King's Ely International Performance Pathways

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the King's Ely International Performance Pathways programme?

The King's Ely International Performance Pathways programme is a new addition to the school's already established international programme.

It is a three-year programme, from Year 11 to Year 13, developed to give students greater flexibility, focus and differentiation to their studies.

The Pathways offer an advantageous route to a top UK or global University for high calibre international students.

The new Performance Pathways will run alongside our existing Year 11 one-year IGCSE programme.

When will the Performance Pathways start?

The Performance Pathways will be available from September 2027. Three Pathways will be available in Music, Science and Creative Arts.

Who are the King's Ely International Performance Pathways for?

Exceptional 15–16-year-old students who are motivated, curious and intellectually ambitious. These students want to achieve great academic results and to go to a leading university in their field.

Who can apply for the Pathways?

High calibre students who can demonstrate a significant interest and ability in one of the three pathways: Music, Science and Creative Arts.

What are these students looking for?

Students on the Performance Pathways will be individuals who are looking for more than just a one-year IGCSE course. They will have a particular interest in Music, Science and Creative Arts. They will be students who want to transition into UK sixth form and onwards to top UK and international universities.

One-Year IGCSE Programme

Can my student still come for the one-year IGCSE course?

Of course. We recognise that the three-year Performance Pathways will not suit everyone, so we welcome applications for the one-year IGCSE programme. Transition into Sixth Form at the end of the one-year course will remain straightforward following assessment and a student interview.

Can my student come for three years but not on a Performance Pathway?

Of course. Not all students will either want to or be accepted onto a Performance Pathway. These students will follow the one-year IGCSE programme, with a full choice of IGCSEs & enrichment activities before they progress to A levels in Y12 subject to assessment and interview.

Pathways Administration

What is the English Language requirement?

The Performance Pathways are designed for high calibre students. As a result, we would expect a B2 level as a minimum.

How will you assess the applications?

Students will be tested via our normal assessment procedure (school transcript, registration form and Password Assessment). In addition, a specific Performance Pathways Application Form will need to be completed and submitted. Additional evidence will be required including an online portfolio for Creative Arts, audition films for music, and a statement of interest and ability for Science. There will be interviews with our Director for International Students as well as interviews with the relevant Head of Department. These may include auditions, portfolio presentations, practical tasks and discussions.

Interviews will be held either in person or online.

How much does the Performance Pathway cost?

The fees for the Pathways match our published International Fees for Years 11, 12 and 13. Current fees (2026-7) are on our website. There is likely to be a modest annual increase to these published fees ahead of the 2027 academic year.

King's Ely International Fees

Are there any scholarships available for the Performance Pathways?

There are no scholarships for entry onto the Pathways in Year 11. However, students joining the Pathway will be eligible and encouraged to apply for the Year 12 Scholarship Programme.

What is the agent commission on students joining the Year 11 Performance Pathways?

As an introductory offer, and in recognition of the increased focus required to manage each application, the commission rate for students entering the Performance Pathways in Year 11 will be 12.5%. This will be followed by a 10% commission payment on the Year 12 fee in the following year.

What visas will my students need to join the Performance Pathways?

Students will still need a one year visa for Y11 followed by a two year visa for Y12 & 13. The appropriate CAS for these years of study will be issued in the normal way by King's Ely Admissions.

Why apply for a Performance Pathway?

What do the Performance Pathways offer?

Firstly, a Performance Pathway offers students additional academic opportunities over and above the normal curriculum, to extend their learning both within and outside the classroom. Being on a Performance Pathway can enable students to study subjects at A level perhaps not previously considered.

Secondly, students will actively participate in tailored enrichment activities focused on their academic interests, giving them a deeper skill base in their chosen area, and offering an early start in planning and developing their university applications.

Academic and enrichment opportunities on each pathway will be bespoke and personalised based on the student's ability, academic interests and ambition.

Each pathway will be monitored by the student's tutor and certificated at the end of their first year.

Together, this leads to greater academic and personal success.

What additional opportunities will benefit my student?

Students will have an advantage when it comes to writing distinctive applications for university.

Staying in the same school for Sixth Form (Y12 &13), will deliver a seamless transition through the year groups. Students will feel happier and more secure in familiar surroundings with staff who genuinely know them and care about their progress and future.

What do the students do in Y11? And in Y12 & Y13?

