



## Raise the Rate campaign: funding impact survey report

James Kewin and Vanessa Donhowe, March 2019

### Introduction

In January 2019, the Sixth Form Colleges Association conducted an online survey of state schools (school sixth forms, academy sixth forms and free school sixth forms) and colleges (FE colleges and sixth form colleges) in England. The survey was conducted on behalf of the twelve organisations behind the *Raise the Rate* campaign.<sup>i</sup> The aim of the survey was to assess the impact of funding cuts and cost increases on the education of sixth form students. Of the 1.1 million students that currently participate in 16 to 18 education in the state sector, 60% study at a college and 40% study at a school.<sup>ii</sup> The leaders of 271 schools and colleges that educate 282,994 16 to 18 year old students (26% of the cohort) responded to the survey.

### Key findings

- In total, **51%** of schools and colleges have dropped courses in modern foreign languages as a result of funding pressures, with A levels in German, Spanish and French the main casualties
- Over a third of schools and colleges (**38%**) have dropped STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) courses
- More than three quarters of schools and colleges (**78%**) have reduced or removed student support services or extra-curricular activities – with significant cuts to mental health support, employability skills and careers advice
- Most schools and colleges (**81%**) are teaching students in larger class sizes and nearly half (**46%**) have reduced the delivery hours of individual courses
- Over two thirds of schools and colleges (**69%**) have moved from a 4 subject offer as standard to a 3 subject offer
- Over three quarters (**76%**) do not believe the amount of funding they will receive next year will be sufficient to provide the support required by disadvantaged students
- Very few schools and colleges believe the following government initiatives that target funding at individual subjects or qualifications will have a major or very major impact on their institution next year: the advanced maths premium<sup>iii</sup> (**6%**), large programme uplift<sup>iv</sup> (**4%**), T levels (**3%**)<sup>v</sup>

### This report

Pages 2 and 3 of this report contain a brief analysis of the survey results and pages 4 to 9 contain a summary of responses to each survey question. For more information about this report, please contact James Kewin at the Sixth Form Colleges Association: [james.kewin@sixthformcolleges.org](mailto:james.kewin@sixthformcolleges.org)

## Analysis

### A funding-driven curriculum

This year's survey indicates that funding pressures are continuing to have a negative impact on the education of sixth form students. Many schools and colleges cannot afford to retain strategically important, but often less popular, subjects such as modern foreign languages and STEM. Young people are typically studying 3 A level subjects rather than 4 and are doing so in larger classes, with less teaching time. The sixth form curriculum is increasingly driven by the (inadequate) funding made available by the government, rather than the needs of students or the economy.

*"Curriculum considerations are driven by profitability (which cannot be right). We cannot offer any course that has fewer than 16 students and will cut further courses that do not generate a good level of contribution in the future."* **Principal, FE college**

*"We cannot make ends meet at all for the sixth form. The only way we can manage is to cross-subsidise from years 7 to 11. We have to invite sixth formers to buy their own textbooks as we can no longer afford them."* **Headteacher, grammar school**

### The squeeze on support

Perhaps the most striking finding in this year's survey is the sharp increase in cuts to student support services. A recurrent theme in the survey responses is that there is very little scope to make further cuts to, or find additional efficiencies in, the curriculum. As a result, it is non-qualification activities that are bearing the brunt of funding pressures:

*"There is no juice left to squeeze out. Students have a diet of three A levels plus a compressed tutorial programme. Our students are often pupil premium and have limited cultural capital. Our ability to put this in place for them has been systematically eroded."* **Headteacher, 11-18 school**

To make matters worse, reductions to student support services are being made at a time when demand for these services has never been higher:

*"We have been unable to expand mental health support in the face of ballooning demand. Student services posts have been left unfilled when people leave, putting existing staff under extreme pressure".* **Principal, sixth form college**

With Brexit looming, many schools and colleges are concerned about the impact of cuts to employability skills and careers advice on the economy, as well as on students:

*"Students have low confidence and employability skills...we are not providing the education that young people deserve and are setting up problems for the economy in doing so".* **Headteacher, 11-18 school**

