

WHAT IS...

A SIXTH FORM

A sixth form is where young people can study A levels and sometimes vocational qualifications after they have finished their formal education at the end of year 11. Students mainly stay in 6th form for 2 years as they offer 2-year courses. They include years 12 and 13. However, you may find that some 6th forms offer 1-year level 2 vocational courses.

There are 2 types of 6th form:

SCHOOL SIXTH FORM:

This is attached to a school. Many young people choose to stay on in their own school sixth form. This is a familiar environment and they know the teachers. As it is a school sixth form it has more of a school feel and you may have to attend school for the whole time, including study periods.

If you're staying at the Sixth Form where you spent your high school years, it's likely that you know the teachers pretty well, and vice versa. This could be really helpful when applying to university (if that's something you're interested in!), as not only will they be able to give you the best advice, they'll also be able to write a really personal reference for you when you apply.

Knowing your teachers and surroundings will also help you settle into A level life a lot quicker than if you move, giving you more time to crack on and be the best student you can be! Lots of pupils find staying in a familiar space comforting, and that's great if that's right for you!

As well as this, class sizes may also be smaller which will give you more contact with teachers, meaning more opportunities to get help if you're struggling.

School Sixth Forms tend to be more formal places, as the space is often shared with younger students in years 7 to 13. The learning environment in a School Sixth Form can therefore already be very familiar to you, particularly if you've stayed on at the same place where you did your GCSEs.

Teachers at a School Sixth Form might ask that you still address them as 'Sir' or 'Miss'. Things like this can make School Sixth Forms feel closer to being at school, whereas a Sixth Form College is closer to what the university experience will be like.

SIXTH FORM COLLEGE:

This is a stand-alone college with students aged 16 and over. These are much bigger than school sixth forms and often offer a wider choice of subjects. Sixth form colleges feel more like a stepping-stone to university.

Sixth Form Colleges provide a different learning environment to what you were used to at school, there are no students below the age of 16, and because they're open to the community, there might be students who are older than 16-19 studying there.

The environment at a Sixth Form College is generally more adult, and students are expected to take more responsibility for themselves and their learning. Sixth Form Colleges tend to be slightly more relaxed when comparing them with School Sixth Forms.

If you want to be more independent Sixth Form College could be for you. With hundreds more students per year than at a school Sixth Form, you've got more chance of meeting 'your kind of people' and expanding your circle.

There could also be a wider range of courses available at 6th Form College, allowing you to further explore what you're into, and guide you towards the degree and career path of your dreams.

Probably the biggest incentive for students to go to 6th Form College is for the experience of being part of a place that functions a little more like a university. Coming out of your comfort zone and meeting loads of new people can be life changing, and a huge boost of confidence before you experience the real thing at university.

WHICH ONE TO CHOOSE?

There is no straight answer about which is better, because when it comes to Sixth Form or 6th Form College, it's up to you and what environment you will best learn in. The stability and comfort of staying with the teachers and surroundings you know might be the best setting for you to learn. Or, if you fancy a change of pace, 6th Form College will introduce you to a mix of new people and perhaps push you out of your comfort zone.

Your school may not have a Sixth Form so you can choose another school with a 6th Form or a 6th Form College. Make sure that you visit them and take advantage of open events so that you can make an informed choice.

Universities don't prefer one or the other. In fact, both can lead to university as long as you put in the hard work and get the grades you need.

WHAT'S NEXT?

WHAT CAN I DO AFTER 6TH FORM?

- > University – study for a degree of your choice. See 'What is a degree'?
- > Apprenticeship – apply for an apprenticeship in a vocational area.
- > Gap Year – take a gap year and find a job or do some travelling.
- > Work – after 18 you can find a job without training. However, learning is for life so try and find a job with training.
- > College – you may decide to further your education at an F.E. College. See 'What is a College of Further Education?'