



Rt Hon Michael Gove
Secretary of State for Education
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

April 2014

Dear Mr Gove

We wrote to you last April. We described how the continuing diminution in resources for 16-19 education, and the inappropriate funding dip between key stage 4 and higher education, would bring adverse consequences.

The continuing and rapid decline in funding has nevertheless continued, and the funding dip has been exacerbated. The adverse consequences of which we warned are now upon us. Minority courses are being cut, enrichment and tutorial activities are pared to the minimum, and much post-16 provision is stripped to the bare bones. Breadth and depth of provision, individual academic support and character-building activities have all but disappeared from many students' programmes. The continuing reduction in funding offers little more than a bleak prospect.

At a time when the participation age is being raised to 18, it seems that 16-19 education has unfairly borne the brunt of funding reductions year upon year, and on current plans will do so into the future.

We wholeheartedly subscribe to your aims for 16-19 education of raising standards, improving quality, and ensuring that the education of our students is unrivalled on the world stage. It seems to us, however, that there is a policy disconnect between educational aspirations and funding. Much of what you are aiming for is simply unachievable without a significant increase in funding. Relatively, the funding for 16-19 education is now a little over half of what it was 17 years ago in real terms. It is inevitable that much 16-19 education is now denuded to a skeleton of what it ought to be.

We are concerned that the professed aims and aspirations for the success of 16-19 year olds risk being seen as empty rhetoric.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you to help re-connect funding and education policies, to help determine the resources needed to meet the aims that we share, and to help ensure that these aims are not thwarted by a paucity of funding. We believe that it is both urgent and important for us to meet with you to discuss these matters.

Yours sincerely



Brian Lightman, General Secretary,
Association of School and College
Leaders



Nick Weller, Chair,
Independent Academies
Association



Martin Doel, Chief Executive,
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David Igoe, Chief Executive,
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Tom Clark, Chairman, Freedom
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Nick Lewis, General Secretary
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16-19 Education Stripped to the Bare Bones

April 2014

Changes in Funding

The money provided for the education of today's 17 year olds is inadequate. Funding for sixth form education is now a little over a half (58%) of what it was when today's 17 year olds were born¹.

Schools and colleges have to live within their means. They have had little option but to reduce educational opportunities for 16 to 19 year olds. Funding has fallen to such a low level that these 17 year olds have fewer choices in terms of courses, less opportunity for breadth in their education, and are in larger classes than ever before.

Over recent years there has been a political imperative to maintain the funding for education, but only up to the age of 16. Post-16 education has been left to bear the brunt of the cuts in the Department for Education, and funding for students on level 3 courses has been hardest hit.

Not only has funding changed, the ambitions for the education of today's 17 year olds have changed too.

What the Ambitions of Government and Industry?

It's not enough for post-16 students just to pass exams; both Government and Industry have greater ambition.

The Government aim is for all students to "have the opportunity to study coherent, well thought out programmes which offer them breadth and depth and do not limit their options for future study or work"². Activities additional to studying for exams are recognised as an essential ingredient for employability.

The Government's ambition for "breadth and depth" should mean, for example, that science students learn to write an essay or to debate an issue, or that humanities students learn to engage with technical issues and to analyse problems, or that all students gain greater economic and cultural understanding.

The CBI says³ that education should foster good behaviours and attitudes, and quote Lord Adonis; "Education isn't just about exam results, it is about education for character, for community and for citizenship."

The CBI's views mean, for example, that students learn to work in a team, or that students make a contribution to projects that go beyond their study environment.

Ofsted's recent guidance⁴ agrees. Inspectors should consider "how well students personal, social and employability skills (communication, teamwork, leadership, taking responsibility, problem-solving, reflective thinking, independent inquiry) are developed..."

¹ In 1997 the AWPU was 138% for sixth form education compared to key stage 4 education, and now the funding sixth form education is down to 79% of the funding for key stage 4, a relative value of 58%.

