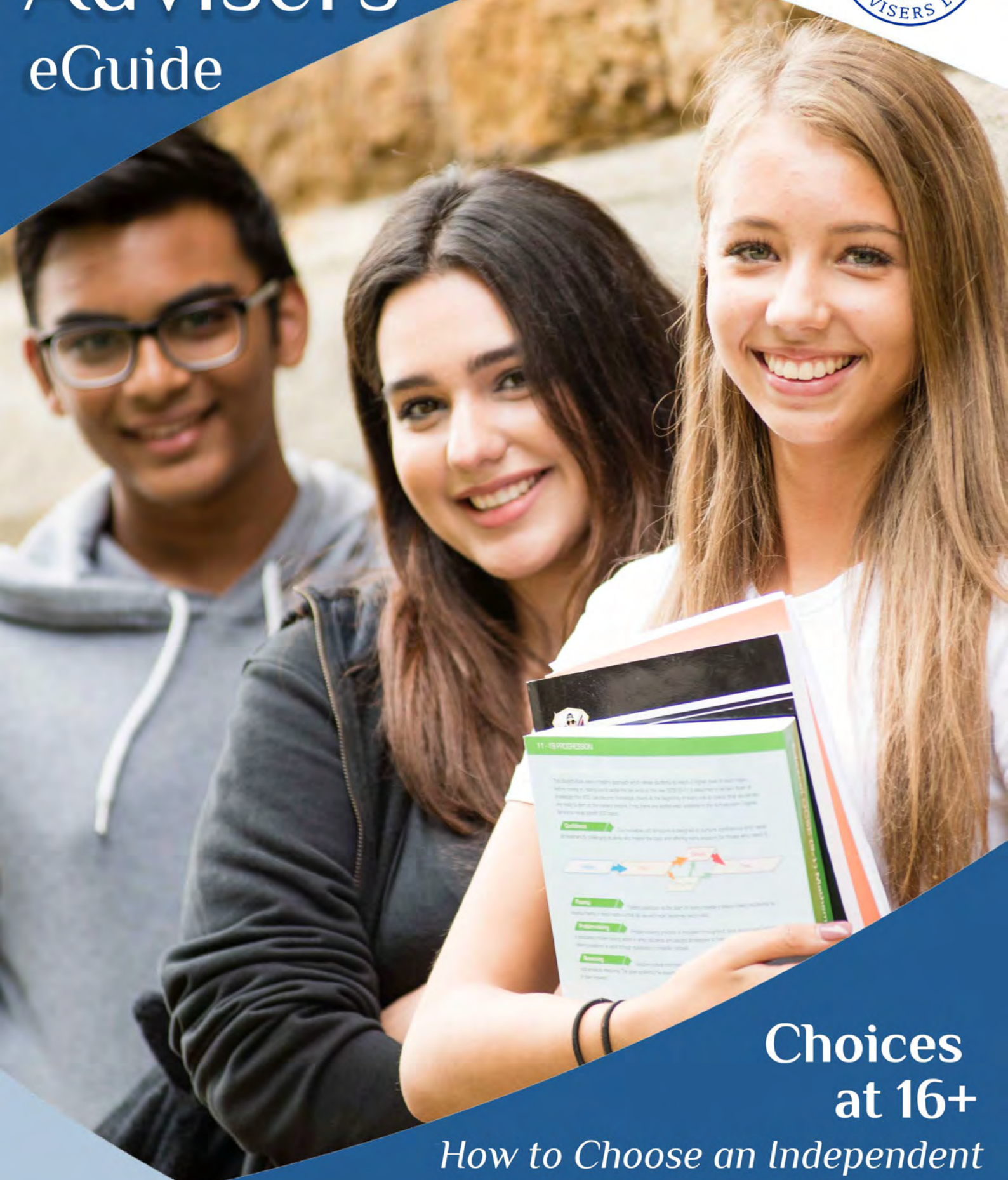


Education Advisers eGuide



**Choices
at 16+**

*How to Choose an Independent
Sixth Form College*



Education Advisers Ltd

UK Private School Consultancy service

Choosing the right private school or college for your child can be an overwhelming and nerve-racking experience for the whole family. It is, without doubt, one of the most important decisions you will make for your child. Your child's sixth form experience will play a huge role in forming positive and resilient characteristics, developing talents, building confidence, and preparing them to face our ever-changing world. It is therefore essential you are confident you have fully investigated all suitable options, and are sending your child to a school or college in which they will thrive both academically and emotionally.



