

## Support Our Sixth-formers campaign: funding impact survey report

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### Introduction

In October 2017, the Sixth Form Colleges Association conducted an online survey of state schools (school sixth forms, academy sixth forms and free school sixth forms) and colleges (FE colleges and Sixth Form Colleges) in England. The survey was conducted on behalf of the eight organisations behind the *Support Our Sixth-formers* campaign.<sup>i</sup>

The aim of the survey was to assess the impact of funding cuts and cost increases on the education of sixth form students. Of the 1.1 million students that currently participate in post-16 education in the state sector, 62% study at a college and 38% study at a school.<sup>ii</sup> The leaders of 341 schools and colleges that educate 359,397 16 to 19 year old students (a third of the cohort) responded to the survey.

### Key findings

The key findings from the survey are outlined below:

- In total, **50%** of schools and colleges have dropped courses in modern foreign languages as a result of funding pressures, with A levels in German, French and Spanish the main casualties
- Over a third of schools and colleges (**34%**) have dropped STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) courses
- Two thirds of schools and colleges (**67%**) have reduced student support services or extra-curricular activities – with significant cuts to mental health support, employability skills and careers advice
- More than three quarters of schools and colleges (**77%**) are teaching students in larger class sizes and half (**50%**) have reduced the delivery hours of individual courses
- Two thirds of schools and colleges (**66%**) have moved from a 4 subject offer as standard to a 3 subject offer
- Almost three quarters (**72%**) do not believe the amount of funding they will receive next year will be sufficient to provide the support required by students that are educationally or economically disadvantaged

### This report

Pages 2 and 3 of this report contain a brief analysis of the survey results and Pages 4 to 7 contain a summary of responses to each survey question. For more information about this report, please contact James Kewin at the Sixth Form Colleges Association: [james.kewin@sixthformcolleges.org](mailto:james.kewin@sixthformcolleges.org)

## Analysis

### What are the problems?

Our survey suggests that funding cuts and cost increases are having a negative impact on the education of sixth form students in schools and colleges. Young people are typically studying 3 A level subjects rather than 4 and are doing so in larger classes, with less teaching time. Previous research indicates that the 15-17 hours of tuition received by students in England is already well below the 25-30 hours received by students in other leading economies such as Canada, Singapore and Shanghai.<sup>iii</sup>

Many schools and colleges cannot afford to retain strategically important, but often less popular, subjects such as modern foreign languages and STEM. And there have been big reductions in student support services – many institutions have been forced to cut mental health and counselling services despite record levels of demand from students:

*“There are increasing numbers of young people with more complex mental health needs who are not effectively supported through the disadvantage block funding.”*

**Principal, FE college**

*“The inability to adequately support the mental health needs of our students is causing attendance problems and, inevitably, undermining students' progress.”*

**Headteacher, 11-18 school**

Cuts to extra-curricular activities such as educational visits, sport, and music and drama will not help to close the growing gap<sup>iv</sup> in the rate of progression to the most selective universities between students from the state and independent sectors:

*“Fewer clubs and events reduces the scope for young people to develop. Our cohort is among the most deprived and the reduced life experiences that they receive is heart-breaking.”* **Principal, FE college**

### Who is facing these problems?

Students in both schools and colleges are affected by the underfunding of sixth form education. It also has a knock-on effect on younger children - many schools in our survey reported that their sixth form is being cross-subsidised with the funding for 11 to 16 education:

*“The amount per student for the sixth form is woefully inadequate. We have to use funding from our 11 to 16 provision but there is not enough of that either.”*

**Headteacher, Grammar School**

Unlike schools, colleges cannot cross subsidise in this way and do not have their VAT costs reimbursed (resulting in around 4% of their annual income being diverted away from the frontline education of students).<sup>v</sup> In addition, the requirement to continue teaching English and maths to all students that have not achieved a grade 4 at GCSE has put a particular strain on colleges.

### Why do these problems exist?

Sixth form funding has been cut three times since 2011 and has not been adjusted to account for inflationary pressures or cost increases.<sup>vi</sup> Funding for 16 to 19 year olds is now 21% lower than the funding for 11 to 16 year olds.<sup>vii</sup>

Successive governments have made the calculation that cuts to 16 to 19 funding are likely to be less politically damaging than cuts to pre-16 education and this has led to a prolonged and systemic period of under-investment.

Sixth form funding in England sits at the bottom of a funding chasm. In addition to being out of step with the resources made available to educate younger children, the average funding for 16 to 19 year olds in the state sector is 50% less than the average university tuition fee of £8,977 and 71% less than the average sixth form fee in the independent sector.<sup>viii ix</sup>

The government's current focus in post-16 education is almost entirely on technical education.<sup>x</sup> This will not help the vast majority of 16 to 19 year old students who are pursuing academic or applied general qualifications.<sup>xi</sup> The recent decision to increase funding for technical, but not academic, education was based on an incomplete 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.

