



**INCREASE INVESTMENT
IN SIXTH FORM EDUCATION**

SFCA Manifesto 2017



Sixth Form Colleges
Association

Support Our Sixth-formers

The Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA) is calling on all political parties to back the *Support Our Sixth-formers* campaign to increase investment in sixth form education. We urge all political parties to adopt the following recommendations:

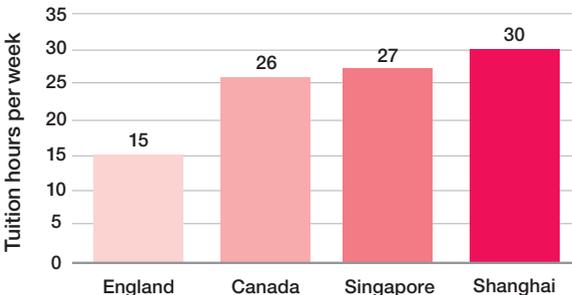
- 1 Introduce an ‘SOS uplift’ in funding to improve the support offered to sixth form students
- 2 Conduct a review of sixth form funding
- 3 Introduce a VAT refund scheme for all sixth form providers
- 4 Introduce a competitive process for establishing new sixth form provision

The case for increased investment

● **Cuts to sixth form funding introduced in 2011, 2013 and 2014¹ have had a significant impact on students and are turning sixth form education into a part time experience.**

Research commissioned by SFCA from the Institute of Education² describes sixth form

education in England as “uniquely narrow and short” compared to the high performing education systems in Shanghai, Singapore, Canada and elsewhere. Sixth formers in England are now only funded to receive half the tuition time as sixth formers in other leading economies.

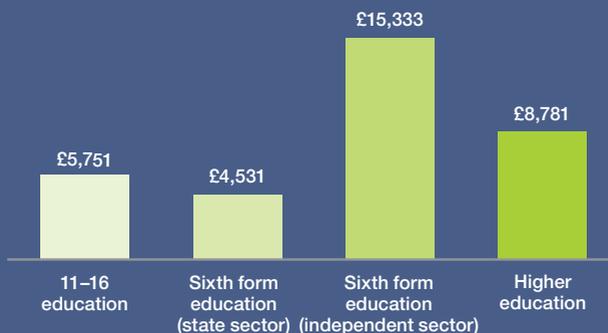


● **The funding that Sixth Form Colleges and schools/academies now receive to educate sixth formers covers the cost of delivering three A level or equivalent qualifications, and little more.** As a result, the wider support offer to students has been greatly diminished. For example, it is increasingly difficult to address the concerns expressed by employers that young people lack the skills to flourish in the workplace. The CBI's 2016 education and skills survey expressed concern about the current education system with its "emphasis on grades...and league tables at the expense of wider personal development."³

● **Many institutions also lack the resources to address the sharp increase in students reporting mental health problems.** This has been compounded by cuts to the NHS and local

authority budgets – the charity MIND recently found that local authorities now spend less than 1% of their public health budget on mental health⁴. More broadly, we know that students with better health and wellbeing are likely to achieve better academically and that participation in extra-curricular activities has a positive effect on attainment.⁵

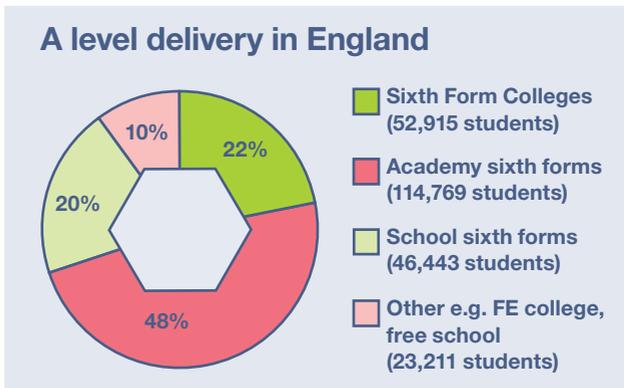
● **These issues are the result of a sustained period of underinvestment in sixth form education.** The average annual funding received by Sixth Form Colleges and school/academy sixth forms is now just £4,531 per student. This is 21% less than the funding received to educate younger students in secondary schools, 48% less than the average university tuition fee and 70% less than the average sixth form fee in the independent sector.⁶



● **This underfunding of sixth form education is a real obstacle to improving social mobility.** The average fee for a single term in an independent school sixth form (£5,111 per student) is more than state colleges and schools/academies receive to educate a sixth former for an entire year. In the independent sector, fees also increase rather than decrease at the age of 16 to reflect the actual cost of delivery for this age group.⁷