Since 2004 Education Advisers Ltd has supported over a thousand British and international families in identifying and gaining entry to the best-fitting schools and colleges. Our commitment is to provide completely impartial advice, and to ensure you and your child are fully informed and prepared from the very beginning until they are happily enrolled in the most suitable academic environment.

The process of identifying and applying for sixth form entry need not be stressful. Managed with expertise and empathy, it should be the first step of an exciting and life-changing journey for your family.

We produce these guides to provide parents with what our experience tells us are the most important considerations when navigating your child's education. We hope you find this guide on Choices at 16+ a useful resource with which to begin your journey.

We also invite you to request a free initial 20 minute phone consultation to explain your objectives and learn more about the most suitable strategy for your individual circumstances.

Mary Murayama BA (Oxon), MA (Sheffield) QTS - Managing Director

Our core services

Our key commitment is to find the best-fitting private school options for any particular family or child. Our advice is completely impartial, and led by each family's priorities and requirements. We offer a range of bespoke consultancy services, but most fall into one of the following categories:

- Education for Life strategy and consultancy service for new parents
- Day school advice and enrolment service (Ages 2-19)
- Boarding school advice and enrolment service (Ages 6-18)
- 6th form applications, day or boarding
- Full consultancy and school enrolment service for families relocating to the UK
- Full consultancy and school enrolment service for families with dyslexic or SEN children
- Personalised pupil assessments in English and Maths
- Consultancy and mentoring for elite school applications
- Summer School recommendations
- University application consultancy service

Please note we do not offer visa, tutoring, guardianship or home relocation services. However, we can offer some initial advice, and introduce relevant, reputable service providers with whom we frequently collaborate.



Introduction: What is 'Sixth Form'?

The two final years of compulsory education in England are known as 'Sixth Form' and this is when students from 16-18 prepare for entry to university or employment. Within the private sector, students can study either in the Sixth Form of a school or they can apply to join one of the Independent Sixth Form Colleges.

Sixth Form includes Year 12 and Year 13, and students generally join Year 12 in the September after their 16th birthday. However, there is some flexibility, especially for students who have studied in other countries and/or need additional English language support before starting academic studies.

Most students in private schools and colleges in the UK will take A Levels in three, or sometimes four, subjects, studied over the two-year period. A significant number of schools also offer the IB Diploma as an alternative qualification, and a few have recently introduced the IB Careers Programme. Several schools and colleges also run BTEC courses in a small range of vocational subjects.

Many Independent Sixth Form Colleges also offer one or two-year GCSE courses for students from the age of 14 or 15. As well as the standard two-year A Level courses, most colleges also offer a one-year intensive A level programme, and some run five-term A level courses that start in the January of Year 12.

For international students aiming to enter a UK university, some independent colleges also offer Foundation Courses, which are an alternative route into Higher Education. Please contact us for further details if this is what you are interested in.

What is an Independent Sixth Form College?

Independent Sixth Form Colleges have a number of common characteristics. Many started as small tutorial colleges in major university cities such as London, Oxford and Cambridge, providing extra tuition for students to prepare them for public examinations. Now there are about 60 independent colleges in the UK, ranging from small day colleges in city centres to large, purpose-built institutions, often owned by large international education groups, catering for 400-500 students and offering full-time boarding accommodation.

How is an Independent Sixth Form College different from a school's Sixth Form?