### How can these problems be overcome?

There is an immediate need for increased investment in sixth form education:

*“It is simply unsustainable! There is no further room for manoeuvre after seven years of cost savings and cost increases.”* **Principal, Sixth Form College**

The coalition of organisations behind the Support Our Sixth-formers campaign is calling on the government to increase the national funding rate for each sixth form student by £200 to £4,200 in the forthcoming Budget, a step that would cost around £244 million per year to implement. Despite the funding crisis in sixth form education, the Department for Education actually *underspent* its budget for 16-19 year olds in each of the last three financial years.<sup>xii</sup> This £373 million underspend should be returned to schools and colleges in time for the 2018/19 academic year.

The government claims it has protected the national funding rate for sixth form students.<sup>xiii</sup> But this 'protection' has come after a series of funding cuts and does not account for inflationary pressures, cost increases, or – most importantly of all – the *actual cost of delivering a high quality sixth form education*. So the second priority for the Support Our Sixth-formers campaign is a fundamental review of sixth form funding to reintroduce a link between investment levels and the cost of providing a high quality education.

*“Students get an impoverished education because there is only sufficient funding to have teachers in front of them for 16 hours per week on average compared to 25-30 hours in the most successful nations”.* **Principal, Sixth Form College**

*“Our students are now effectively part time. Does the government realise this?”*  
**Headteacher, 11-18 school**

The current underinvestment in sixth form education is bad for students, bad for our international competitiveness and bad for social mobility. To ensure that schools and colleges can continue to transform the lives of young people and develop the highly skilled workforce of the future, an immediate increase to the national funding rate and a more fundamental review of sixth form funding are both urgently required.

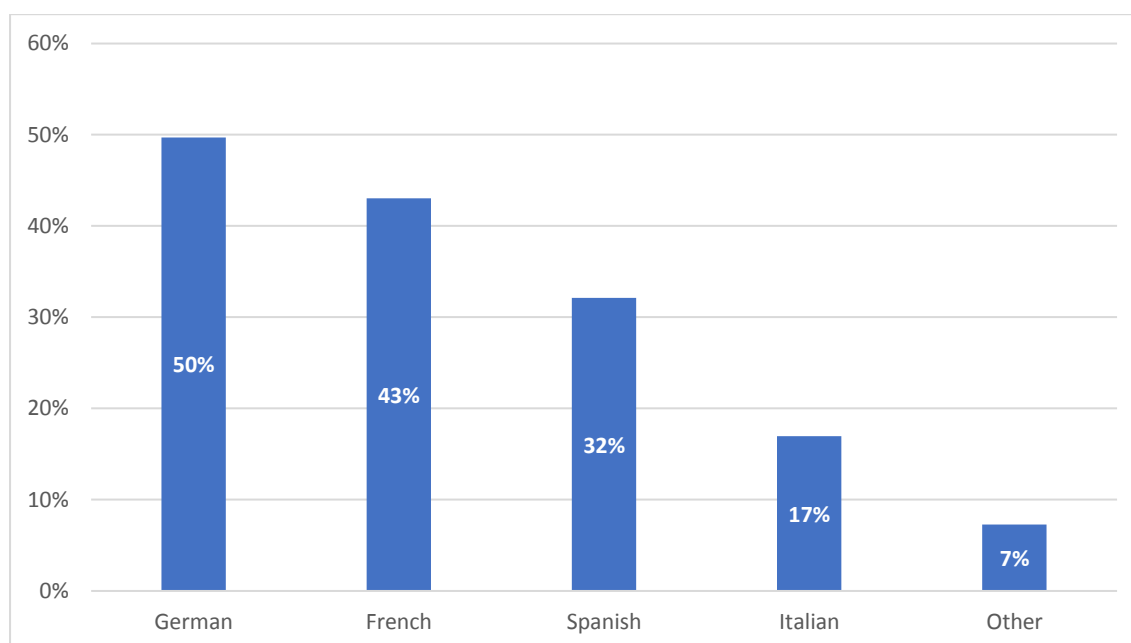
## Detailed findings

### A. Cuts to courses

As Table 1 illustrates, **50%** of schools and colleges have dropped courses in modern foreign languages. As Figure 1 shows, the biggest casualties have been A levels in German, French, and Spanish.

| Answer Options | Responses | Response Percent |
|----------------|-----------|------------------|
| Yes            | 165       | 50%              |
| No             | 166       | 50%              |