● **The impact of this underfunding is felt particularly acutely by Sixth Form Colleges as, unlike schools and academies, they cannot cross subsidise from the more generous funding available for younger students and do not have their VAT costs reimbursed.** This is a tax on learning that requires the average Sixth Form College to redirect £385,914 per year away from the front line education of students to pay VAT.⁸

◆ In March 2017, plans were announced to increase investment in 16–19 education for students studying technical courses in Further Education colleges⁹. This will have no impact on the vast majority of students in Sixth Form Colleges or school/academy sixth forms as they are primarily studying academic qualifications such as A levels (as are some students in Further Education colleges).¹⁰



◆ The government was right to identify that students studying technical courses require additional support to succeed, but the same is true of young people studying A levels and applied general qualifications – particularly disadvantaged students. The decision to increase investment in technical, but not academic, education is also based on a flawed analysis of the country’s productivity challenge. The high-skilled economy envisaged in the government’s Industrial Strategy will be driven by leaders, scientists, technicians, engineers and others that in most cases will have followed the academic path during their sixth form studies.

Our recommendations

The chronic underinvestment in academic sixth form education is bad for students, bad for our international competitiveness and bad for social mobility. To ensure that Sixth Form Colleges and schools/academies can continue to transform the lives of young people and develop the highly skilled workforce of the future, we are calling on all political parties to adopt the following recommendations:

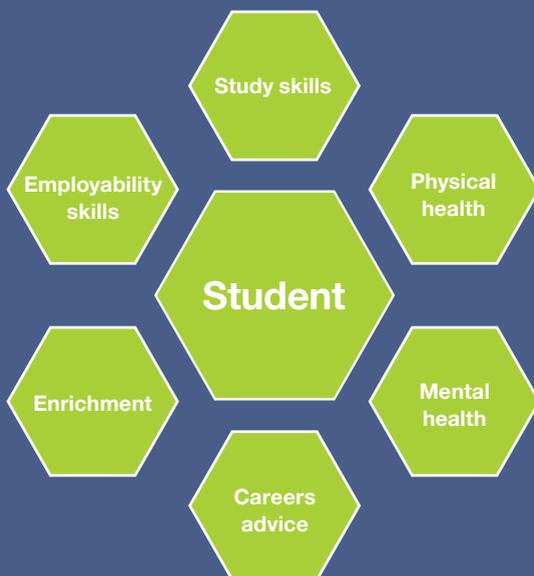
Recommendation 1: Introduce an ‘SOS uplift’ in funding to improve the support offered to sixth form students

◆ The government should make a targeted investment in sixth form education to ensure institutions can provide every student with the support they need to develop into healthy, happy, resilient and productive citizens. A modest annual increase in funding of £200 per student, would help Sixth Form Colleges and schools/academies to begin reassembling the range of support activities required to meet the individual needs of young people. This ‘SOS uplift’ is affordable (it amounts to an increase in funding of less than 5%) and would make a real difference to the life chances of students.

◆ **Sixth Form Colleges and schools/academies are best placed to co-ordinate the diverse range of non-qualification support activities that students require and can ensure these activities are tailored to the individual needs of students.** The outcomes will be significant:

- Improving the mental and physical health of students will increase their resilience and contribute to improved exam performance.
- Improving study skills will benefit students when they progress to higher education or employment and enhance their sixth form studies.

- Improving careers advice will ensure young people make better choices when they leave sixth form education.
- Improving employability skills will help students to flourish in the workplace.
- Improving the range of enrichment activities will provide sixth formers in the state sector with the social capital to compete with their better-funded peers in the independent sector.



◆ **The development and progress of young people cannot simply be measured through annual performance tables.** The introduction of the 'SOS uplift' is urgently required and should be introduced in time for the beginning of the 2018/19 academic year.





Recommendation 2: conduct a review of sixth form funding

● **While funding for sixth formers in England is lower than in other developed economies, and lower than both pre-16 and higher education, the more fundamental concern is the disconnect between the funding made available to educate sixth formers and the actual cost of delivering an academic curriculum.** There is no educational basis for the reduction in funding at the age of 16. The government claims that it has “provided sufficient funds for every full-time student to do a full timetable of courses”¹¹, but it has not published any research¹² into the sufficiency of the funding provided to educate sixth formers. There is a clear disconnect between the arbitrary amount of funding the government provides to educate sixth formers in England and the actual cost of delivering their education.

