

Sufficiency, certainty, flexibility: our funding priorities for sixth form education

June 2020

In January, SFCA set out [four key priorities](#) for sixth form education in 2020. The first relates to funding: [raise the rate](#) of funding for 16, 17 and 18 year olds to at least £4,760 per year followed by an annual rise in line with inflation. Securing a *sufficient* level of core funding by raising the rate remains our first priority, but the Covid crisis has highlighted the need for this to be accompanied by two further priorities: greater *certainty* on future funding levels and greater *flexibility* in delivery.

Sufficiency

- There have been many calls for dedicated funding and initiatives to address some of the specific challenges caused by Covid. But now is not the time for gimmicks. Short term and often bid-based funding streams are no substitute for a sufficient level of core funding that college and school leaders can tailor to the individual needs of their students. There is already a place in education or training for every 16 to 18 year old that needs one. The key issue is that the funding for each place is not sufficient to deliver a rounded, high quality experience or to address the many challenges presented by Covid.
 - Raising the rate is the best way to address the issue of *sufficiency*. This will in turn help to boost economic growth and ensure that no young person is left behind as a result of Covid.

Certainty

- The process of allocating 16 to 18 funding on an annual basis (based on the number of students recruited the previous academic year) has always made long term planning difficult. Recruitment this September is likely to be more volatile than ever, as some young people will be less willing or able to travel to their sixth form, particularly if it is new to them. A big drop in student numbers will damage already fragile finances, particularly as sixth form providers (who have experienced the [biggest cuts](#) to education funding since 2010) have already seen their costs increase and income reduce as a result of Covid. More information is set out in our [recent survey](#), but the combined cost of introducing social distancing measures, investing in IT, providing additional transport etc. is high and ongoing.
- In this context, and given that institutions will be dealing with the logistical and educational challenges of delivering a blended model of online and face to face education for the foreseeable future, the government should provide *certainty* on future funding levels. The best way to do this is by:
 - Confirming that the one year measures announced in the 2019 spending round for 16 to 18 education (e.g. small increase in funding rate, high cost/high value courses premium and coverage of the Teachers' Pension Scheme contribution costs) will extend until 2022/23 and beyond.
 - Providing a funding allocation guarantee for 2021/22 and 2022/23 with colleges and schools receiving no less than they did in their 16 to 18 allocations for 2020/21.

Flexibility

- Given the unprecedented change to the nature of delivery caused by Covid, study programmes have changed dramatically. It would make little sense for the government to scrutinise the content of these programmes through a pre-Covid lens – institutions must have the *flexibility* to tailor their offer to students without being retrospectively penalised by funding regulations, financial health scores or the audit regime.
 - The Department for Education has confirmed that colleges and schools will not be held to account on the basis of exams and assessment data from summer 2020 and the same commitment should extend to the data that institutions return on student activity via the ILR or school census for 2019/20 and 2020/21.
- Our [four key priorities](#) for sixth form education in 2020 have not changed. But Covid has highlighted the need for greater *certainty* on future funding and greater *flexibility* in delivery to help colleges and schools to deliver the education and support needed by sixth form students in these unprecedented times.
- For more information about this briefing please contact: james.kewin@sixthformcolleges.org