

0001 Wednesday 18th August 2021



Institute for Fiscal Studies

IFS Report R333

**Luke Sibieta
Imran Tahir**

Further education and sixth form spending in England



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**



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Luke Sibieta

Imran Tahir

Copy-edited by Judith Payne

Published by

The Institute for Fiscal Studies

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ISBN 978-1-80103-052-6

The authors are grateful for funding from the Nuffield Foundation (EDO/FR-000022637) and for co-funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) via the Impact Acceleration Account (ES/T50192X/1) and the Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy (ES/T014334/1). The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare, and Justice. It also funds student programmes that provide opportunities for young people to develop skills in quantitative and scientific methods. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the Ada Lovelace Institute. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of the Foundation. Visit www.nuffieldfoundation.org.

Key findings

- 1 During the pandemic, the share of 16- and 17-year-olds in full-time education rose to a historical high of 85%. An unprecedented 68% of 16- and 17-year-olds in education studied for an A level or equivalent qualification, with a rise of 3 percentage points in 2020 alone. This reflects abnormally high GCSE results in 2020 and reduced opportunities outside of education. This pattern is likely to continue into 2021 given the further jump in GCSE results this year.
- 2 Reflecting the constraints of the pandemic, the number of 16- and 17-year-old apprentices fell by 30% between 2019 and 2020. Only 3% of 16- and 17-year-olds took apprenticeships in 2020 and only 2% were in employer-funded training – both at their lowest levels since at least the 1980s.
- 3 Colleges and sixth forms have seen the largest falls in per-pupil funding of any sector over the past decade. Funding per student aged 16–18 fell by over 11% in real terms between 2010–11 and 2020–21 in further education and sixth-form colleges, and by over 25% in school sixth forms.
- 4 In the 2020–21 academic year, funding per student was lowest in school sixth forms (£5,000) and sixth-form colleges (£4,800). Funding was higher in further education colleges (£6,200), partly reflecting extra funding targeted at deprivation and complex, vocational programmes.
- 5 The government allocated an extra £400 million to colleges and sixth forms in the 2020–21 financial year. With 5% growth in student numbers in 2020, this, at best, restores funding back to 2018–19 levels, leaving most of the cuts over the last decade in place.
- 6 These spending changes will make it difficult for colleges and sixth forms to respond to students' lost learning during the pandemic and a 17% expected rise in the number of 16- and 17-year-olds between 2019 and 2024. We calculate that an extra £570 million will be required by 2022–23 just to maintain spending per student in real terms from 2020–21 onwards.

Introduction

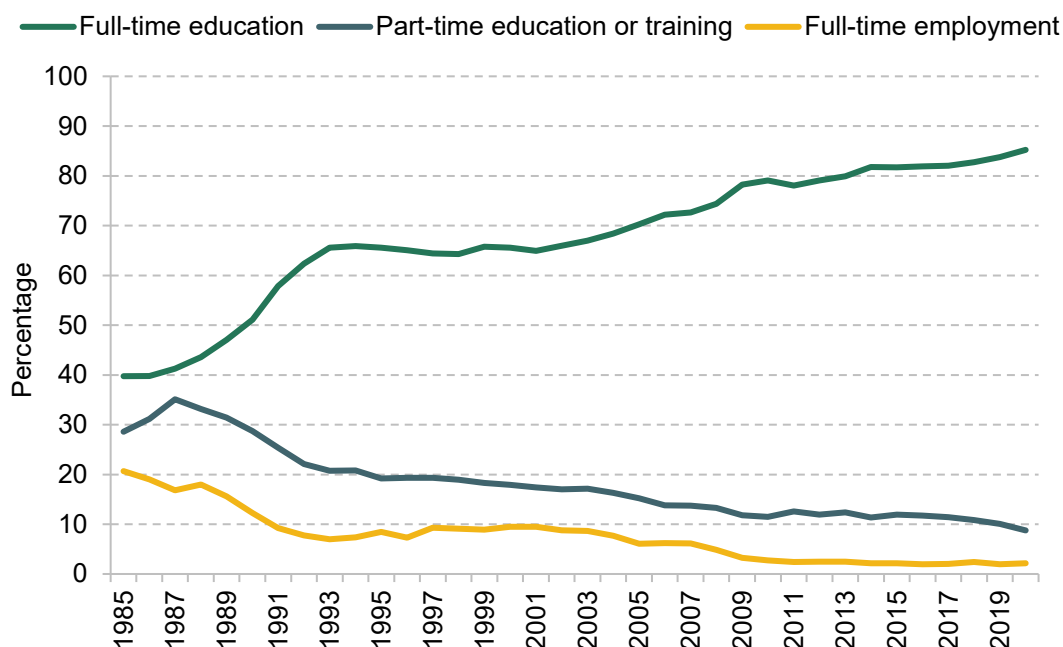
Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entire education sector has faced a period of unprecedented challenge in seeking to provide remote lessons and support to students. In addition to these challenges, sixth forms and colleges are contending with a number of specific and long-running issues. A combination of long-term changes and higher GCSE results in 2020 means that the number of 16- and 17-year-olds in full-time education has increased to a historically high level. This has put pressure on spending and resources, which were already at relatively low levels following large cuts to spending per student over the previous decade.