### The need for extra, extra-curricular

This year's survey indicates that cuts to the curriculum and student support services have been exacerbated by reductions in extra-curricular activities such as sport, music and drama, and educational visits. This has obvious implications for social mobility and will not help to close the gap in the rate of progression to the most selective universities between students from the state and independent sectors.<sup>vi</sup>

*“We support students in the lowest quintile for economic deprivation. They are taught and taught well but we cannot provide the extra wrap-around activities that help young people make the most of their lives.”* **Principal, FE college**

*“All enrichment is being squeezed out as staff have to be utilised entirely in the classroom for financial viability.”* **Headteacher, 11-18 school**

## How the government responds

When challenged about the impact of funding cuts and cost increases on sixth form education, ministers usually point to government initiatives that target funding at individual subjects or qualifications.<sup>vii</sup> This year’s survey shows that these uplifts in funding have little impact. This is partly because the amount of funding available is so small, and partly because the initiatives are aimed at a minority of students.<sup>viii</sup> Even the £500 million investment in T-levels (the government’s proposed new suite of technical qualifications), will not fully materialise until 2023, and will not benefit the vast majority of students that pursue academic or applied general qualifications.<sup>ix</sup>

The government also claims to have ‘protected’ the funding rate for 16 to 18 year olds at **£4,000 per student**, per year during the current spending review period.<sup>x</sup> In reality, this is a funding freeze that followed a series of funding cuts and does not account for the significant cost increases that schools and colleges have had to contend with. For example, recent research from London Economics found that in real terms, sixth form colleges received £1,380 less per student in 2016/17 than they did in 2010/11 – a 22% decline in funding.<sup>xi</sup> The Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that *“funding per student aged 16 to 18 has seen the biggest squeeze of all stages of education for young people in recent years.”*<sup>xii</sup> This is what ‘protected’ funding looks like for sixth form students.

## How the government should respond

There is only one way to ensure that schools and colleges can continue to deliver a high quality, internationally competitive, sixth form education and that is to raise the funding rate for 16, 17 and 18 year olds to at least **£4,760 per student**, per year in the 2019 spending review. The rate should then rise in line with inflation each year. Recent research from London Economics found that this was 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).<sup>xiii</sup>

It is important that this new funding is in addition to, rather than instead of, funding that may be required to meet additional costs that emerge during the next spending review period. For example, research indicates that institutions will require a further £140 per student, per year, if the proposed increase in employer contributions to the Teachers’ Pension Scheme is not fully funded by the government.<sup>xiv</sup>

Raising the rate, and ensuring it keeps pace with inflation (an inflationary rise on its own would fall well short of what is required) is the only way to ensure that sixth form funding is sufficient and made available in a way that schools and colleges can tailor to the individual needs of *all* students. This year’s survey provides more evidence that the ongoing underinvestment in sixth form education is bad for students, bad for the economy and bad for social mobility. The 2019 spending review is make or break for sixth form education in England. It’s time to raise the rate - before it’s too late.