² Department for Education; Study Programmes for 16- to 19-year- olds, Government response to consultation and plans for implementation; July 2012

³ CBI; First Steps report; Nov 2012

⁴ Ofsted, 16 to 19 Study Programme; January 2014

This thinking is not unique to England. In Scotland and Wales they have a similar perspective⁵

Delivering Ambitions

Study programmes ought to include a range of non-qualification activity. Some of these activities are essential for the personal well being of all students, such as competing through sport, keeping fit and developing healthy lifestyles. All students should also learn about personal finance, gain a breadth of cultural understanding and take part in work related activity.

The study programmes of some students could gain breadth and depth from taking part in music and drama, developing complementary skills in areas such as information technology or debating, and running community based projects.

Study programmes give the freedom to schools and colleges to tailor non-qualification activity to meet the needs of students.

There are clear ambitions for post-16 education and study programmes give a method. However, aims and ideas alone aren't enough. Schools and colleges have to live within their means. They must consider what is actually affordable.

What can be afforded?

The basic funding rate is £4000 per student⁶, although schools and colleges receive some additional funding for students who have not attained maths or English GCSEs, some additional funding to meet the needs of students from economically deprived backgrounds, or if students are studying engineering or similarly expensive courses. However, schools and colleges can lose funding should a student not complete their studies.

Typically the total funding for a student adds up to £4500 (less for a student studying level 3 courses). This provides a starting point for considering what can be afforded.⁵

Typically, the teacher to student ratio to break even is around 19, and average class size 18.⁷ Fewer students in classes mean that schools and colleges can't balance the books.

These numbers, whilst arrived at from estimations, should not be surprising. The pupil to teacher ratio in secondary schools is around 15 to 1⁸, with a median expenditure of £5671 per pupil⁹. With only around £4500 per post-16 student, the student to teacher ratio for the institution to break even would be expected to be proportionately larger, i.e. around 19.

Affordability Consequences for the Post-16 Curriculum

Schools and colleges are faced with the stark financial requirements of large classes and high teacher student ratios. There has been no option but to reduce curriculum opportunities.

Courses which only attract a small number of students, of around a dozen or so, would have been close to viable in the past, or could have been accommodated by having larger classes in more popular subjects. Now languages, further mathematics, music, computing, applied

⁵ See Appendix 2

⁶ This rate is for 16 and 17 year olds, it is to be 17.5% less for the 18 year olds in the same school or college. £4000 is an overestimate of the overall rate in post-16 education for 2014/15

⁷ See Appendix 1

⁸ School workforce in England: November 2012; Department for Education; Updated 25 November 2013

⁹ Department for Education; Performance Tables 2012-2013.

science are amongst the subjects being cut from the curriculum offer in many schools and colleges.

Teaching 16-19 year olds is not like lecturing to a large audience. Students need to be engaged through tasks. Whether these tasks are discussions, answering questions, making presentations or hands on practical work, preparing high quality lessons for large groups demands significant time.

The progress 16-19 year olds make in their studies needs careful monitoring. The marking time needed for large numbers of students is very substantial.

In the past students were given significant individual academic support. Large class sizes and fewer teachers simply make this untenable. Not only do the increases in preparation and marking demand all the hours available from teachers, the large numbers of students in groups make it impractical.

Teachers have little time to provide any pastoral support for students. Student support and tutorial work is being delivered more and more by support staff, simply because that's a cheaper option.

Perhaps the most striking consequence of the affordability imperative has been for the "breadth and depth" of the curriculum. The non-qualification elements of study programmes, the essential elements that bring "breadth and depth", are being whittled back to almost nothing.

Being starved of funding has left schools and colleges with little choice but to reduce post-16 education, and particularly advanced level education, to the bare bones of what it should be.

Teachers have little or no time to provide additional activities in Sport and Outdoor pursuits, Debating, I.T. Skills, Citizenship, Enterprise, Drama, Art, and the list goes on. The wider skills of working in a team, undertaking independent research, or problem solving cannot be given space in a bare bones curriculum.

What is needed?

Current qualifications reform, study programmes and the ambitions for sixth form education are based on worthy aims. However, they all seem likely to become consigned to the waste bin of fine ideas stymied by short-sighted funding reductions.

