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Sixth Form Colleges  
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## Enrolment survey

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### Introduction

A total of fifty four Sixth Form Colleges participated in the survey – a 58% response rate. Throughout the report, the number of organisations that responded to each question is presented underneath each chart as the *base*. Bases vary throughout the report as not all participants responded to every question.

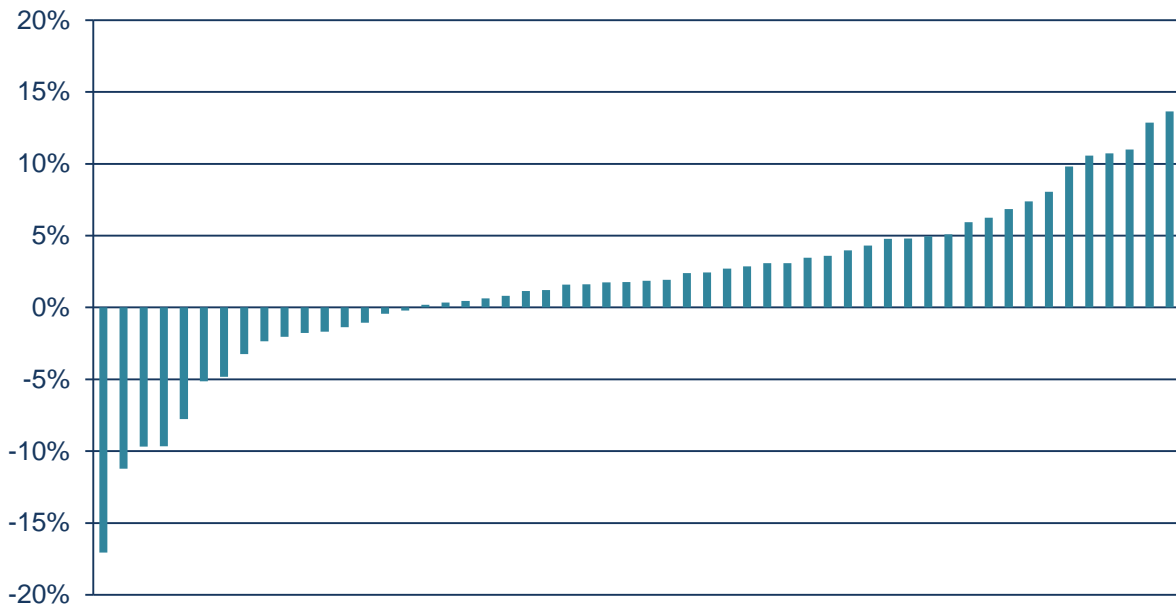
This report provides an initial analysis of the survey. It is important to exercise a degree of caution when analysing the responses. Sixth Form Colleges were asked to give estimates of their R04 returns based on previous drop-out rates and the ‘actual’ picture may be different. However, previous surveys completed at this time have shown a consistent and accurate picture of Sixth Form College enrolment patterns and this analysis is offered in that context.

### Enrolments

The returns indicate an increase in overall enrolments of 1.98% with the average Sixth Form College 16-18 student body standing at 1,888. This is a positive result in the context of falling 16-19 demographics and endorses the view that SFCs are remaining popular despite increasing competition from the expansion of schools and academy sixth forms and new 16-18 free schools. Improvements in Sixth Form College exam performance and reputation were the most frequently cited reasons for this.