Virtually all private schools, both day and boarding, accept a number of new students at 16+ to join Year 12. This includes the highest achieving academic schools and all the prestigious boarding schools. Entry to a top school's sixth form is highly competitive, and students have to go through a rigorous entrance procedure which starts over 12 months in advance. There is no doubt that a good private school will offer many opportunities to sixth form students alongside the academic curriculum. Schools generally have excellent facilities for sport, drama and music and will always offer a very wide range of clubs and extra-curricular opportunities. Although there are more freedoms for students of 16+, schools will usually provide a stricter and more formal environment than a college. Please contact us if you would like to discuss applying to a school for sixth form entry.

However, although they are less formal, academically the Independent Sixth Form Colleges are just as rigorous as any school. There is special attention paid to study skills which covers such topics as examination technique, essay-writing and note-taking – everything in fact that is needed to ensure that students are fully prepared for the demands of the examination system. Students are assessed regularly and there is a strong focus on university preparation.

There is usually a wide range of subjects available and as timetable constraints are not as rigid as in a school catering for a much greater age range, subjects can usually be combined to suit the individual student's needs and requests. Class sizes are small enabling students to receive plenty of personal attention. Most colleges have good library facilities and also well-equipped science laboratories.

Socially these colleges have a mixture of day and residential students and they can vary in size from about 50 to 400 students. All reputable colleges are inspected regularly by at least one of the following national bodies: the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) or the British Accreditation Council (BAC). Latest inspection reports can be found on their websites at www.isi.net, www.ofsted.gov.uk and www.the-bac.org. Many of these colleges also offer sports facilities and have a programme of extra-curricular activities. However, you should appreciate that colleges based in city centres rarely have the kind of sports or performing arts facilities often taken for granted in independent schools. Student welfare is not forgotten and colleges should have a well-organized system of personal tutors who monitor the academic progress and wellbeing of the students in their care on a regular basis.

To make sure that you select the college that is right for you there are a number of questions you should ask. The sixth form years are particularly important and there are obvious advantages with staying on into the sixth form of the child's present school, not least because of continuing with friends and teaching staff. However, for some of the reasons already stated regarding subject choice and change of scene, as well as a different style and method of education, it might be decided to change schools after GCSE exams.

Here are some things to consider:

Location and Accommodation

One of the first decisions to make is where to attend college and whether or not the student will live at home and commute or need accommodation. If the student will be living at home the decision-making process can be quite straightforward and you will be looking within a certain traveling distance of your house. However, depending where you live, this will inevitably limit your options.

If you are willing to consider boarding, or arranging alternative accommodation, there will be far more choice. International students whose parents do not live in the UK are obliged to live in college-approved accommodation, at least until the age of 18.