In this note, we analyse how participation in and spending on 16–18 education have evolved over recent years. We document the long-term growth in the numbers of young people pursuing education after age 16. We then turn to assessing how spending levels in further education have changed in recent years. While the government allocated an additional £400 million to sixth forms and colleges in 2020–21, we show that the growth in student numbers means that this extra money only reverses a very small fraction of the cuts experienced over the last decade.

Changing participation in further education

The share of young people progressing to full-time education after age 16 now stands at a historically high level. Since the mid 1980s, the proportion of young people in full-time education has progressively increased. This is illustrated by Figure 1, which shows the percentages of 16- and 17-year-olds (broadly speaking, those in Years 12 and 13) in full-time education, part-time education or training, and full-time employment from 1985. Over this period, the proportion of this age group in full-time education has increased from 40% in 1985 to 84% in 2019 and then up to 85% in the latest year of data (2020). At the same time, the shares of 16- and 17-year-olds in part-time education or training and full-time employment have gradually declined. As a result, there are now only 2% of this age group in full-time employment and 9% in part-time education or training.

Figure 1. Percentage of 16- and 17-year-olds in education, training and employment in England



Source: Department for Education, 'Participation in education and training and employment: 2020', <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment>.

In addition to a higher fraction of young people progressing to full-time education, the total number of students in colleges and sixth forms is increasing as a result of population growth. Having fallen over the last decade, Office for National Statistics (ONS) forecasts imply a 17% growth in the number of 16- and 17-year-olds in England between 2019 and 2024, or an extra 200,000 young people.¹ As a result, sixth forms and colleges must contend with increasing numbers of students due to rising participation and population growth.

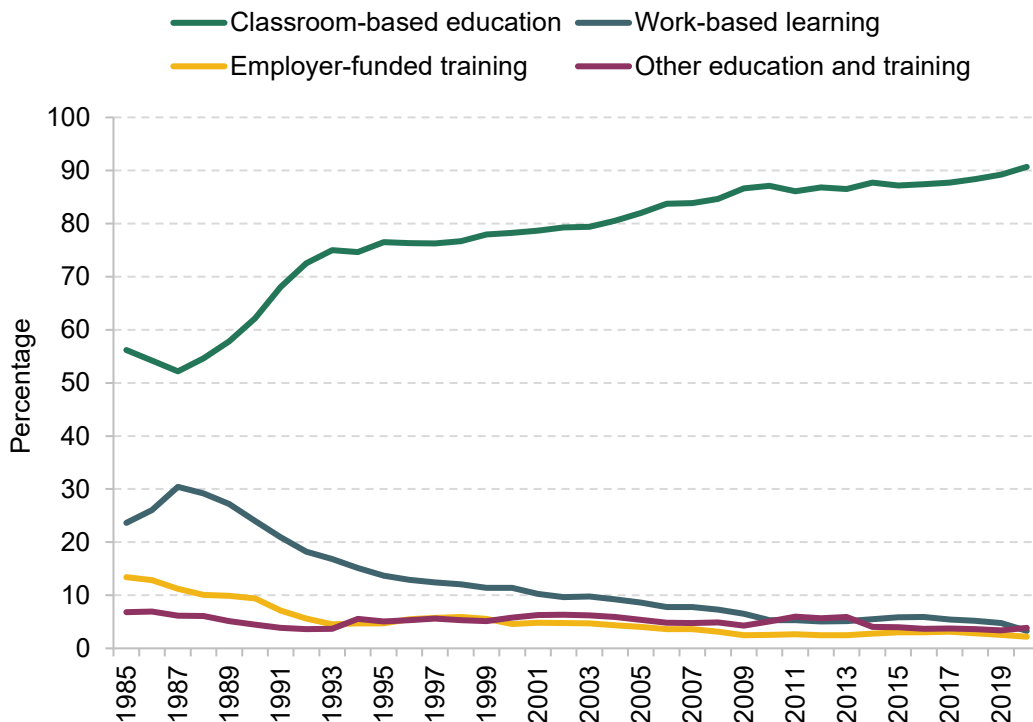
Not only have the numbers in full-time education increased, but also there has been a shift in the types of qualifications taken by young people. Classroom-based qualifications, such as A levels and BTECs, have become increasingly common. Figure 2 displays the form of education taken among 16- and 17-year-olds since 1985 (excluding those in full-time employment or not in any education or training). Over 90% of 16- and 17-year-olds in education now take classroom-based courses,

¹ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/datasets/ppsyoa>.

while the share undertaking other forms of education, such as work-based learning, has declined since the 1980s.