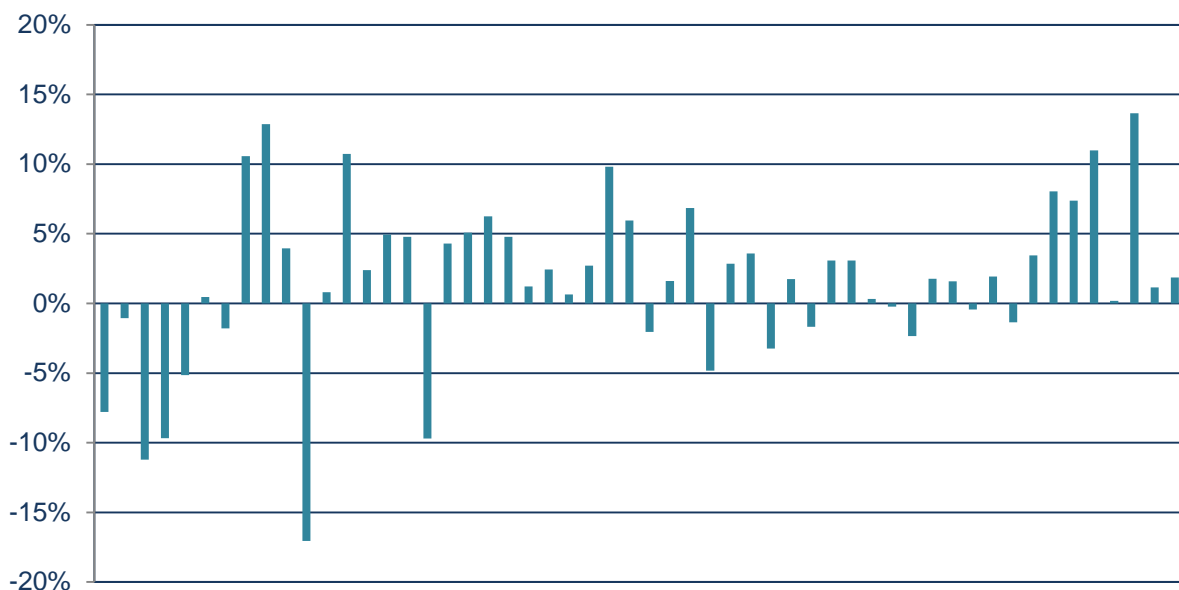
However the pattern of enrolments varies markedly across the country and within regions. This year is characterised by a very wide range of percentage changes in enrolment and this may prove difficult to manage in the context of lagged funding.

Based on the colleges which returned data, Figure 1 shows the range of changes to enrolments from minus 17% to plus 14%. It suggests that 65% of Sixth Form Colleges are managing to grow, with 26% experiencing a decrease in enrolments. This variation is greater than in previous years, although it follows the same overall trend found in the 2013/14 enrolment survey. Many colleges have reported their enrolments have increased in a deliberate attempt to offset funding cuts and the increase in National Insurance and pension contributions.



**Figure 1: % change in enrolments. Base: 54**

Figure 2 shows the variation in enrolments relative to overall college size ranked from the smallest college (735 students) to the largest (3,734 students). This suggests that size is no impediment to growth given that there are colleges across the range that have shown growth above 5%. However the pattern of declining colleges is more interesting. There does seem to be a correlation between the size of the college and declining enrolment, with six out of the ten smallest Sixth Form Colleges (in terms of 16-18 student numbers), experiencing a decline in enrolments. Comparatively, only one out of the ten biggest colleges experienced a decline in enrolments. This reinforces the analysis from previous enrolment surveys which also found a correlation between college size and growth potential. Where colleges did experience a decline in enrolments, competition from school/academy sixth forms and demographic downturn were cited as the main reasons. Lack of available and/or affordable transport was also considered to be an important factor for those colleges that had experienced a decline in enrolments.



