

# SUPPORT OUR SIXTH-FORMERS

**INCREASE INVESTMENT  
IN SIXTH FORM EDUCATION**



# Support Our Sixth-formers

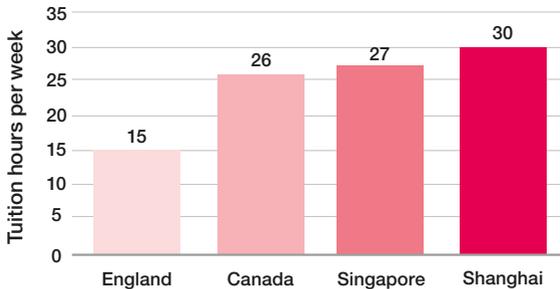
As the associations that represent schools and colleges in England, we are calling on the government to back the Support Our Sixth-formers campaign by adopting the following two recommendations:

- 1** Introduce a £200 per student uplift in funding to improve the education and support offered to sixth form students
- 2** Conduct a review of sixth form funding to ensure it is linked to the realistic costs of delivering a rounded, high quality curriculum

## The case for increased investment

● **Cuts to sixth form funding introduced in 2011, 2013 and 2014<sup>1</sup> 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 Education<sup>2</sup> 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 schools and colleges 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.”<sup>3</sup>



● **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 health.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

● **These issues are the result of a sustained period of underinvestment in sixth form education.** The average annual funding received by schools and colleges 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.<sup>6</sup>



● **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 schools and colleges 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.<sup>7</sup>

● **In March 2017, plans were announced to increase investment in 16-19 education for students studying technical courses.**<sup>8</sup> This is a welcome development, but it is important to understand that 16-19 education is a lot broader than technical education. This increased investment will not impact on the vast majority of the cohort who are pursuing academic or applied general qualifications.

● **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 an incomplete analysis of the country's productivity challenge. The high-skilled economy envisaged in the government's Industrial Strategy will require leaders, scientists, technicians, engineers and others that in most cases will have followed the academic path during their sixth form studies.



## Our recommendations

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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 schools and colleges can continue to transform the lives of young people and develop the highly skilled workforce of the future, we are calling on the government to adopt the following recommendations:

### **Recommendation 1: Introduce a £200 per student uplift in funding to improve the education and 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 schools and colleges to begin reassembling the range of support activities required to meet the individual needs of young people. This ‘SOS uplift’ is affordable – we estimate it would cost £244 million per year to implement<sup>9</sup> – and could be partly funded by using the underspend in the Department for Education’s budget for 16–19 education (that amounted to £135 million in 2014/15 and £132 million in 2015/16).<sup>10</sup> As the funding rates for sixth formers have been fixed since 2013, this modest uplift would also help schools and colleges to deal with the inflationary pressures and cost increases they have faced during that time and ensure that students have access to the full range of STEM and language courses.

● **Schools and colleges 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:**

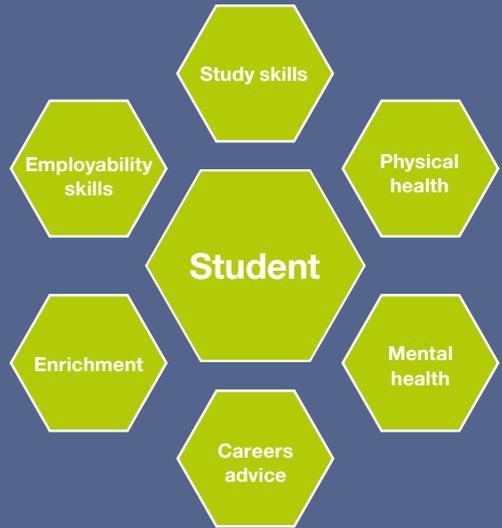
- Improving study skills will benefit students when they progress to higher education or employment and enhance their sixth form studies.
- Improving employability skills will help students to flourish in the workplace.
- Improving careers advice will ensure young people make better choices when they leave sixth form education.
- Improving the mental and physical health of students will increase their resilience and contribute to improved exam performance.
- 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 to ensure it is linked to the realistic costs of delivering a rounded, high quality curriculum**

● **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”,<sup>11</sup> but it has not published any research<sup>12</sup> 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 – schools and colleges 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.

Schools and colleges have been forced to respond to funding pressures by cutting courses and increasing class sizes, with some colleges also holding down pay, making it difficult to recruit and retain high quality teachers. Significant efficiency savings have already been made and without further investment, there will be further cuts to courses (particularly STEM and languages) and school sixth forms in rural areas will simply disappear. As the number of 16-19 year olds starts to increase, the establishment of new sixth form provision should be based on an impartial assessment of demand, quality and value for money to make best use of scarce resources.



## We are calling on the government 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 introduction of a £200 per student uplift in funding 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. 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.

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**A £200 per student uplift will help to provide the support that sixth form students urgently need.**

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## 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:  
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- 3 The right combination: CBI/Pearson education and skills survey 2016:  
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- 5 Public Health England, The link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment:  
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- 7 Independent Schools Council Census 2016: [www.isc.co.uk/media/3179/isc\\_census\\_2016\\_final.pdf](http://www.isc.co.uk/media/3179/isc_census_2016_final.pdf)
- 8 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](http://www.tes.com/news/further-education/breaking-views/spring-budget-really-fair-funding-colleges)
- 9 Based on an uplift of £200 for each of the 1,219,769 16–19 year olds funded by the Education Funding Agency in 2016/17. Funding allocations can be found here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-allocation-data-2016-to-2017-academic-year](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-allocation-data-2016-to-2017-academic-year)
- 10 Response to 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/)
- 11 See, for example: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-33847860](http://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](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/Study%20Programmes%20for%2016-19%20year%20olds%20v2%20-%20consultation%20document.pdf)

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