In Year 11, students on a Performance Pathway:

- Have a bespoke timetable covering their academic interests and tailored enrichment activities
- Take a choice of 5-7 accelerated Cambridge IGCSEs
- Receive personalised ESOL support, depending on English level
- Attend a Pre-sixth form syllabus
- Embark on their Performance Pathway

In Year 12 & 13, students join the Sixth Form:

- Choose from a wide choice of A level subjects including those studied on their Pathways
- Take part in Super-curricular work, supported by tutor
- Continue their Performance Pathway with tailored enrichment activities
- Receive guidance and support in creating distinctive and compelling university applications

How many Cambridge IGCSEs can students take?

One-year IGCSE students normally take between 5-7 IGCSEs, enabling them to fulfil most UK university requirements and giving them the best chance to achieve high grades in those subjects. Depending on the student, their aspirations and capability, these may include home language studies or subjects like Further Maths.

What are the details of the Science Performance Pathway?

Academic opportunities in the Science Pathway may include:

- Olympiad competition preparation & entrance in Maths, Chemistry, Physics & Biology
- Head of Department directed open-ended project work (highly regarded by leading universities)
- Completing Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)
- Visits to Cambridge University laboratories and talks
- Personal introductions to leading scientists via alumni network and links with Cambridge University/Cambridge Science Park
- Direction and support in finding relevant work experience
- Curation of Science Week & Osmond Lecture Series
- Masterclasses with alumni and visiting experts

Enrichment activities may include:

- Avicenna Society, for aspiring Medicine and Veterinary applicants
- Turing Club, for coding and Computer Science
- The Experimentalists, an invitation only club reading and using scientific papers
- The Conservation club, for environmentalists
- DaVinci Society, for engineering

What are the details of the Music Performance Pathway?

Academic opportunities in the Music Pathway may include:

- 5 lessons a week of Music GCSE content, which is certificated and can lead directly to Music A level
- Conservatoire preparation, including a pre-application assessment at Guildhall School of Music
- Links with Cambridge University via alumni, teaching staff and Director of Music at Selwyn College, Cambridge
- Invitation to Scholar Cantorum — our top tier choral ensemble
- Extensive performance opportunities at school concerts and in Ely Cathedral
- Visits to concerts and performances in Cambridge and London
- Pianists: opportunity to progress to the Organ and accompany choirs on tour
- Masterclasses with alumni and visiting music professionals
- Inclusion in the Y11 Music Scholar programme

Enrichment activities may include:

- Orchestra and String Orchestra
- Concert and Jazz Bands
- Scholar Cantorum and Chamber Choirs (who sing in Ely Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral, London, and St George's Chapel, Windsor as well as European tours
- Drumline
- Flute Choir
- Flying Fiddles (violin and viola ensemble)
- Spikes (cello ensemble)

What are the details of the Creative Performance Pathway?

Academic opportunities in the Creative Arts Pathway may include:

- 5 lessons a week in Fashion and Textiles, Fine Art or Photography — certified projects leading directly to A level (no GCSE required)
- Enter national & international competitions: Stitch Festival National Fashion Awards, Alexandra Palace Exhibition
- Curate and exhibit in the King's Ely Spring Exhibition, which is open to the public and where work is regularly sold
- Outstanding studios with no house style — students explore their own creative perspectives where ambitious ideas and outcomes are nurtured and supported
- Tuition from Alison Rhodes (Royal College of Art, Chief Moderator Textiles), Tom Ward (Slade School of Fine Art), Antonio Longo (Royal College of Art)
- Visits to Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge), Kettle's Yard, Sainsbury Centre, Women's Art Collection (Cambridge University)

Enrichment activities may include:

- Additional studio time: after school and weekend, to support portfolio development
- Set design & creation: for school drama productions
- Palette and KEStrel magazine: edit and contribute to student -led publications

Will they have enough time to focus on their IGCSEs as well as other opportunities?

The timetables have been carefully created to ensure that the students have plenty of time to focus on their IGCSEs as well as all the additional opportunities. Each students' Pathway is bespoke to them, and their ambition and ability, and will be carefully monitored to ensure they are able to make the best of all the opportunities they have.

Can students still take part in other enrichment activities, like sport/music/drama?

We encourage all students to take part in many of the co-curricular activities that are available at King's. Pathways students will have plenty of time to take part in a wide range of activities alongside all other students.

Looking ahead to Sixth Form and University

What does the pre-Sixth Form syllabus cover?

This includes psychometric tests and a series of interviews to help with A level choices, bearing in mind what university options this may lead to. There will also be taster lessons with current Y12 students to help inform that choice, as well as tours of the Sixth Form boarding houses and the Old Palace, our Sixth Form centre.

We will also cover understanding the UK university system: how the application process works, and what students can do to help create a top-level application. This may include support in finding work experience.

What is super-curricular work and why is it important?