**Table 1: Has your institution had to drop courses in modern foreign languages as a result of funding cuts and cost increases? Base: 331**



**Figure 1: Modern foreign languages dropped as a result of funding cuts and cost increases. Base: 165**

Almost a third (**34%**) of schools and colleges reported they have dropped STEM courses (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths courses) as a result of funding cuts and cost increases. In total, **12%** of all schools and colleges surveyed have dropped maths courses - in most cases Further Maths and the new Core Maths qualifications.

| Answer Options | Responses | Response Percent |
|----------------|-----------|------------------|
| Yes            | 114       | 34%              |
| No             | 226       | 66%              |

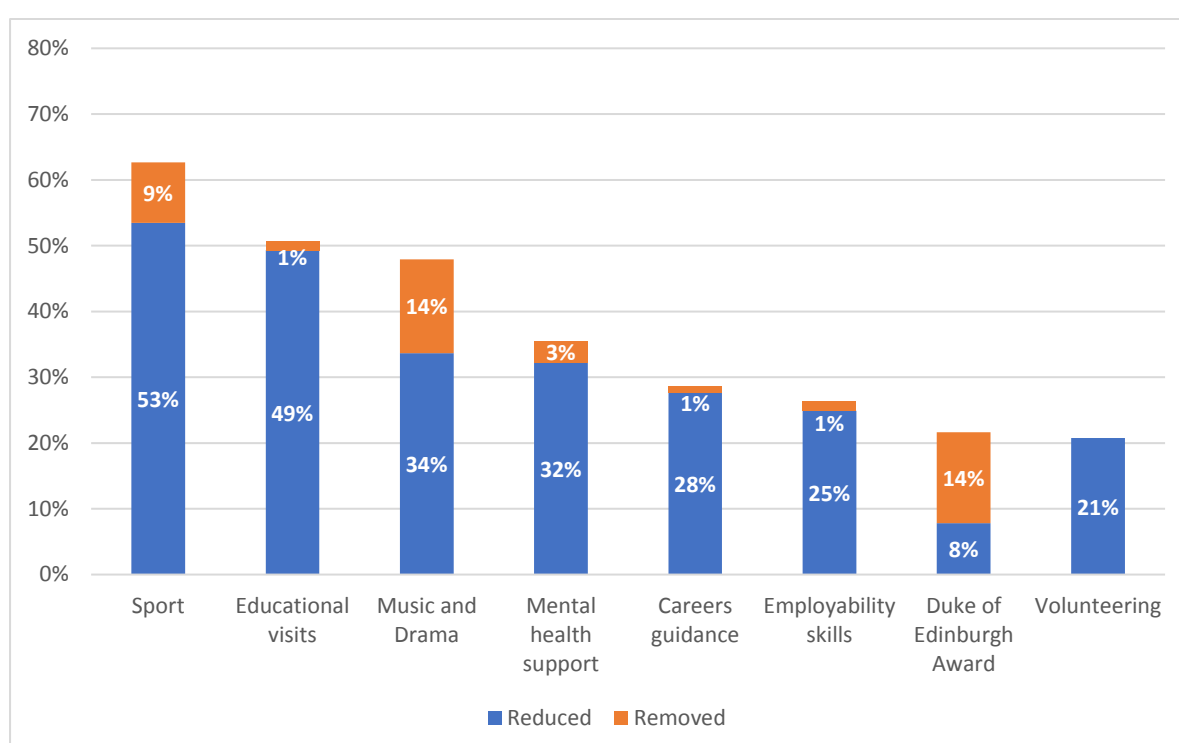
**Table 2: Has your institution had to drop courses in STEM subjects as a result of funding cuts and cost increases? Base: 340**

## B. Cuts to student support and enrichment activities

As Table 3 illustrates, just over two thirds (**67%**) of schools and colleges have removed or reduced student support or enrichment activities as a result of funding cuts and cost increases. Figure 2 shows there have been big reductions in sport, educational visits, and music and drama. Vital student support services linked to mental health, careers guidance and employability skills have also been scaled back.

| Answer Options | Responses | Response Percent |
|----------------|-----------|------------------|
| Yes            | 217       | 67%              |
| No             | 107       | 33%              |