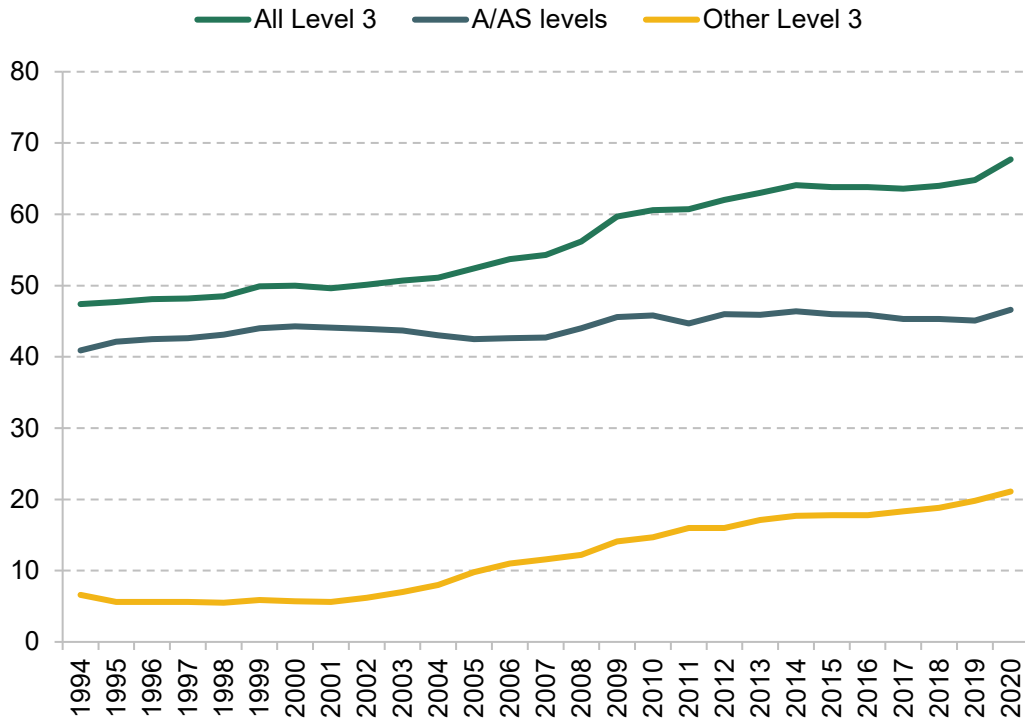
While a comparatively low number of 16- and 17-year-olds undertake work-based learning (mainly apprenticeships), there was an especially large fall in 2020. The number of this age group taking part in work-based learning fell by roughly 30% between 2019 and 2020. This was largely due to the economic disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to adhere to social distancing, which made it challenging for employers to offer apprenticeships and training placements. As a result, employer-based education and training among 16- and 17-year-olds fell to a historically low level. Only 3% of 16- and 17-year-olds took apprenticeships in 2020 and only 2% were in employer-funded training, both at their lowest levels since at least the 1980s and almost certainly a lot longer.

Figure 2. Percentage of 16- and 17-year-olds in different forms of education and training in England



Source: Department for Education, 'Participation in education and training and employment: 2020', <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment>.

Figure 3. Percentage of 16- and 17-year-olds in full-time education taking Level 3 qualifications in England



Source: Department for Education, 'Participation in education and training and employment: 2020', <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/participation-in-education-and-training-and-employment>.

Another consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic was that students did not sit their GCSE examinations last year; instead, they were awarded teacher- or centre-assessed grades, which was associated with higher GCSE grades on average. Figure 3 shows that this led to more students in the 2020 GCSE cohort taking higher-level qualifications such as A levels, and Level 3 qualifications more generally.²

The share of pupils taking qualifications at Level 3 has increased since the early 2000s but had plateaued in recent years. In 2020, there were increases of 1.5 percentage points in the proportion of young people doing A levels and 2.9 percentage points in the proportion undertaking any Level 3 qualifications. There was an especially sharp rise in the number of students studying certain non-A-level qualifications at Level 3. In particular, between 2019 and 2020, the percentage of

² J. Britton, C. Farquharson, L. Sibieta, I. Tahir and B. Waltmann, *2020 Annual Report on Education Spending in England*, IFS Report R183, 2020, <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15150>.

16- and 17-year-olds taking Applied General qualifications, which include BTECs, at Level 3 increased by 2.9 percentage points. Hence, young people who completed their GCSEs last year were indeed more likely to study qualifications at a higher level this year. This creates a potential opportunity for more young people to achieve higher-level qualifications. However, this will be a challenge in itself given the difficulties of studying remotely over the pandemic and the potential lost learning by these pupils over the past 18 months.

Changing spending levels

We now turn to examining how the funding allocated to providers of 16–18 education has changed over time. Figure 4 illustrates spending per student aged 16–18 in school sixth forms, further education (FE) colleges and sixth-form colleges in each academic year from 2013–14 onwards. Figure 5 later examines trends further back in time. In all cases, we are examining spending allocated per student, as opposed to actual amounts of spending on students, which could be higher or lower depending on how schools and colleges allocate funding for different stages of education.