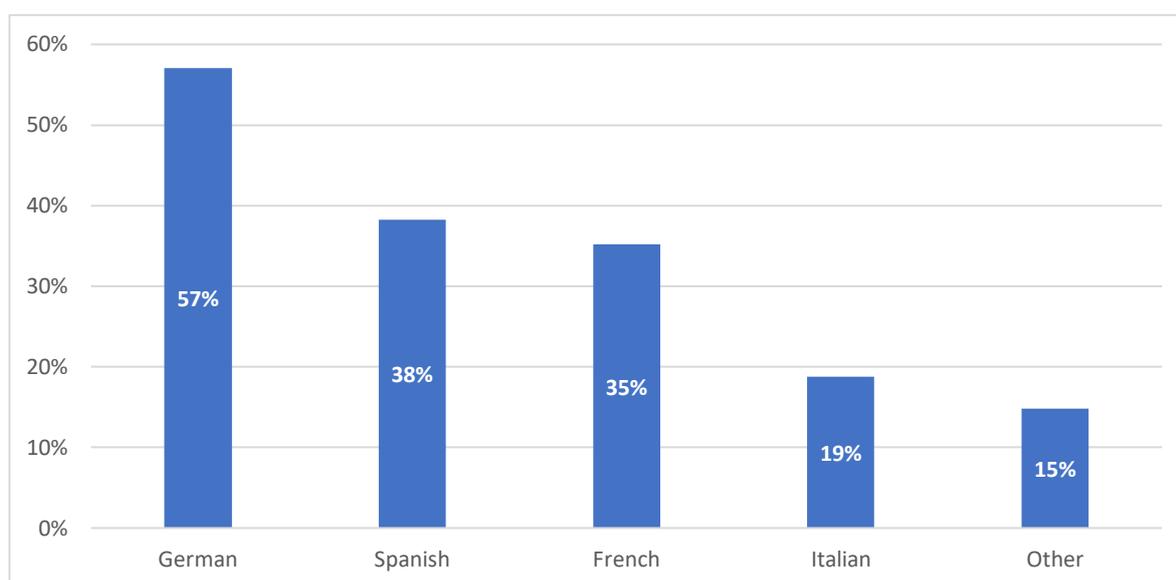
## Detailed findings

### A. Cuts to courses

As Table 1 illustrates, **51%** of schools and colleges have dropped courses in modern foreign languages. As Figure 1 shows, the biggest casualties have been A levels in German, Spanish and French.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Yes	128	51%
No	122	49%

**Table 1: Has your institution had to drop courses in modern foreign languages as a result of funding cuts and cost increases? Base: 250**



**Figure 1: Modern foreign languages dropped as a result of funding cuts and cost increases. Base: 128**

Over a third (**38%**) of schools and colleges reported they have dropped STEM courses (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths courses) as a result of funding cuts and cost increases.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Yes	97	38%
No	158	62%

**Table 2: Has your institution had to drop courses in STEM subjects as a result of funding cuts and cost increases? Base: 255**

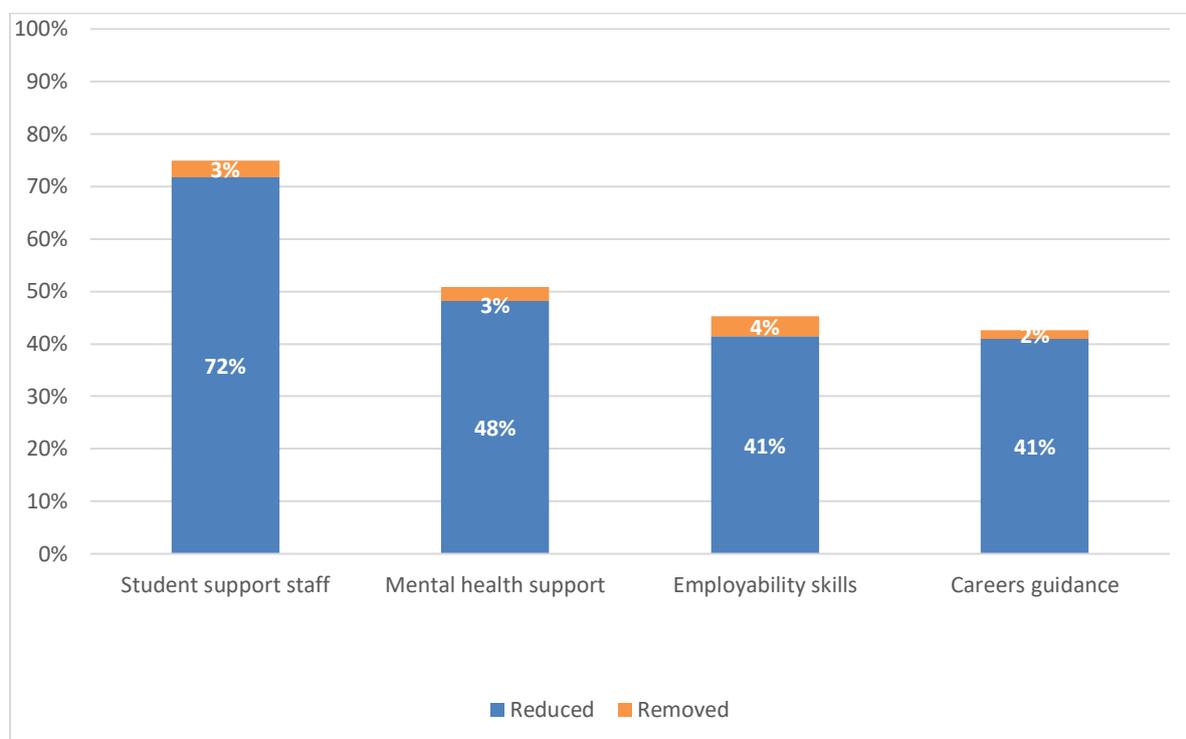
## B. Cuts to student support and enrichment activities