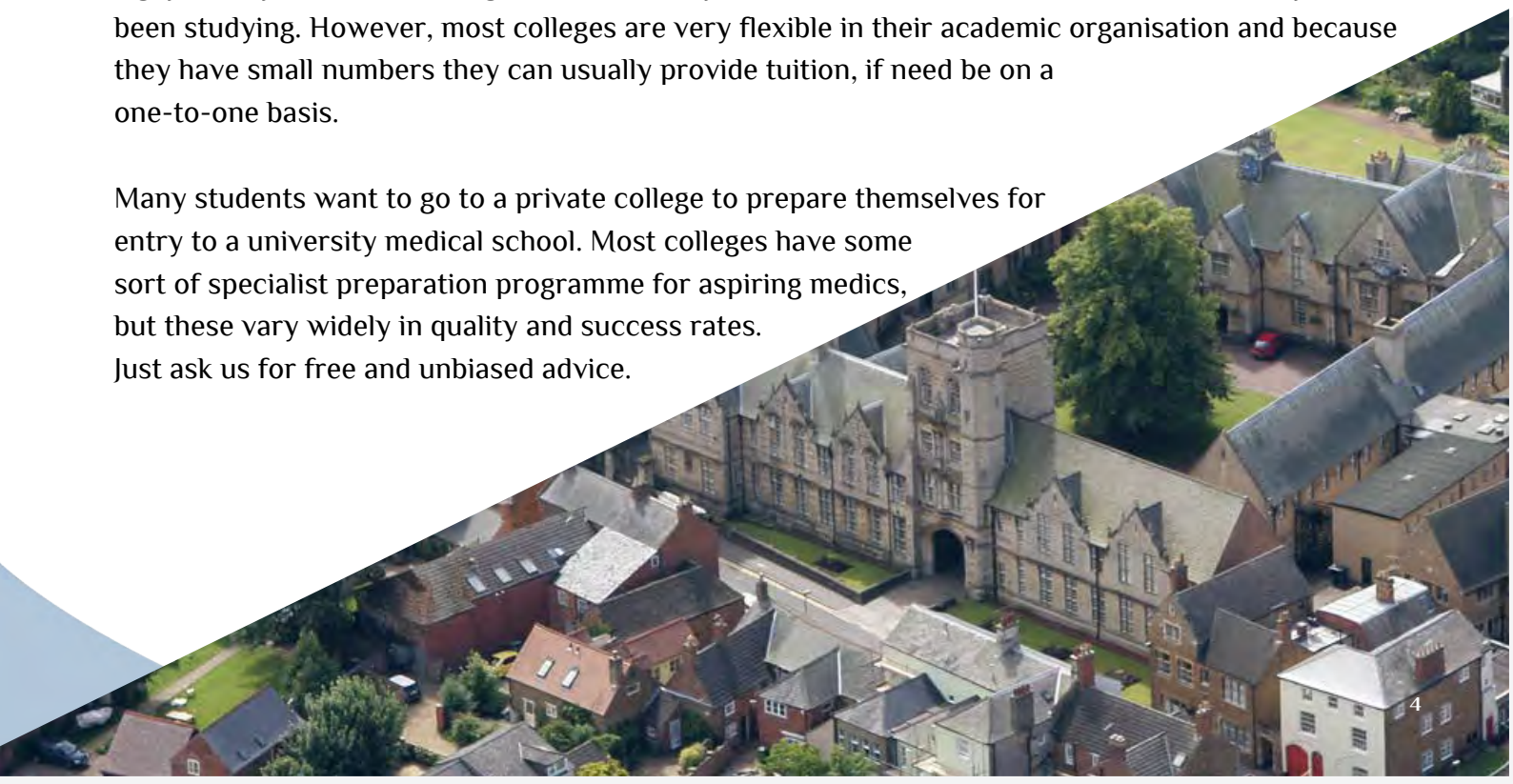
Curriculum

A major consideration is whether the college offers the subjects you require. All will offer A-Level courses in key subjects including Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Economics and sometimes Business Studies, which tend to be those most sought-after by international students seeking entry to top universities in the UK. Some colleges really focus on these subjects whereas others have a much wider range to choose from and some specialise in creative subjects. Please contact us for more information.

Most of the larger colleges also have university foundation programmes which are very popular with international students as an alternative route into university. The IB Diploma is not widely offered by Independent Sixth Form Colleges. Please speak to us if this is something you are interested in, or visit our website www.IB-schools.com

All colleges publish their available courses on their websites. If you are thinking of retaking an A-level then find out the exam board that the college is offering, as there could be a problem if it is different, e.g. you may find that the English Literature syllabus has different set books from the ones you have been studying. However, most colleges are very flexible in their academic organisation and because they have small numbers they can usually provide tuition, if need be on a one-to-one basis.

Many students want to go to a private college to prepare themselves for entry to a university medical school. Most colleges have some sort of specialist preparation programme for aspiring medics, but these vary widely in quality and success rates. Just ask us for free and unbiased advice.



An increasing number of colleges are starting to offer GCSE courses either over one year or two years. It is fair to say that currently their GCSE results do not rival those of independent schools, mostly because they are often taking on either students who have struggled with GCSEs already or international students who are combining GCSEs with intensive English language study. However, the small classes and individual attention can mean that students can achieve great successes and make really huge improvements in their grades.