Given difficulties in calculating and interpreting inflation during the pandemic, we present two different values for the real level of spending in the 2020–21 academic year. The solid line shows the level of spending per pupil calculated using the actual level of the GDP deflator for 2020–21 (incorporating a 6% rate of inflation for 2020–21), while the dotted line uses an imputed average level of inflation between 2019–20 and 2022–23 (a 1.5% rate of inflation). We will argue that the latter is likely to be a better estimate of the real-terms changes in inputs or resources going into sixth forms and colleges.

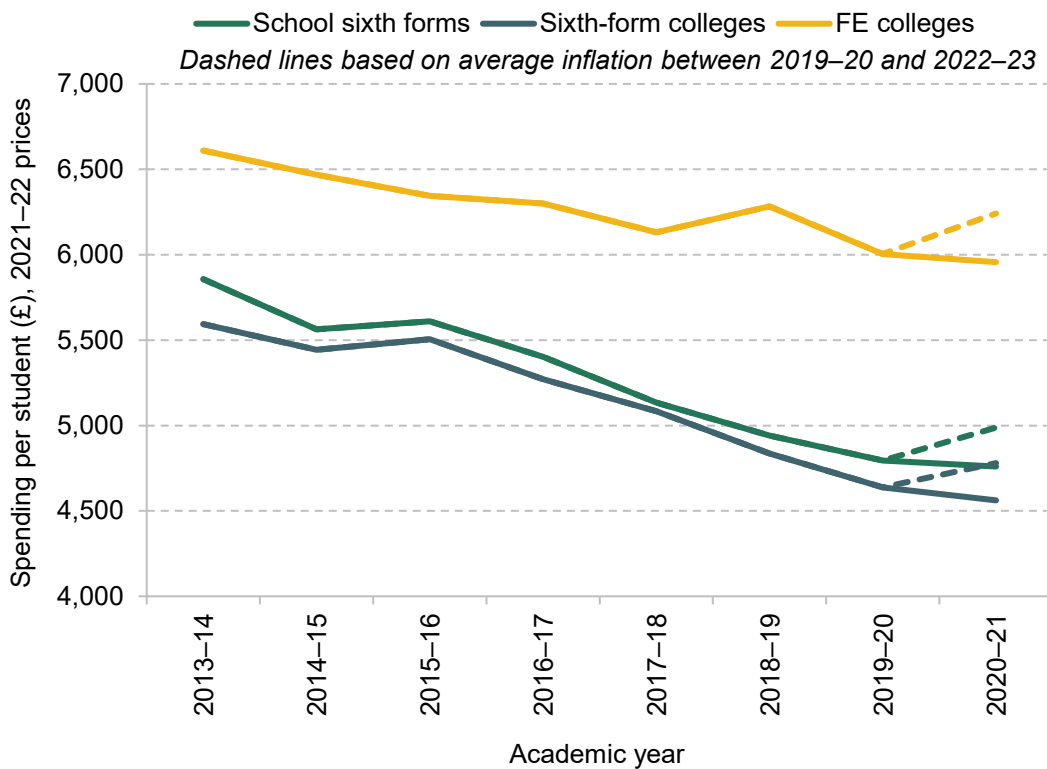
In each year, spending per student aged 16–18 is noticeably higher in FE colleges. In the academic year 2020–21 (and based on our imputed inflation series), FE colleges spent roughly £6,200 per pupil, compared with £5,000 in school sixth forms and £4,800 in sixth-form colleges. This is because students in FE colleges are more likely to study vocational qualifications and are more likely to come from deprived backgrounds, both of which attract higher levels of funding.

The pace of real-terms cuts between 2013–14 and 2019–20 has been similar across school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges, with real-terms cuts of around 17–18% since 2013–14. The cuts to FE colleges have been smaller at 9% between 2013–14

and 2019–20. This reflects the fact that FE colleges have gained more from new funding streams, particularly those aimed at vocational qualifications.

In the 2019 Spending Review, the government pledged an extra £400 million in funding for 16–18 education in the 2020–21 financial year. As this £400 million only covered 8 months (August 2020 to March 2021) of the college academic year (August to July each year), the actual amount allocated over a full 12 months of the academic year will have been higher. However, the COVID-19 pandemic makes 2020–21 an exceptional year for many reasons. First, the increase in education participation meant that this extra money was spread over more students. Second, the economic crisis has led to significant turbulence in inflation.

Figure 4. Spending per student in further education colleges (16–18), sixth-form colleges and school sixth forms



Note and source: See the appendix; HM Treasury GDP deflators, June 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/gdp-deflators-at-market-prices-and-money-gdp>. Solid lines use actual GDP deflator values for 2020–21; dashed lines use average value between 2019–20 and 2022–23.