Schools and colleges are hard pressed to find survival strategies with the current poor levels of funding. There is no disagreement, implementing more effective and higher quality provision for 16-19 year olds gains consensus. However, the prospects look bleak given the very low levels of funding.

Three changes must be made if post-16 education is to flourish.

- 1) The only rational argument for funding the education of 16 to 19 year olds at a fraction of the level funding at the age 15, is that 16 to 19 education is somehow much less unimportant. Clearly this is not the case. Raising the participation age, our ambitions for post-16 education, and the need to nurture talent to compete in a global market all suggest that funding for education from the ages of 16 to 19 should have parity.

Funding for the education of 16 to 19 year olds should be at least at a similar level to funding prior to the age of 16.

- 2) Funding education to the age of 16 at a level that ensures that it is healthy and can succeed is undeniably important. Not having the same consideration for education up to the age of 19 is both inconsistent and unjustified.

The funding of education for 16-19 year olds has been reduced year upon year to a level that is now close to untenable. Funding for 16-19 year olds should not be subject to year upon year reductions, bearing the brunt of cuts in the Department for Education.

The Department for Education should apply the same safeguards for 16-19 expenditure as it does for pre-16 education. Education funding to the age of 18 should be protected.

- 3) New providers of 16-19 education are being unnecessarily created. They are unfairly advantaged in having significant additional funding, and thus distort the local situation. There needs to be a level playing field. Good and economically effective providers should be able to grow to meet needs, and respond to popular demand.

Resources should not be squandered on unnecessary new 16-19 provision, where there is neither a demographic nor a quality or curriculum need.

The views in this paper

This paper was prepared by ASCL working with the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA), the Association of Colleges (AoC), Freedom and Autonomy for Schools- National Association (FASNA), the Independent Academies Association (IAA), and the Principals Professional Council (PPC).

All the associations subscribe to the views expressed in this paper.

Appendix 1

Teacher Costs

1. The mean gross pay for teachers working outside London is £36,904¹⁰.
2. With on costs @25% (including employers contributions to pensions and national insurance) the cost to the establishment of each teaching post is £46,130

Teacher Costs and Other Expenditure

However, teacher costs are not the only outgoings. Support staff, premises, and other costs need to be factored in

1. The performance table data for 2012-2013 show that the median teacher cost per pupil in maintained secondary schools with KS4 was £3113
2. The performance table data for 2012-2013 also shows that the median expenditure per pupil in maintained secondary schools with KS4 was £5671.

Clearly, expenditure in education is not only on teacher costs and from the above data teacher costs are around 55% of the overall cost. Using this figure, the cost per teacher, with all the additional expenditure added, is around £84,000.

Staff to Student Ratios and Economic Class Sizes

If students bring £4500 each into the institution, then the teacher to student ratio needs to be 1 to 19, to cover the £84,000 cost. This is a break-even teacher to student ratio.

The economic class size will generally be a little lower than 19. The average class contact time for teaching staff across an institution is generally a little higher than the equivalent class contact time for students. The break-even class size is thus around 18.

¹⁰ **School workforce in England: November 2012**; Department for Education; Updated 25 November 2013,

Appendix 2

Scotland

The Scottish Government's lifelong learning strategy aims to ensure that everyone develops the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need for life, learning and work. The curriculum is all the experiences that are planned for learners to support the development of these skills.

The Scottish Government has launched the “curriculum for excellence”, and with it a focus on four capacities.

“The purpose of the curriculum is to help children and young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (the four capacities)”

Wales

The Welsh Government is engaged in the development of the “Welsh Bac” as an essential component of post-16 education.

“Through the Welsh Bac, Welsh students are becoming more confident, improving their essential and social skills and gaining a better understanding of a range of topics from enterprise to politics and current affairs. Through the Welsh Bac, Welsh students are becoming more confident, improving their essential and social skills and gaining a better understanding of a range of topics from enterprise to politics and current affairs.”

The areas of study are, Wales, Europe and the World, The Language Module, Personal and Social Education, Community Participation, Work Related Education, The Individual Investigation.