

ISA Awards 2024 Case Study:

Boarding School of the Year

CARDIFF SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

DECEMBER 2025



History of the School

Cardiff Sixth Form College (CSFC), established in 2004, is an academically ambitious, international boarding college where boarding is not an add-on, but the foundation of the College's identity. Over time, the College expanded its provision, relocated to a purpose-built campus in central Cardiff and developed into one of the UK's most academically successful boarding colleges, consistently topping national league tables for A-Level results. The outstanding outcomes for which the college is renowned are driven not only by exceptional teaching and learning, but by a deliberately designed boarding experience that supports academic focus, wellbeing, cultural exchange and personal growth. Its evolution reflects a sustained commitment to combining rigorous academic standards with an inclusive residential environment that attracts young people from around the globe.



Tom Arrand
Principal

From early in its development, Cardiff Sixth Form College embraced multiculturalism as a core part of its identity, welcoming its first international students in 2009 and steadily increasing its global reach. With up to forty nationalities represented within a close-knit residential community, boarding at there creates an immersive and inclusive environment in which students live and learn together. The College believes that high academic achievement is best realised within a strong pastoral framework, where students feel supported, valued and connected, and where diversity is actively celebrated. The result is a residential community that not only supports high academic achievement but also cultivates independence, intercultural understanding and lifelong friendships among boarders.

Founded with a clear academic mission, Cardiff Sixth Form College has grown from a small, specialist sixth form into one of the UK's leading international boarding colleges. Its reputation for excellence has been built steadily through a consistent focus on high expectations, disciplined study habits and a carefully structured residential model.



Throughout its development, the College has remained committed to providing an environment in which students from around the world can succeed academically while benefiting from the stability, routine and cultural richness that a strong boarding community provides.

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AIMS

The College aims to deliver a boarding experience that enables students to achieve exceptional academic outcomes while developing independence, resilience and global awareness. Central to this aim is the belief that outstanding boarding provision should extend learning beyond the classroom, creating a structured yet nurturing environment in which students can thrive both academically and personally.

CSFC seeks to foster a residential community built on mutual respect, cultural understanding and shared purpose. Through a carefully planned pastoral curriculum, enrichment programme and inclusive boarding culture, the College aims to prepare students not only for entry to leading global universities, but also for successful, engaged lives beyond education.



ACTIONS

Teaching and Learning within a Boarding Context

The College's teaching and learning strategy is designed to complement and enhance the boarding environment. CSFC delivers the 'best of both worlds' by fusing the creative pedagogy and rich questioning traditions of Western education with the intellectual rigour, discipline and high expectations often associated with Eastern education systems.

Students are taught in fully integrated, internationally diverse classes, with boarding enabling extended academic support, structured independent study and ready access to staff. This creates an environment where high standards are normalised and academic ambition is sustained beyond the school day.

Pastoral Curriculum and Residential Enrichment

Recognising the central role of boarding in student development, CSFC has created a bespoke pastoral curriculum that runs alongside academic study. In Key Stage 4, students follow a Politics, Philosophy and Ethics (PPE) programme, broadening cultural literacy and encouraging engagement with ethical reasoning, global issues and complex ideas.

In the Sixth Form, the Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme builds on this foundation, preparing students for the academic, social and cultural demands of university life. The College's Enrichment Programme is embedded into the boarding calendar, with sessions delivered across half terms so students can remain on site rather than returning home or to guardians. This ensures continuity of care while offering structured opportunities such as debate, oracy, acting skills, teamwork and intensive university application preparation.





Boarding as a Cultural and Community Experience

Boarding is the defining feature of life at Cardiff Sixth Form College. Of the College's 375 students, up to 310 are full boarders, and day students are actively encouraged to access the benefits of boarding, including extended hours, communal dining, supervised study and participation in evening, weekend and holiday activities. The College does not operate exeat and remains open during half terms and Easter, reinforcing stability, routine and community cohesion.

Enrichment Weeks are a key feature of the boarding calendar and are designed to broaden cultural understanding at local, national and international levels. Experiences range from visits to Welsh cultural institutions such as the Big Pit National Coal Museum to international travel, including trips to Kathmandu. Within the residential setting, students also share their own cultural heritage through assemblies and international dining events, where menus reflect the diverse backgrounds of the boarding community.

Celebration, Identity and Global Citizenship

The boarding environment enables diversity to be celebrated in visible and meaningful ways. The annual Cultural Event brings together performance, music, dance and traditional dress from around the world, alongside communal dining and the celebration of achievement. This event reflects the inclusive, family-like atmosphere that defines boarding at CSFC.

The College is equally proud of its Welsh identity, which is celebrated through the annual St David's Day Eisteddfod. Music, poetry, dance and opportunities to engage with the Welsh language form part of a vibrant cultural programme that allows boarders from around the world to experience local heritage.

The International Citizenship Experience (ICE) further enhances the boarding offer by providing real-world experiential learning, including overseas opportunities such as a medical-focused placement in Nepal. These experiences deepen global understanding and reinforce the values of service and responsibility within a residential context.





OUTCOMES

The impact of CSFC's boarding provision is reflected in exceptional academic and personal outcomes. Approximately 80% of graduates progress to universities ranked in the QS Top 100 worldwide, demonstrating the effectiveness of a boarding environment that supports sustained academic focus and aspiration.

Equally significant are the social and cultural outcomes of boarding. In a recent student survey, 95% agreed that the College helps them to understand and respect people from different faiths, traditions and backgrounds. Inclusive leadership within boarding, including a Prefect Team that reflects the main regions of the student population, reinforces a culture of representation, respect and shared responsibility.

Students leave Cardiff Sixth Form College as confident, culturally literate individuals, well prepared for the academic and social realities of global university life.

NEXT STEPS

The College remains committed to enhancing its boarding provision. Future priorities include further expansion of international enrichment opportunities, continued development of the International Citizenship Experience, and ongoing investment in pastoral and residential support to promote wellbeing, inclusion and academic success.

Through its intentional, values-driven approach to boarding, Cardiff Sixth Form College aims to remain a sector-leading example of how residential education can transform outcomes and experiences for young people.

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