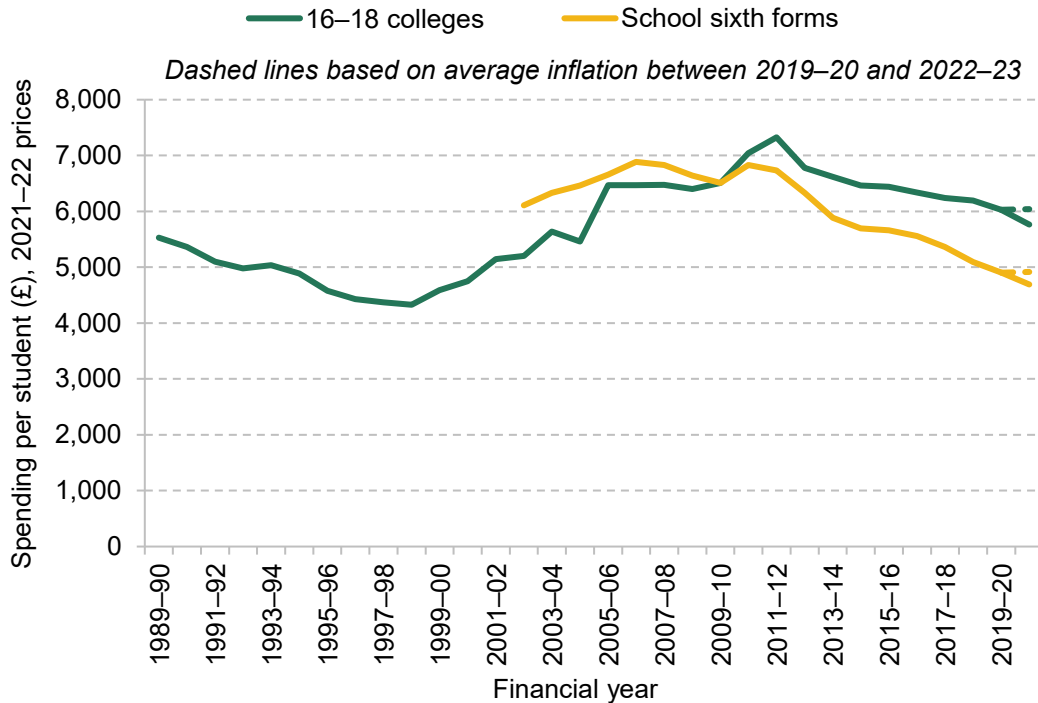
Judged against the actual GDP deflator in 2020–21, spending per student continued to fall in real terms despite the extra spending. This results from a large rise in economy-wide inflation as the price of providing the same economic output in 2020 rose substantially during multiple lockdowns and restrictions. One could argue that the price of providing the same quality of education *outputs* also rose substantially in 2020–21 due to schools and colleges being closed for most pupils and most education occurring remotely. Indeed, the implied 1–2% real-terms fall in spending in 2020–21 based on the actual GDP deflator could significantly understate the true fall in the real value of education outputs of sixth forms and colleges.

That said, the GDP deflator is probably a poor measure of the real value of *inputs* going into colleges and schools over this period, given that the number and pay of staff continued largely at pre-pandemic levels. From Figure 4, we can see that using the average value of the GDP deflator between 2019–20 and 2022–23 instead implies real-terms growth of 4% in the level of spending per pupil in school sixth forms and FE colleges, and 3% for sixth-form colleges. Whilst this would represent the first time spending per pupil has grown in real terms in about 10 years, spending per student only returns to 2018–19 levels, leaving in place much of the cuts in spending per student seen over the previous decade.

The growth in spending per pupil was partially depressed by the significant growth in student numbers in 2020, which was around 5%. Indeed, because funding is determined on the basis of lagged student numbers, this growth will not actually have a full effect on funding levels until 2021–22.

In Figure 5, we look at longer-term trends in spending per student. To do so, we must combine FE and sixth-form colleges, which we refer to as 16–18 colleges, and track spending by financial years instead. Once again, we present two different estimates of spending per pupil in 2020–21, with the solid line representing real spending levels calculated using the actual value of the GDP deflator in 2020–21 and the dashed line showing estimates using an average level of inflation between 2019–20 and 2022–23.

Figure 5. Long-run trends in spending per student in 16–18 colleges and school sixth forms



Note and source: See the appendix; HM Treasury GDP deflators, June 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/gdp-deflators-at-market-prices-and-money-gdp>. Solid lines use actual GDP deflator values for 2020–21; dashed lines use average value between 2019–20 and 2022–23.

Over the 2000s, spending per student in colleges increased from around £4,800 per student to reach £7,000 per student in 2010–11, a real-terms increase of around 50% or over 4% per year. Spending per student in school sixth forms increased from £6,100 in 2002–03 (the earliest data point we have) to roughly £6,800 per student in 2010–11, a total increase of £700 or 12%. The faster growth amongst colleges meant that spending per student in colleges was higher than spending in school sixth forms in 2010–11, reversing the picture over much of the 2000s when spending was higher in school sixth forms.

Over the period since 2010–11, there has been a decline in per-pupil spending in all types of institutions. Between 2010–11 and 2019–20, spending per student fell by just over 14% in colleges and 28% in school sixth forms.