**Figure 2: % change in enrolments ranked by overall college size (from smallest to largest). Base: 54**

## Enrolments by region

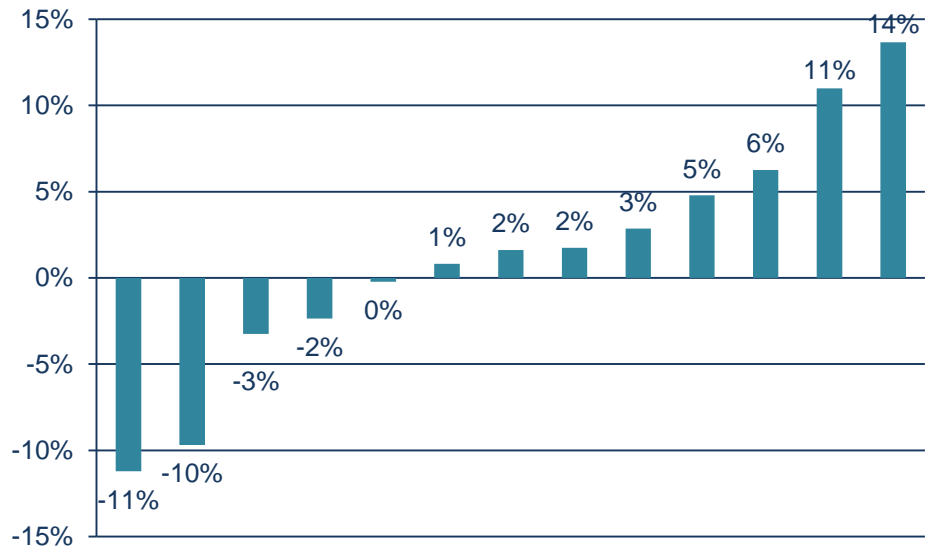


Figure 3: Enrolments by North West region. Average % change: +1%. Base: 13

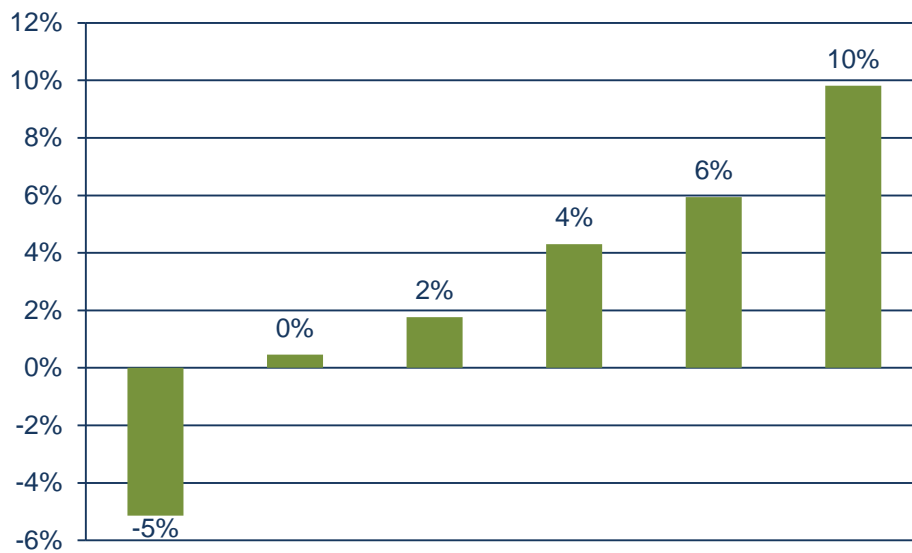


Figure 4: Enrolments by North East region. Average % change: +3%. Base: 6