As Table 3 illustrates, over three quarters (**78%**) of schools and colleges have removed or reduced student support or enrichment activities as a result of funding cuts and cost increases – a sharp increase on last year (67%).

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Yes	191	78%
No	54	22%

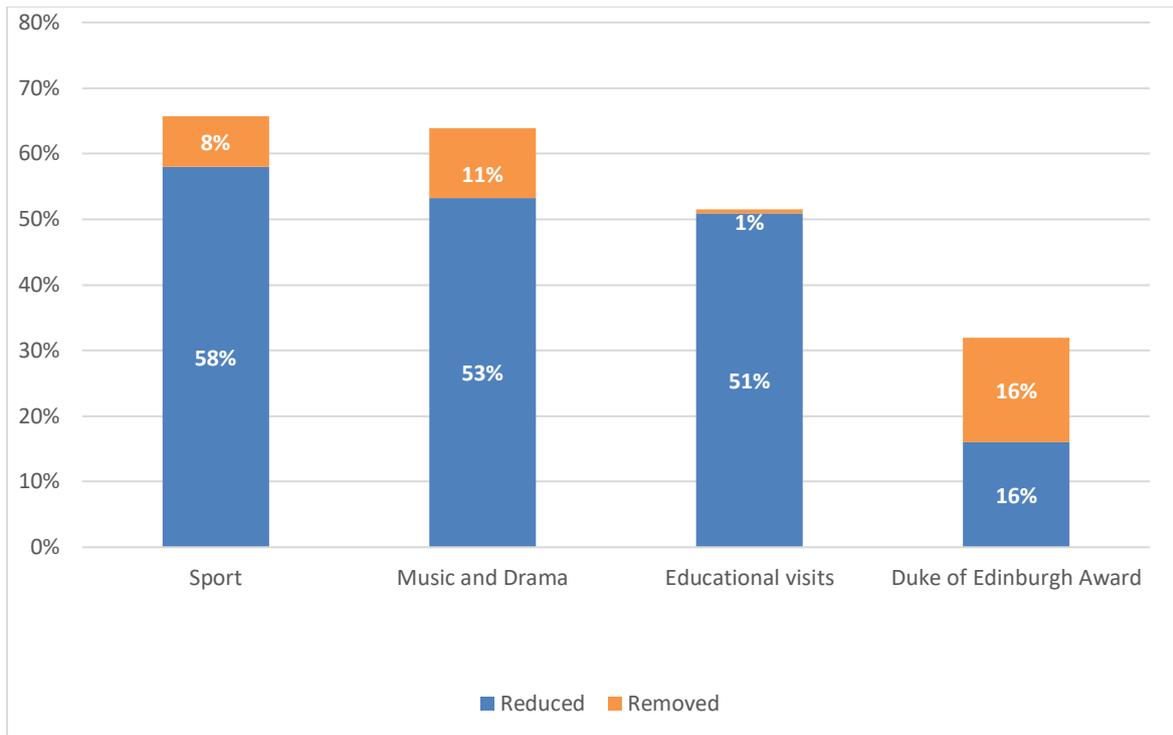
**Table 3: Has your institution had to remove or reduce student support or enrichment activities as a result of funding cuts and cost increases? Base: 245**

The *extent* of cuts to student support services has also been more noticeable than last year. For example, the number of schools and colleges that have reduced mental health support has leapt from 32% to **48%**, employability skills from 25% to **41%** and careers guidance from 28% to **41%**.