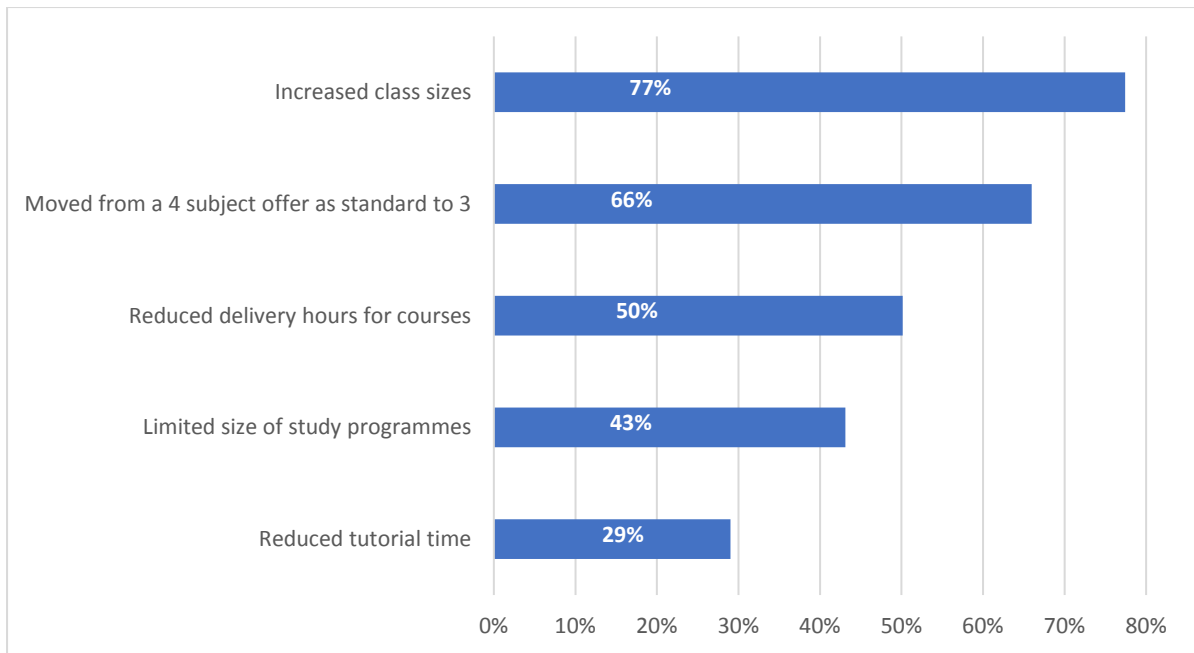
**Table 3: Has your institution had to remove or reduce student support or enrichment activities as a result of funding cuts and cost increases? Base: 324**



**Figure 2: Student support or enrichment activities removed or reduced as a result of the funding cuts and cost increases. Base: 217**

## C. Changes to curriculum delivery

As Figure 3 illustrates, schools and colleges have made a series of changes to curriculum delivery in response to the funding cuts and cost increases they have experienced. We can see that **77%** of schools colleges have been forced to increase class sizes, **50%** have reduced the delivery hours for courses and two thirds **66%** have moved to a 3 subject offer as standard.



**Figure 3: Changes to curriculum delivery implemented as a result of funding cuts and cost increases. Base: 341**

#### D. The future offer to students

As Table 4 illustrates, **58%** of schools and colleges strongly disagree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding that they will be allocated in 2018/19 will be sufficient to provide students with a high quality education.

| Answer Options             | Responses | Response Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Strongly agree             | 4         | 1%               |
| Agree                      | 60        | 19%              |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 72        | 22%              |
| Disagree                   | 131       | 40%              |
| Strongly disagree          | 57        | 18%              |

**Table 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding your institution will be allocated in 2018/19 will be sufficient to provide students with a high quality education? Base: 324**

**67%** of schools and colleges strongly disagree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding that they will be allocated in 2018/19 will be sufficient to provide students with the personal support they require to progress to higher education and/or employment.

| Answer Options             | Responses | Response Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Strongly agree             | 3         | 1%               |
| Agree                      | 51        | 16%              |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 53        | 16%              |
| Disagree                   | 157       | 49%              |
| Strongly disagree          | 58        | 18%              |

**Table 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding your institution will be allocated in 2018/19 will be sufficient to provide students with the personal support (e.g. tutoring, careers advice) they require to progress to higher education and/or employment? Base: 322**

**71%** of schools and colleges strongly disagree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding that they will be allocated in 2018/19 will be sufficient to provide students with meaningful opportunities for personal growth.

| Answer Options             | Responses | Response Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Strongly agree             | 2         | 1%               |
| Agree                      | 35        | 11%              |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 60        | 18%              |
| Disagree                   | 152       | 46%              |
| Strongly disagree          | 83        | 25%              |

**Table 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding your institution will be allocated in 2018/19 will be sufficient to provide students with meaningful opportunities for personal growth (e.g. sport, music, educational visits)? Base: 322**