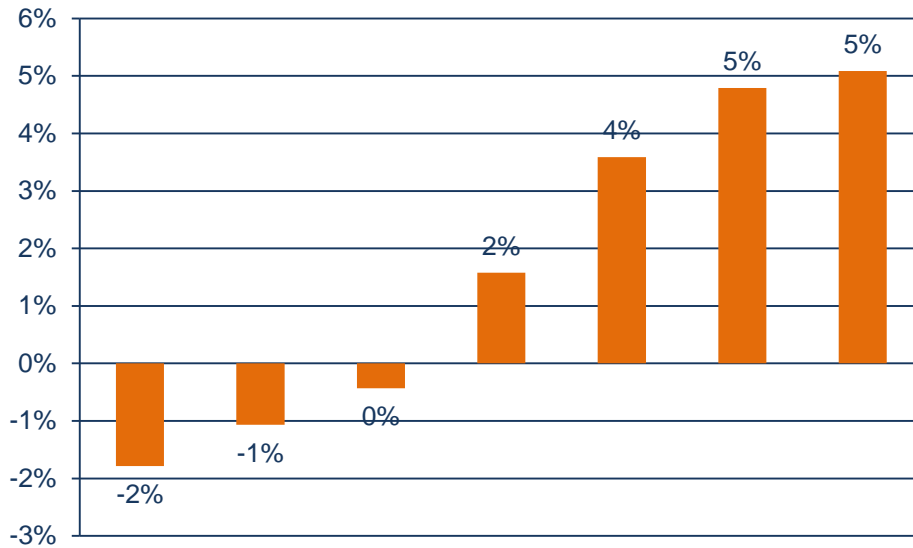


Figure 5: Enrolments by Midlands region. Average % change: +2%. Base: 7

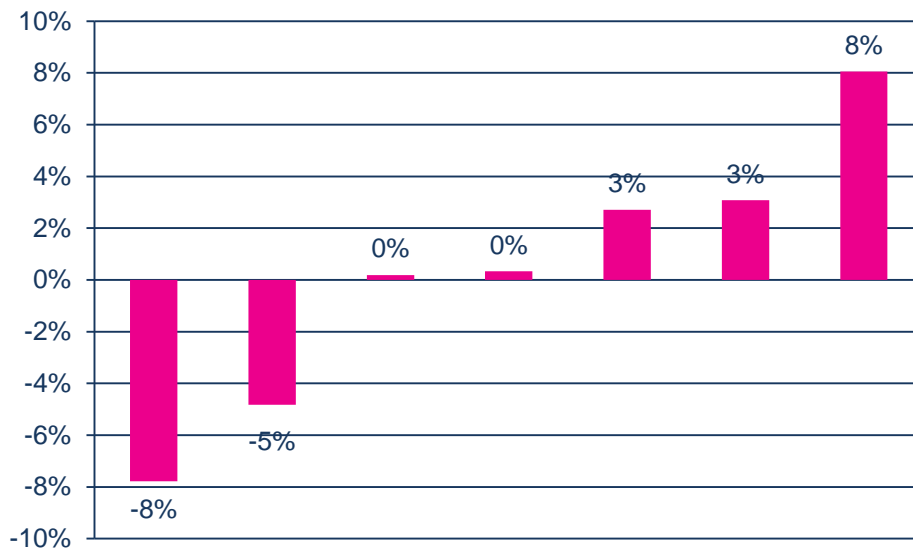


Figure 6: Enrolments by Eastern region. Average % change: 0%. Base: 7

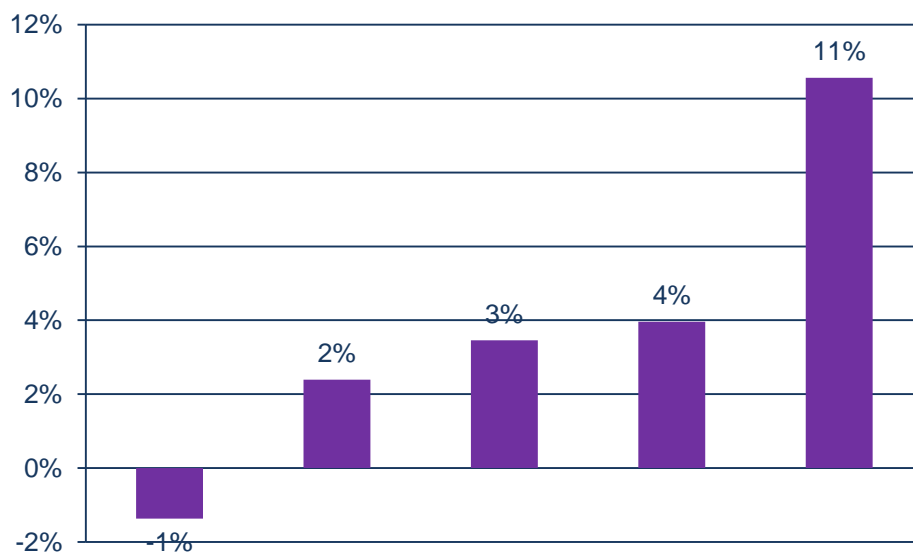
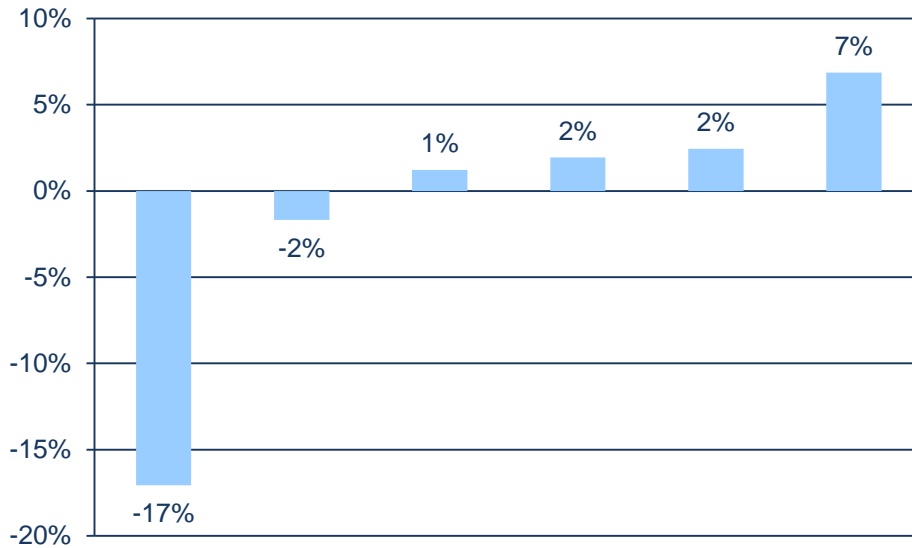
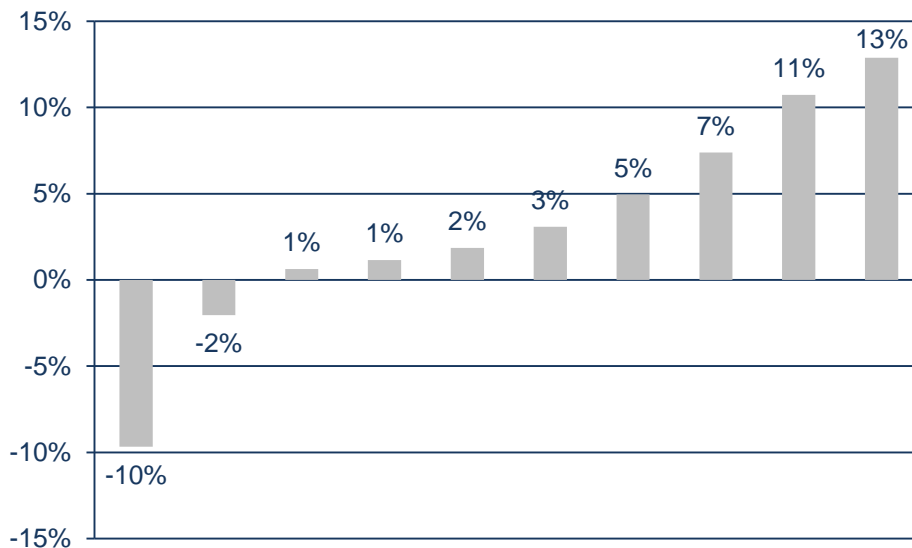


