



# Practical Use of Alps in a School Sixth Form **Radyr** **Comprehensive School**

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## **About us**

At Radyr, we have a sixth form of around 340 students, which has grown by over 40% over the last few years. We now offer 30 subject courses which are predominantly AS and A level alongside vocational courses such as BTEC Sport, Business, Applied Science and ICT. We started working with Alps in May 2014 and over the last few years, with their help, we have been able to raise standards whilst expanding.

For us, a key to raising standards at sixth form is successfully preparing our Year 11 students for the challenges that lie ahead. We have worked very hard over the last few years to improve the communication between the sixth form team and Year 11 students/parents. All students have the option of a 1:1 meeting with members of the sixth form team. At these meetings we introduce our students and parents to the Alps system and use predicted GCSE grades alongside Alps data to help students make the right choices. In Year 11, we have regular Data Capture Points (DCPs) where each subject gives students a Current Expected Grade and an Attitude to Learning grade. We use software to collate this information and make average GCSE pts score predictions for each student. During our interviews we discuss with students what their target grades are likely to be in Year 12 along with their strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, etc. We then try to help our students match their skills to relevant courses. These interviews give us the opportunity to reinforce to students the importance of picking a balanced curriculum in terms of coursework, exam-based subjects, etc. We have found in recent years that this can be key for students to meet or exceed their Alps targets.

Each year around twenty students join our sixth form from neighbouring schools. Every student who applies to join us from elsewhere is invited to have a tour of the school and given the same level of options advice. Using Alps not only helps us to match our students to suitable combinations of courses, it also helps us to set challenging targets as soon as they start Year 12.

When students start in Year 12, we devote time within Tutor Periods and Information Evenings to explain the Alps system in detail. All students calculate their own average point score and then use this to determine their minimum target grades. We always explain to parents and students that any Alps target grade a student has, is a minimum target grade. Students and teachers may choose to raise this target however it will never be lowered. At Radyr we set our students the Alps A level targets from the beginning of Year 12. Although we consider it a challenge for students to achieve grades that put them in the top 25% of all students with similar GCSE results, we motivate and empower our students by explaining to them that each year, many of our students exceed these challenging targets through hard work, dedication and focus.



## About us (continued)

Form tutors play a key role in mentoring our students, supporting them as they work through a series of weekly tutorials aimed at helping them make the transition from KS4 to KS5 successfully. Students' progress in the sixth form is measured at regular intervals and at each Data Capture Point, they are given a Current Expected Grade and Attitude to Learning. Form tutors interview students throughout the academic year and students are asked at these interviews to reflect on the progress they are making in relation to their Alps targets.

## So what did we do in 2015/16?

Form tutors then help students to draw up action plans to help them achieve their goals. Around fifty students each year will receive additional mentoring sessions by our KS5 Well-Being Officer and other members of the sixth form team to help them meet their target grades.

We have found that the move away from traditional reports to a system of Data Capture Points has been very beneficial for our students, helping them to keep track of their progress throughout sixth form. All our teachers have received training in how to use Alps and every department tracks progress at each DCP using the Alps 'What If' spreadsheets. This allows them to see not only where each student is in relation to their Alps target but also to see where their department currently ranks in terms of value added results compared to the national picture. This data, together with past Alps reports, is also used in meetings between Heads of Faculty, Heads of Department and members of the Senior Leadership Team to review current and past performance as well as to set meaningful targets for the future. Additional meetings with members of the Alps team help us to identify current strengths and weaknesses and to plan effectively for the future.

Even though DCP data is published for students and sent home three times each academic year, the fast paced nature of sixth form education means that it is often essential that student progress is communicated to parents between DCP's. The sixth form team has worked hard over the last few years to improve the communication that takes place between departments, students and parents, whether that be 1:1 meetings, cause for concern or praise letters, phone calls home, etc. This together with extensive tracking from the sixth form team means that intervention strategies can be put in place swiftly to support students who are underachieving or struggling with the different demands of sixth form education.

In the three years that we have been working with Alps, we have seen a massive improvement in the outcomes our students have achieved. Performance levels at AS, A level and BTEC have improved significantly. Our value added results now put us well inside the top 25% of all UK Alps schools and colleges. Our aim going forward with the support of Alps is to be in the top 10%. We have also seen a massive improvement in progression rates from AS to A2 level with 98% of students obtaining the grades necessary to return to Year 13. Our aim

is achieve a retention rate of 100% and we believe that with Alps this is possible. In addition to this we have seen massive increases in the number of students receiving offers from universities and Russell Group universities in particular.

Alps has provided us at Radyr with a target setting and monitoring system that challenges and supports both staff and students. It has been instrumental in improving the outcomes of our students and has helped us to achieve this whilst expanding in size.

We are at the end of the telephone Monday to Friday  
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