As shown in Britton et al. (2020),³ total funding for pupils aged 16–18 in colleges and sixth forms actually fell by more than 25% in real terms between 2010–11 and 2019–20 as this is a period when student numbers were dropping.

This is a more negative picture for spending per student in 2020–21 than the growth shown in Figure 4. This results from the fact that Figure 5 relates to financial years and Figure 4 covers academic years. Figure 5 includes a full 12 months of extra funding, whilst Figure 4 only includes 8 months' worth of extra funding.

The net effect of all these changes is that spending per student in colleges is 14% lower in real terms in 2020–21 than a decade earlier in 2010–11, or 11% lower if we instead assume growth of 4% in 2020–21 (as per Figure 4). Spending per student would be about 28% lower in school sixth forms, or 25% lower if we instead assume growth of 4% for 2020–21.

For colleges, this still leaves spending per student about the same level it was around 2004/2005. For school sixth forms, spending per student is lower than at any point since at least 2002. Indeed, in 2020–21, it will be over 16% lower in real terms than 18 years earlier in 2002–03. These historically large decreases in spending per student create immense resource challenges for colleges and sixth forms in seeking to maintain the quality of education, a subject we return to in the conclusion.

Conclusion and discussion

Over the last few decades, there has been an increase in education participation after age 16 and a move towards more classroom-based education at higher levels. While these have been long-term trends, there have been especially sharp changes in the last year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and underlying population growth. As a result of these changes in participation and large cuts to spending per student over the last decade, colleges and school sixth forms face a range of resource challenges.

The government allocated an additional £400 million to colleges and sixth forms for 16- to 18-year-olds in the 2020–21 financial year. At best, this only restores

³ J. Britton, C. Farquharson, L. Sibieta, I. Tahir and B. Waltmann, *2020 Annual Report on Education Spending in England*, IFS Report R183, 2020, <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15150>.

spending levels back to what they were in 2018–19, leaving in place much of the cuts over the previous decade. For 2021–22, the government has announced a further £291 million in funding. However, this partly reflects past increases in funding continued for the full 2020–21 academic year (i.e. extending the effects of the £400 million for 12 months instead of 8 months). Most elements of the 16–19 funding formula were left frozen in cash terms for 2021–22. At the same time, the number of students is likely to continue to rise, with ONS projections implying growth of 17% between 2019 and 2024 (or an extra 200,000 16- and 17-year-olds). This matters for funding as allocations to providers are determined based on lagged student numbers. Extra students will therefore put pressure on sixth-form and college finances, which are already strained as a result of extra costs during the pandemic and falls in spending per student over the past decade. Colleges will also have faced reduced demand for commercial services during lockdown, such as training, apprenticeships and events, which accounts for over 20% of college income according to the NAO.⁴

If student numbers grow by 6% between 2020 and 2022 (in line with ONS projections), then total funding to colleges and sixth forms for students aged 16–18 will need to grow by over 9% in cash terms to keep spending per pupil constant in real terms between the 2020–21 and 2022–23 academic years. This amounts to £570 million in cash terms in 2022–23 compared with 2020–21. This is before we account for increases in the rate of participation in education in 2021–22 and 2022–23, so the true figure needed may be a bit higher than this.

In addition, colleges and sixth forms also face pressures and challenges as a result of lost learning during the pandemic. Whilst GCSE results have been higher than in previous years, pupils of all ages have missed out on significant amounts of face-to-face schooling over the course of the pandemic. They are therefore likely to be further behind in their educational progress as compared with previous cohorts. Most of the evidence on lost learning so far relates to primary-age children, but there is a clear risk that secondary-age pupils will have fallen behind, including

⁴ National Audit Office, *Financial Sustainability of Colleges in England*, 2020, <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Financial-sustainability-of-colleges-in-England.pdf>.

those moving into post-16 education. Colleges and sixth forms may thus need to make significant efforts to help pupils catch up and access the curriculum for A level and other Level 3 qualifications. So far, the government has allocated over £200 million through the 16–19 tuition fund to help pupils catch up with lost learning in 2020–21 and 2021–22. This has recently been extended for a further two years through to 2023–24.⁵ It is not yet clear whether this will be sufficient given the scale of missed schooling.⁶

Lost face-to-face learning time poses particular difficulties for young people taking vocational qualifications that require them to display specific skills or undertake a specific number of hours of learning. Partly for this reason, the government is allowing more young people aged 16–19 to repeat a year.⁷ However, institutions will need specific approval if more than 5% of students are to repeat the year.⁸

Finally, the 30% drop in young people taking apprenticeships in 2020 is significant. Whilst the size of the drop is clearly related to the pandemic, it actually continues a pre-existing trend of reducing numbers of young people taking an apprenticeship, with only 3% of 16- and 17-year-olds taking such a route in 2020. Despite large financial incentives from government – now £3,000 per new apprentice – there is no sign yet of any recovery in apprenticeship numbers. Without further remedial action, some of the decline as a result of the pandemic could become permanent, with apprenticeships being undertaken by an increasingly small number of young people. Whilst the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill is currently working its way through parliament and the government has recently introduced ‘flexi-job apprenticeships’,⁹ there are few policy reforms or incentives in place to arrest the specific decline in work experience opportunities amongst 16- and 17-year olds. In the medium term, the nascent T-level qualification may be a solution to this issue as it will provide 16- and 17-year-olds with the opportunity to undertake an industry placement as part of their studies. Yet it is unclear how many young people will

⁵ <https://feweek.co.uk/2021/06/02/revealed-government-plans-to-expand-16-19-covid-tuition-fund/>.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huge-expansion-of-tutoring-in-next-step-of-education-recovery>.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-recovery-support>.