**72%** of schools and colleges strongly disagree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding that they will be allocated in 2018/19 will be sufficient to provide the support required by students that are educationally or economically disadvantaged.

| Answer Options             | Responses | Response Percent |
|----------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Strongly agree             | 3         | 1%               |
| Agree                      | 42        | 13%              |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 46        | 14%              |
| Disagree                   | 145       | 44%              |
| Strongly disagree          | 90        | 28%              |

**Table 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding your institution will be allocated in 2018/19 will be sufficient to provide the support required by students that are educationally or economically disadvantaged? Base:326**

## References

- <sup>i</sup> More information about the campaign can be found at [www.supportoursixthformers.org](http://www.supportoursixthformers.org). The eight organisations supporting the campaign are: Association of Colleges, Association of School and College Leaders, Freedom and Autonomy for Heads – National Association, Grammar School Heads Association, National Governance Association, National Union of Students, SSAT: the schools students and teachers network, and the Sixth Form Colleges Association. The main recommendations of the campaign, along with supporting data can be found in the Support Our Sixth-formers manifesto: <https://www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/Support%20Our%20Sixth%20Formers%20Manifesto.pdf>
- <sup>ii</sup> Department for Education, SFR 29/2017, 29th June 2017: Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 year olds in England <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-in-education-training-and-employment-2016>. Table 2 cont. shows that there were 424,400 16 to 18 year olds being educated in schools and 695,800 being educated in colleges at the end of 2016 (1,120,200 in total). A further 91,700 16 to 18 year olds were being educated in the independent sector, 15,700 in special schools, and 201,700 had already entered higher education.
- <sup>iii</sup> 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](http://www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/171016%20Tuition%20time%20in%20upper%20secondary%20education.pdf)
- <sup>iv</sup> Department for Education, SFR 39/2017, 03 August 2017: Widening Participation in Higher Education, England, 2014/15 age cohort [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/635103/SFR39-2017-MainText.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/635103/SFR39-2017-MainText.pdf) - this data shows that 23% of A level students from state schools and colleges progressed to the most selective universities in 2014/15, compared to 65% of students from the independent sector. This gap in progression rates between the state and independent sector has grown by 6 percentage points since 2008/09.
- <sup>v</sup> Last year's funding impact survey found that the absence of a VAT reimbursement left the average Sixth Form College with £385,914 less to spend on the front line education of students: <https://www.sixthformcolleges.org/sites/default/files/191016%20SFCA%20Funding%20Impact%20Survey%20FINAL.pdf>
- <sup>vi</sup> Cuts to 16-19 funding were introduced in 2011, 2013 and 2014. According to the House of Commons Library, spending on 16-19 education fell sharply between 2010/11 and 2016/17: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN07019>. Alongside funding cuts and inflationary pressures, costs continue to rise – in 2015 employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme increased from 14.1% to 16.4% and in 2016 employer National Insurance contributions increased from 10.4% to 13.8%.
- <sup>vii</sup> DfE performance tables indicate that grant funding per student in secondary schools is £5,751: <https://www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables> This compares to the average funding of £4,531 per student received by Sixth Form Colleges and school/academy sixth forms, based on 16-19 funding allocations for 2016/17: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-allocation-data-2016-to-2017-academic-year>
- <sup>viii</sup> Office for Fair Access: <https://www.offa.org.uk/press/quick-facts/#key-facts>
- <sup>ix</sup> The Independent Schools Council Census 2017: <https://www.isc.co.uk/media/4069/isc-census-2017-final.pdf> shows that the average annual day fee for a sixth form student is £15,831. In the independent sector, fees increase at the age of 16, unlike the state sector where there is a sharp decrease in investment levels.
- <sup>x</sup> The government committed £500 million in the Spring 2017 Budget to fund the introduction of T levels, billed as the technical equivalent of A levels.
- <sup>xi</sup> Of the sixth form students that completed a Level 3 study programme in 2015/16, 15% had a tech level core aim compared to 85% of students that had an academic or applied general core aim. See retention data published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-16-to-18-results-2015-to-2016-revised>
- <sup>xii</sup> The response to a written parliamentary question from Nic Dakin MP, 13th July 2017: [www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-07-10/3811/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-07-10/3811/) indicated that the government had underspent its 16-19 education budget by £135 million in the 2014/15 financial year and £132 million in the 2015/16 financial year. The response to a written parliamentary question from Caroline Lucas MP, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-10-06/106098/> indicated that the government had underspent its 16-19 education budget by £106 million in the 2016/17 financial year.
- <sup>xiii</sup> See for example this response to a written parliamentary question from Gordon Marsden MP, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2017: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-10-10/106971/>