Examination Results

You should look at the academic success record of any college you are considering. Most colleges will have posted these on their website and you can further find out individual subject results by simply asking them. The exam track-record will tell you a good deal about the college and whether or not it is the right one for you. There is always controversy about league tables because some schools are very selective on entry, thereby ensuring their A level results are invariably top rated. Many of such schools will have A level pass rates exceeding 95% and indeed some schools achieve more than 65% A*-A grades. This is obviously the kind of track record which is excellent, especially as entry to elite universities (e.g. the Russell Group) will usually demand A* and A grades.

However, before selecting a college on this basis, it should be considered whether or not the student will thrive in a high pressure academic environment. A lot of colleges are not selective in their intake, but students can significantly improve their grades with the high level of academic support provided. You can view available results for Independent Sixth Form colleges on www.best-schools.co.uk

Teaching Experience

It is also important to find out the qualifications and experience of the staff and whether or not there is a high turnover of teachers. The same rules apply in selecting any school – ask questions and if possible arrange to meet the College Principal and tutors.

Student Body

The larger colleges that offer on-site boarding tend to have a very high percentage of international students, offering a vibrant and exciting multi-cultural environment. Others, particularly the longer-established day colleges, cater more for the local population and will have a broader mixture of nationalities including many domestic students.

College Facilities

The facilities available at a college need researching before making a final decision. Classrooms, science-labs, art studios, and sports and recreational provision should all be investigated as well as the availability of careers advice and university counselling. For boarders, the standard of catering is also an important consideration. Although the sixth form colleges exist primarily for academic purposes, the social and sporting side of life should not be neglected.

Size

Sixth form colleges in the state sector now often have 2000-3000 students or more. In the independent sector it is more likely to be between 100 to 400. A larger size usually means a greater range of subjects and a wider choice of courses. However, what you are paying for in the private sector is individual attention and class sizes would typically be a maximum of 8-10 students. There are some tutorial colleges which specialize in 1:1 tuition with a personal tutor. For this you will end up paying an hourly rate.

Study Hours and Timing

How many hours will be spent in study each week?

Do students have to be present in the college even if they don't have scheduled classes?

What extra help is available outside timetabled lessons? Is there any charge for this?

Is there a quiet library or study centre for independent study?

Are there any compulsory subjects or activities apart from the subject lessons?

Rules and Discipline

Although teenagers like to imagine that they are perfectly capable of running their own lives they still require a framework of rules and it is important that sixth form colleges have a clear framework of principles within which they operate. Some colleges have personal tutors who not only monitor academic progress but also act as mentors, in the true sense of the word, to the students under their care. Although they are more flexible in their approach, the sixth form colleges have a very clear approach to discipline and, without it being onerous, they expect students to live and work within its limits. You should check with the college/s you are considering to find out more about their code of conduct.

International Students

Many international students come to Independent Sixth Form Colleges in the UK in order to gain entry to a UK university. Often the college will combine A level 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.

University Careers and Guidance

Given that most students progress to university, does the college offer guidance on degree course/ university choice or careers? Many colleges will have dedicated counsellors and others will expect tutors to mentor their particular students.

Some colleges will offer specific coaching on interview techniques, preparation for subject-specific university tests such as BMAT or UKCAT for medicine, and writing a personal statement and preparing a UCAS application.

If you need bespoke advice on university degrees, we offer a bespoke consultancy service with very experienced advisers. Please ask us for further information.

Finance

Last but not least finance has to be considered. All independent sixth form colleges have a scale of charges that depends on the courses taken. These are fully published on their websites and it would be advisable to look at them to start with to ensure that the costs are within your budget!

The average day tuition fees for a student taking three A levels is going to be in the range of £20,000 to £26,000 per annum in Central London or Cambridge or Oxford. We can sometimes find students colleges down to £15000 per annum outside of major city centres. Remember that accommodation costs are going to add between £15,000 to £20,000 to the tuition fees, if you need boarding.

We can sometimes negotiate discounts for outstanding students so please contact us for advice.



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www.sixth-form.com

www.bestprepschools.co.uk

www.best-sen.schools.co.uk

www.ib-schools.com

