

**Making the RIGHT Choices for 16+ study**

**BTECs Can Boost UCAS Applications for Top Academic Students, discovers Louise Carroll.**

Until now, if you are a Year 11 parent, you probably hadn't heard of 'stalking' applications on TheStudentRoom.com and didn't imagine that 'threads' had so little to do with needles. Helping your teenager to make good A Level choices has gone well beyond parents' evenings and options booklets – the traffic on Mumsnet and Netmums, and the UCAS parent guide has never been busier.

No wonder. Hiked-up tuition fees and a fiercely competitive employment market for the next generation of graduates, combined with a choice of more than 37,000 degree courses, amounts to a need for informed choices and for schools and colleges to create innovative opportunities for post-16 study. Sedbergh School, a leading co-educational independent boarding school in Cumbria, launches a BTEC Subsidiary Diploma in Agriculture this September, as a new route to studying Veterinary Science, Mechanical

Engineering and Environmental Science degrees. The course, a joint venture with Newton Rigg College in Penrith, is equivalent to one A Level and has been warmly welcomed by Admissions Tutors for these courses.

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Mary Curnock Cook, Chief Executive for UCAS, recently reported that since 2008, there has been an 80 per cent increase in numbers of pupils entering University holding BTEC qualifications. Rod Bristow, President of Pearson Education, said: “We already know that there is a strong correlation between having a vocational qualification such as a BTEC and being in employment. Our latest data shows that vocational qualifications, not only A Levels, give you the opportunity to excel at university.” Sedbergh School Headmaster, Andrew Fleck, said: “The combination of practical and academic subjects provides an

ideal platform for pupils to progress to Higher Education, in particular in vocational and practical courses. Pupils who combine A Levels with our new BTEC in Agriculture will have a wider range of skills, a broader knowledge base and a greater understanding of the Agriculture industries. It's an exciting project, which we believe will open up new opportunities for pupils to succeed. Combining this course with subjects such as Maths, Biology and Chemistry will immediately distinguish candidates who wish to apply to study Veterinary Science and Engineering.”

Newton Rigg, which is part of Askham Bryan College, is one of the fastest growing land-based college in the country and the only one to have its own hill farm and moorland. Wes Johnson, Campus Principal, said: “The course explores all aspects of modern agriculture and ways of addressing the challenges of 21st Century farming. The Agriculture industry needs at least 86,000 new employees in the sector by 2021 according to LANTRA, Skills Sector Council and we work closely with industry to help shape the most appropriate courses as we strive to provide students with the best possible chance of progression in the future.”



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T: 015396 20535