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-guidance-for-young-people-2021-to-2022-repeat-of-part-or-all-final-year-of-programme-for-16-to-19-students/funding-guidance-for-young-people-2021-to-2022-repeat-of-part-or-all-of-final-year-of-programme-for-16-to-19-students>.

⁹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2868/publications>; <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flexi-job-apprenticeship-offer>.

choose to take T levels and what the quality of work experience available to them will be.

Appendix. 16–18 spending methodology

In this appendix, we detail how we constructed our series for spending per student in further education colleges (including sixth-form colleges) and school sixth forms (academies and maintained schools). Table A1 gives details of the numbers and sources.

2003–04 to 2020–21

From 2003–04 to 2020–21, we are able to calculate both sets of figures by first calculating total reported allocations to further education and sixth-form colleges and to school sixth forms. This includes spending on learners with learning difficulties or disabilities between 2005–06 and 2014–15 (no spending is reported outside of these years) and high-needs top-up payments from local authorities to 16–18 providers between 2013–14 and 2018–19. For colleges, we are able to calculate these directly as top-up payments to post-school providers. For school sixth forms, we impute them as 0.125 of the total top-up payments to state-funded secondary schools (0.125 being the approximate share of pupils at state-funded secondary schools who are aged 16–19¹⁰).

For years between 2003–04 and 2015–16, we can then simply divide these allocations by the reported numbers of students by institution type. This includes pupils aged 16–18 who are participating in further education at higher education institutions.

From 2017, sixth-form colleges had the opportunity to convert to academy status. This creates a problem for our analysis as the funding shifts from being classified at 16–18 colleges towards academies with school sixth forms. The students also move from being classified as in sixth-form colleges towards academies. Unfortunately, the student and funding data are reported at different times of the years and are highly likely to be inconsistent with one another. Using the raw data would lead to a misleading conclusion. We therefore employ the following steps from 2016–17:

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2018>.

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- We manually recode academy sixth-form colleges back to sixth-form colleges. There are fewer than 20 of these in academic year 2017–18, though closer to 30 in 2020–21.
- We calculate total funding (excluding student support and 19+ funding) allocated to school sixth forms and colleges.
- We divide by student numbers at school sixth forms and colleges as reported in national statistics for academic years 2015–16 and 2016–17 (i.e. using end of calendar year 2016 for 2016–17).
- For academic years 2017–18 to 2020–21, we calculate student numbers for school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges in a different way. We first use the national statistics to obtain the total number of students across school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges, and we use the institutional allocations to obtain the percentages of students in school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges. We multiply the total number of students across school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges by these two shares to get the numbers of students in school sixth forms and sixth-form colleges. We adjust these figures by the share of part-time students in each institution to get an estimate of the total full-time-equivalent (FTE) numbers.
- This gives a series by academic years. We then take averages between years to give a series in financial years (e.g. $FY\ 2017-18 = 4/12 \times AY\ 2016-17 + 8/12 \times AY\ 2017-18$).

Before 2004–05

Before 2004–05, figures for spending per student in further education are available from various departmental and Office for National Statistics publications. These give slightly different levels for spending per student in 2003–04 from the more recent source. We therefore take the more reliable 2003–04 figure and back-cast imputed figures based on past changes in spending per student in further education. Figures for spending per student in school sixth forms are not readily available before 2002–03.

Table A1. Spending on and numbers of students in further education and school sixth forms (spending figures in 2021–22 prices)

	Further education				School sixth forms		
	Total allocation, £bn	Calculated spending per student	Imputed spending per student	16- to 18-year-olds (FTE)	Total allocation, £bn	Calculated spending per student	16- to 18-year-olds (FTE)
1989–90		£5,995	£5,528	537,100			248,400
1990–91		£5,818	£5,365	529,150			254,700
1991–92		£5,529	£5,098	550,450			270,600
1992–93		£5,400	£4,979	554,250			276,300
1993–94		£5,464	£5,039	561,450			274,300
1994–95		£5,304	£4,890	548,700			277,100
1995–96		£4,966	£4,579	561,650			290,100
1996–97		£4,805	£4,431	582,450			308,100
1997–98		£5,058	£4,372	576,700			317,200
1998–99		£5,009	£4,329	555,700			318,100
1999–00		£5,309	£4,589	550,200			324,200
2000–01		£5,500	£4,753	544,700			329,700
2001–02		£5,951	£5,144	554,000			332,700
2002–03		£6,020	£5,203	572,050	2.09	£6,108	341,350
2003–04	3.31	£5,637	-	586,400	2.23	£6,335	351,350