● **The priority for the Department for Education should be to move away from funding sixth formers based on a notional number of annual hours and an arbitrary funding rate, and conduct a review of funding to ensure it is linked to the realistic costs of delivering a rounded, high quality curriculum.** Failure to do this will ensure that a part time educational experience will become the norm for sixth formers in England. This will have clear implications for social mobility – colleges and school/academy sixth forms are united in the view that busy students are successful students. This is particularly true of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and those that require additional help and support.

Recommendation 3: introduce a VAT refund scheme for all sixth form providers

● **While school/academy sixth forms have their VAT costs refunded, Sixth Form Colleges do not.** The absence of a VAT refund left the average Sixth Form College with £385,914 less to spend on the front line education of students last year. The VAT anomaly was partly addressed in the 2015 spending review, when the government announced that Sixth Form Colleges could become 16–19 academies, and in doing so recover their VAT costs. But those colleges that do not convert will still be subject to the VAT ‘learning tax’ – we believe young people should receive the same level of investment in their education, irrespective of where they choose to study.

Recommendation 4: introduce a competitive process for establishing new sixth form provision

● **There should be a competitive process for establishing new sixth form provision that is open to all types of sixth form provider.** The establishment of new sixth form provision should also be based on an impartial assessment of demand conducted at a local level. The absence of a competitive, demand-led process has led to the creation of sixth form providers in areas where there is already an oversupply of good or outstanding provision. This in turn has put pressure on the Department for Education’s capital budget and forced colleges and schools to divert revenue funding away from the front line education of students to increase their marketing spend.

We are calling on all political parties to adopt the recommendations in this manifesto.

The focus on pre-16 education and introduction of the National Funding Formula has overshadowed the funding crisis in sixth form education. The immediate investment in an ‘SOS uplift’ will help to provide the support that sixth form students urgently need, and the more fundamental review of sixth form funding will re-introduce a link between investment levels and the actual cost of delivering a high quality education. Addressing the VAT anomaly will ensure that Sixth Form Colleges can direct more resources towards students, while improving the entry process for new sixth form providers will make best use of scarce resources.

By backing the **Support Our Sixth-formers** campaign and pledging to increase investment in sixth form education we can ensure that every sixth form student in England receives the sort of high quality, rounded educational experience they need to become healthy, happy, resilient and productive citizens. This investment will also help to boost social mobility, improve the career choices that students make, and ensure that young people possess the skills required to flourish in the workplace.

An ‘SOS uplift’ will help to provide the support that sixth form students urgently need.

References

- 1 Funding cuts introduced in 2011, 2013 and 2014 saw the average Sixth Form College lose 17% of its funding before inflation. This figure masks the plight of some Sixth Form Colleges that lost a third of their funding between 2011 and 2016.
- 2 UCL Institute of Education, Tuition time in upper secondary education (16–19): Comparing six national education systems, updated October 2016:
www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/171016%20Tuition%20time%20in%20upper%20secondary%20education.pdf
- 3 The right combination: CBI/Pearson education and skills survey 2016:
www.cbi.org.uk/cbi-prod/assets/File/pdf/cbi-education-and-skills-survey2016.pdf
- 4 Charity reveals ‘shocking’ spend of less than 1% on public mental health:
www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/charity-reveals-shocking-spend-of-less-than-1-per-cent-on-public-mental-health/#.WPeZi2nyuWU
- 5 Public Health England, The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment:
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/370686/HT_briefing_layoutvFINALvii.pdf
- 6 SFCA, Sixth Form Colleges: 2017 key facts and figures:
www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/SFCA%20Key%20Facts%202017.pdf
- 7 Independent Schools Council Census 2016: www.isc.co.uk/media/3179/isc_census_2016_final.pdf
- 8 SFCA, funding impact survey report 2016, op.cit.
- 9 TES, 6th March 2017: Spring Budget: Is this really fair funding for colleges?
www.tes.com/news/further-education/breaking-views/spring-budget-really-fair-funding-colleges
- 10 A level retention measure found in Department for Education, A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2015 to 2016 (revised):
www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2015-to-2016-revised
- 11 See, for example: www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-33847860
- 12 Professor Alison Wolf published a review of vocational education on behalf of the government in March 2011. Although academic/general education was outside the scope of her work, the review paved the way for the welcome introduction of flexible ‘programmes of study’ and funding individual learners rather than qualifications. But in the consultation that followed, the government stated that “We expect that the majority of study programmes could be delivered in around 600 hours, a significant proportion of which should be contact time”. There is no underpinning evidence base for this, or the amount of funding required to deliver such a programme.
www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Study%20Programmes%20for%2016-19%20year%20olds%20v2%20-%20consultation%20document.pdf

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