

# UNLOCKING SUCCESS: INSIGHTS FROM SIXTH FORM ADMISSIONS

## EXPERTS ON PLANNING THE PERFECT SIXTH FORM EVENING



## Unlocking Success: Insights from Sixth Form Admissions Experts on planning the perfect Sixth Form Evening

Sixth form admissions are a fiercely competitive landscape, where schools must consistently innovate to attract and retain students. At a recent event, industry leaders shared their insights on running effective Sixth Form open evenings, engaging both internal and external applicants, and ensuring a seamless admissions process. Here are some of the key takeaways from the discussion.

### The Importance of Planning

Successful Sixth Form admissions begin long before the open evening itself. As Camela Ervin, Director of Sixth Form at Elthorne Park High School, shared, "Our planning starts the day after the previous open evening, reflecting on what worked, what didn't, and what we need to tweak for next year." The goal is to create a whole-school event that gains buy-in from all staff members, ensuring a cohesive experience for prospective students.

Shane Ryan, SLT Operation Leader at Atham Park, emphasised the importance of making the Sixth Form feel like an integrated part of the school. "The Sixth Form shouldn't be seen as a separate entity. We encourage all staff to participate in open evening events, even if they don't directly teach Sixth Form students. This fosters a sense of community and belonging."

## **Engaging Students in the Admissions Process**

A key strategy shared was the involvement of current Sixth Form students in open evening activities. Many schools now have student leadership teams who help guide prospective students and share their experiences.

"We've got 18 students on our sixth form leadership team who have been preparing for the open evening since July," said Shane Ryan. "They lead various aspects of the event, ensuring that the evening is truly student-centered."

This approach is mirrored by Kelly Thurst, Business Manager at Greenshaw High School, who highlighted the importance of authenticity: "We have a student common room where current sixth formers talk about their experiences, providing prospective students with real insight into life at our school."

## **Leveraging Technology to Enhance Open Evenings**

Schools are increasingly using technology to streamline their admissions process and improve the open evening experience. QR codes, for example, have proven to be a valuable tool.

"Every classroom has a QR code that links directly to subject-specific information, making it easier for students and parents to access details instantly," explained Kelly Thurst. "We also use online booking systems to track attendance and engagement."

## **Making Your School Stand Out**

With students often attending multiple open evenings, schools must differentiate themselves to make a lasting impression.

"For us, it's about having a clear vision," shared Kamala Irvine. "We emphasise both high academic achievement and strong pastoral support. Having a consistent message coming from staff, students, and promotional materials helps solidify our school's identity."

Personalised experiences can also make a significant difference. "We match prospective students with tour guides from their current schools, helping ease their transition into our sixth form," noted Shane Ryan.

## **Attracting External Applicants**

Schools must also find effective ways to reach students from other institutions. Traditional methods such as banners, social media, and newsletters remain effective, but word of mouth remains a powerful tool.

"We include open evening details in our headteacher's weekly newsletter, knowing that parents from other year groups might have relatives looking for a sixth form," said Kelly Thurst.

## **Final Thoughts**

Sixth Form admissions require careful planning, strong student involvement, and innovative engagement strategies. Schools that create a welcoming and informative open evening experience, supported by technology and clear messaging, will be best positioned to attract and retain students.

By continuously refining their approach and learning from successful practices, schools can ensure they stand out in the competitive world of Sixth Form admissions.