Super-curricular work is self-directed academic work beyond the curriculum, directly relevant to the student's area of interest. It demonstrates a student's intellectual curiosity, commitment and engagement in their chosen field. It is especially relevant for students planning on applying for Oxbridge, G5, Russell Group or similar top tier universities.

It may include an EPQ (Extended Project Qualification), additional reading, listening to podcasts, attending lectures, open ended projects, entering academic competitions or attending exhibitions.

Students will be given guidance by their tutor or Head of Department as to what super curricular work is of the most value for them individually.

Students are supported in applying this to their university applications, as well as embedding employability skills through real life experiences. The value of these opportunities in a university application is vital in creating distinctive applications: in many cases these can be as, if not more important than the A level grades.

Why do the Performance Pathways give students an advantage when it comes to applying for university?

This advantage comes from earlier specialisation in their chosen subject area, with the opportunity to develop skills, learning and technical expertise before embarking on A levels.

What is the personal statement for UK universities and how do students create a compelling and distinctive application?

The personal statement for UK universities is made up of three questions:

- Why do you want to study this course or subject?
- How have your qualifications and studies helped you prepare for this course or subject?
- What else have you done to prepare outside of education and why are these experiences useful?

Top tier universities require students to demonstrate a genuine interest in their subject area, have relevant experience, show a strong understanding of the course and take a well-structured approach to writing their statement, as well as having the academic grades necessary.

Taking part in additional academic opportunities, tailored enrichment activities and supra-curricular work will all enable students to have an extensive range of in-depth experiences to draw on when writing their statements.

Introduction to King's Ely

Where is King's Ely?

King's Ely is in the City of Ely, a short 15-minute train ride from Cambridge. It is the second smallest city in England with about 30,000 people living there. It is historic and beautiful. At the centre of the city stands the Cathedral, a magnificent building with which the school has close and long-standing connections. The choristers who sing in the Cathedral are members of the school community.

The city offers a safe environment for our international students' education away from home. It is only a 5-minute walk from the boarding houses into the city centre where there is a good selection of shops, of cafes and restaurants.

Ely railway station is close-by from which there are regular trains to Cambridge (15 minutes) and London (70 minutes). For a small city, Ely is very well connected by road, rail and air. Stansted airport is just 45 minutes away by train. Heathrow airport is a two-hour taxi transfer away.

How old is the school?

King's Ely was founded in 970AD making it one of the oldest schools in England. We have over 1,000 years' experience of educating young people and preparing them for the challenges ahead. The school has survived civil and world wars, plagues, financial crises and pandemics. It is independent and financially stable.

How big is the school?

We are a community of 1,150 students ranging from 2 years to 18 years. The school is divided into sections: Senior School (610 pupils), Prep (400 pupils) and Pre-Prep/Nursery (125 pupils).

Within the larger community, individual care is given to students by their form teachers, their department heads, their Heads of Year and, if boarding, by their House Master or House Mistress.

The school was recognised in its recent Inspection (March 2025) for the strength of its pastoral care. King's Ely was also the proud winner of the Talk Education Award in 2025 for Pastoral Care and Wellbeing.

What is the gender mix at the school?

The school is equally divided between boys and girls. Miraculously, at the start of September 2025, there were 50% boys and 50% girls. It is truly a co-ed community.

How many international students are there?

We have about 200 international students from across 40 different nationalities. Our biggest contingent is from China and Hong Kong but other countries such as Germany, Ukraine, Spain and Russia are also well represented within the school.

Other nationalities include Vietnam, Thailand, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, America, South Korea, Finland, Latvia and Nigeria.

How many boarders are there?

We have 185 boarders across our seven boarding houses. Our boarding houses are straight out of a Harry Potter movie – beautiful and historic buildings kitted out for modern day life! They are gender, and age-specific.

About 25% of our boarding population are British. There is a good mix of nationalities in the houses, and the speaking of English is encouraged by room allocation, and by the programme of activities that the students can enjoy in the evenings and at weekends.

Has anything else changed for boarding at King's Ely?

From September 2026 students can now stay at school for the 3 exeat weekends throughout the school year. A charge to cover costs will apply.

International students will arrive in school a few days ahead of the start of the year, for their induction programme and to ensure they feel settled in before term begins. For Performance Pathway students, this would include finalising their bespoke timetable and expectations discussion with the various Heads of Departments.

We are also delighted to share the news that the renovation to School House (Years 9-11 boy boarders), will be completed ahead of the 2026 academic year. The boys will have the very best of boarding accommodation set within an historic building.

If you have any further questions, or want to get in touch with the King's Ely Admissions Team, call us on 00 44 1353 660707 or email admissions@kingsley.org