



Sixth Form Colleges
Association

THE VOICE OF SIXTH FORM EDUCATION

ELECTION 2019: A MANIFESTO FOR SIXTH FORM EDUCATION



NOVEMBER 2019

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sixth Form Colleges Association is the established voice of dedicated sixth form education and the hub of a national network of sixth form providers. SFCA represents all designated sixth form colleges and 16 to 19 academies in England, as well as a growing number of FE colleges and 16 to 19 free schools.

We urge all political parties to adopt the following recommendations ahead of the 2019 election:

- 1 Raise the Rate of funding for sixth form students to £4,760 per year
- 2 Protect Applied General Qualifications (e.g. BTECs)
- 3 Introduce dedicated capital expansion and maintenance funds for sixth form providers
- 4 Introduce a single, competitive process for establishing new sixth form provision

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Raise the Rate of funding for sixth form students to £4,760 per year

We support the recent recommendation from the cross-party Education Select Committee for “a post-16 core funding rate raise from £4,000 to at least £4,760 per student, rising in line with inflation.” The current funding rate has remained frozen at £4,000 per student, per year since 2013/14. In the September 2019 spending round, the government announced that it would raise the rate to £4,188 per student from 2020/21.

This is a welcome step in the right direction, but research from London Economics indicates that £760 per student is the minimum level of additional funding required to increase student support services to the required level (e.g. mental health support), protect minority subjects that are at risk of being dropped (e.g. modern foreign languages), and increase non-qualification time (e.g. extra-curricular activities, work experience).

The Raise the Rate campaign (that is backed by the associations that represent schools, colleges, teachers, support staff, students and governors in England) would like to see all political parties make a clear commitment to increase the funding rate for 16, 17 and 18 year olds to at least £4,760 per student from 2021/22, accompanied by an annual rise in line with inflation. This funding should be in addition to, rather than instead of, funding required to meet additional costs such as increased employer contributions to the Teachers’ Pension Scheme.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Protect Applied General Qualifications (AGQs)

The government has set out a clear vision of post-16 education where A level and T levels are the qualifications of choice for 16 to 18 year olds at Level 3. However, we believe that the newly-reformed AGQs (BTECs being the best known brand) also have a vital role to play in the future qualifications landscape.

For some young people, an A level or a T level will not be the most appropriate route to support progression to higher education or employment. Although AGQs are available in similar subjects, they are a different type of qualification that provide a different type of educational experience.

AGQs have transformed the life chances of hundreds of thousands of young people and made a huge contribution to both social mobility and economic growth. The government is currently consulting on the future of these qualifications and our response provides more information on our position. We urge all political parties to guarantee that AGQs (in their new, more rigorous format) will continue to be available to students alongside A levels and T levels in the future.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Introduce dedicated capital expansion and maintenance funds for sixth form providers

The number of 16 to 18 year olds in England will increase sharply over the next eight years. We estimate that the number of 16 to 18 year olds participating in full time education will rise from 1,127,000 in 2019/20 to 1,387,585 in 2028/29 - an increase of 260,585. In some parts of the country it will make sense to establish new institutions to meet this demographic increase. But as a general principle, we believe that expanding existing, high performing institutions, offers better value for money (it is a lot cheaper to do) at lower risk (they already have a proven track record) than opening brand new ones.

The absence of a dedicated capital fund for sixth form providers means that expansion is simply not an option for many institutions. Sixth form colleges and academies must bid from a single Condition Improvement Fund for all phases of education that prioritises capital improvement over expansion. The small minority of expansion projects that are approved typically focus on acute overcrowding rather than future place planning. The creation of a dedicated capital expansion fund for high performing sixth form providers should be a priority for all political parties. This could be modelled on the existing expansion fund for grammar schools but with non-selective institutions eligible to apply.

A separate capital maintenance fund for sixth form providers would also help to address the ongoing challenges many institutions have with their estate. One practical commitment political parties could make is to extend eligibility for school condition allocations (currently limited to MATs with 5 or more academies and at least 3,000 pupils) to sixth form colleges and 16 to 19 academies, either individually or as part of a consortium. This would provide funding for institutions to deploy strategically across their estate to address priority maintenance needs.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Introduce a single, competitive process for establishing new sixth form provision

There are currently separate processes for adding a sixth form to a maintained school, adding a sixth form to an academy and establishing a free school (16 to 19 or all through). In addition, the decision to add or create a sixth form is rarely linked to the current and future provision in non-school providers such as sixth form colleges. This lack of co-ordination was reflected in the government's area reviews of post-16 education in England that focused on the viability of colleges but not school and academy sixth forms (where 40% of 16 to 18 year olds are educated).

As the number of 16 to 18 year olds starts to increase, the need for a single, competitive process for establishing new sixth form provision will become even more pressing. This process should focus on the age range of students (16 to 18 year olds) rather than where they study (school or college) and should begin with an impartial assessment of current and future demand in each local area.

Once this has been established, a competitive process for establishing new sixth form provision should take place that is open to all types of sixth form provider. This is more likely to result in a sixth form solution that is right for each local area and is a more effective way of dealing with the national increase in student numbers. We urge all political parties to support our call for a more coherent, co-ordinated approach in this area as it is a pre-requisite to ensuring both value for money and high quality educational outcomes.

For more information about this manifesto:


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