Figure 7: Enrolments by London region. Average % change: +4%. Base: 5



**Figure 8: Enrolments by South East region. Average % change: -1%. Base: 6**



**Figure 9: Enrolments by South West region. Average % change: +3%. Base: 10**

## Maths and English

Following the introduction of the maths and English condition this year, colleges were asked to report on the number of students enrolled without a maths and/or English GCSE at grade A\*-C.

According to the forty eight colleges that responded to this question, there has been a 14.6% increase in the number of students enrolled at a Sixth Form College without a GCSE in maths. This is a significant increase, particularly given there was a 4.8% national increase in the proportion of students awarded an A\*-C in GCSE maths this summer. Colleges also indicated there has been a smaller increase of 6.6% in the number of students enrolled without a GCSE in English at grade A\*-C.

Many respondents attributed the increase in the number of these students to school and academy sixth forms becoming more selective as a result of the introduction of the condition of funding. Several reported weaker school performance in the linear GCSEs which has had a significant effect on GCSE grades in some parts of the country.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the demographic downturn and proliferation of schools, academies and free schools, the reputation and performance of the sector remains strong, and this is reflected in the national increase in student numbers. Although some Sixth Form Colleges have adopted a strategy of growth to offset funding cuts and cost increases, this is not a strategy that all institutions can pursue.

The increase in students without an English and/or maths GCSE at grade A\*-C will put a particular strain on colleges. In effect, Sixth Form Colleges are stepping in to help young people that have been failed by better-funded schools and academies and - as a result of the cut to funding for 18 year olds - will be financially penalised for doing so in many cases. It is important that Sixth Form Colleges are not also penalised by Ofsted and the new 16-19 accountability measures for doing the right thing – these students require additional and tailored support to successfully progress to higher education or employment. Increasing their number will put pressure on stretched budgets, and questions the wisdom of excluding Sixth Form Colleges from the Golden Hello scheme for maths teachers in Further Education.