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2004–05	3.34	£5,463	-	611,700	2.35	£6,461	363,300
2005–06	4.11	£6,468	-	635,350	2.46	£6,659	370,050
2006–07	4.31	£6,470	-	665,550	2.61	£6,886	379,350
2007–08	4.40	£6,478	-	678,750	2.66	£6,828	390,250
2008–09	4.48	£6,398	-	700,700	2.69	£6,642	404,900
2009–10	4.77	£6,512	-	732,200	2.76	£6,509	423,550
2010–11	5.17	£7,043	-	734,600	2.96	£6,828	434,150
2011–12	5.19	£7,326	-	708,850	2.93	£6,734	434,450
2012–13	4.76	£6,777	-	701,850	2.79	£6,334	440,750
2013–14	4.62	£6,617	-	698,950	2.66	£5,887	451,950
2014–15	4.49	£6,464	-	694,050	2.60	£5,695	456,750
2015–16	4.39	£6,444	-	680,950	2.54	£5,661	448,700
2016–17	4.15	£6,340	-	654,220	2.48	£5,557	446,383
2017–18	4.00	£6,240	-	640,240	2.31	£5,362	430,054
2018–19	3.90	£6,195	-	628,796	2.16	£5,096	423,300
2019–20	3.85	£6,029	-	638,334	2.09	£4,903	426,074
2020–21	4.01	£6,041	-	663,696	2.21	£4,916	449,902

18 Further education and sixth form spending in England

Note and source: Number of full-time-equivalent (FTE) students calculated as number of full-time students plus 0.5 times number of part-time students. Spending per student from 2016–17 to 2019–20 calculated based on total funding allocations in annual 16–19 funding allocations (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-funding-allocations>) divided by the number of FTE students aged 16–18 in further education colleges and school sixth forms. Number of students taken from Department for Education, ‘Participation in education, training and employment: 2020’ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-in-education-training-and-employment-2020>). For 2017–18 to 2020–21, these figures are adjusted based on the number of students reported in the aforementioned 16–19 institutional funding allocations. Spending per student for 2003–04 to 2015–16 calculated as spending on further education for 16- to 19-year-olds, sixth-form spending (maintained schools and academies) and spending on learners with learning difficulties or disabilities as reported in Education Funding Agency annual report and accounts for 2012–13 to 2015–16 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/efa-annual-report-and-accounts-for-the-year-ended-31-march-2016>, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/efa-annual-report-and-accounts-for-the-year-ended-31-march-2015>, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/efa-annual-report-and-accounts-1-april-2013-to-31-march-2014>, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/efa-annual-report-and-financial-statements-for-april-2012-to-march-2013>), Young People’s Learning Agency annual report and accounts for 2011–12 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-young-peoples-learning-agencys-annual-report-and-accounts-for-2011-to-2012>) and Learning and Skills Council annual report and accounts for 2004–05 to 2009–10 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications?departments%5B%5D=learning-and-skills-council>) and divided by number of FTE students aged 16–18 in further education colleges and school sixth forms. Number of students taken from Department for Education, ‘Participation in education, training and employment: 2018’ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-in-education-training-and-employment-2018>). For years between 2013–14 and 2018–19, we also include local authority top-ups for high-needs pupils calculated from local authority spending plans (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-local-authority-school-finance-data>). Figures for spending per student in further education from 1989–90 to 2003–04 taken from Department for Children, Schools and Families departmental report for 2009 (<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-Annual%20Report%202009-BKMK.PDF>) and Department for Education and Employment, ‘Education and training expenditure since 1989–90’, Statistical Bulletin 10/99 (http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/13586/1/Education_and_training_expenditure_since_1989-90_%28Statistics_Bulletin_10_99%29.pdf). Imputed figures are calculated by back-rating the calculated figure in 2003–04 by the real-terms growth in the calculated series (figures for overlapping years are not shown here). HM Treasury GDP deflators, June 2021 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/gdp-deflators-at-market-prices-and-money-gdp>).

Split by three institutional types from 2013–14 onwards

From 2013–14 onwards, we are able to split spending per student by all three main institutional types: school sixth forms; sixth-form colleges; and further education colleges. These figures are based on reported allocations to providers,¹¹ with total spending measured as total programme funding for individuals aged 16–18, plus high-needs funding, funding adjustments for young people who have not achieved C grades in English and maths GCSEs, Capacity and Delivery Funding and the Advanced Maths Premium Funding. We adjust student and institution numbers in the same way as above to account for conversions of sixth-form colleges to academy status. However, in contrast to our main figures, we leave these figures in academic rather than financial years, given this is how the data are presented.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-education-funding-allocations#to-19-funding-allocations>.