**Figure 2: Student support activities removed or reduced as a result of the funding cuts and cost increases. Base: 191**

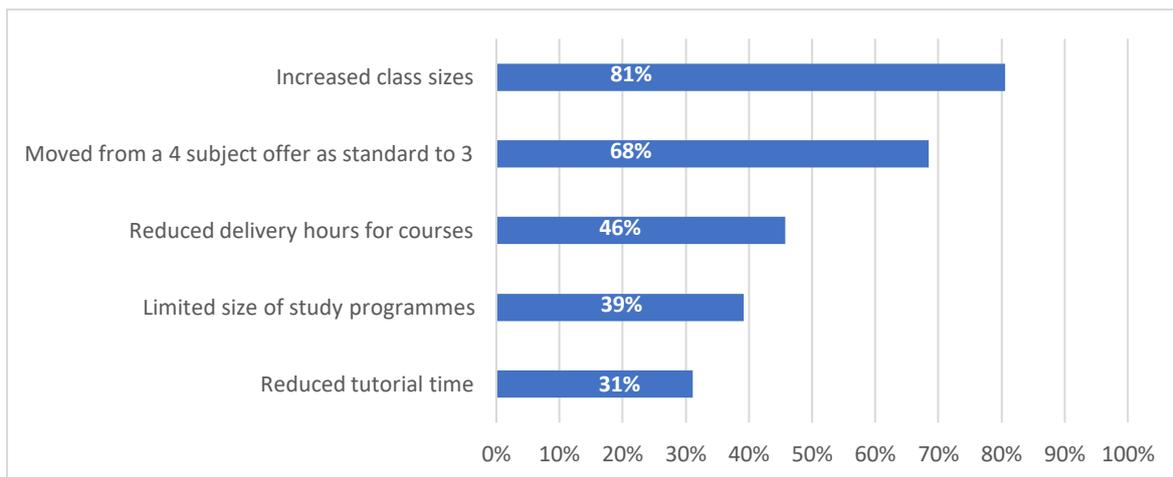
Figure 3 sets out the impact on enrichment activities. The results are broadly similar to last year, although it is worth noting the marked increase in the number of schools and colleges that have reduced music and drama as an enrichment activity (34% to **53%**).



**Figure 3: Enrichment activities removed or reduced as a result of the funding cuts and cost increases. Base: 169**

### C. Changes to curriculum delivery

As Figure 4 illustrates, schools and colleges have made a series of changes to curriculum delivery in response to the funding cuts and cost increases they have experienced. We can see that **81%** of schools and colleges have been forced to increase class sizes, **68%** have moved to a 3 subject offer as standard and **46%** have reduced the delivery hours for courses.



**Figure 4: Changes to curriculum delivery implemented as a result of funding cuts and cost increases. Base: 219**

## D. The future offer to students

As Table 4 illustrates, **67%** of schools and colleges strongly disagree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding they will be allocated in 2019/20 will be sufficient to provide students with a high quality education.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Strongly agree	2	1%
Agree	34	14%
Neither agree nor disagree	43	18%
Disagree	103	43%
Strongly disagree	56	24%

**Table 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding your institution will be allocated in 2019/20 will be sufficient to provide students with a high quality education? Base: 238**

**73%** of schools and colleges strongly disagree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding they will be allocated in 2019/20 will be sufficient to provide students with the personal support they require to progress to higher education and/or employment.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Strongly agree	2	1%
Agree	25	11%
Neither agree nor disagree	36	15%
Disagree	110	46%
Strongly disagree	65	27%

**Table 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding your institution will be allocated in 2019/20 will be sufficient to provide students with the personal support (e.g. tutoring, careers advice) they require to progress to higher education and/or employment? Base: 238**

**81%** of schools and colleges strongly disagree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding they will be allocated in 2019/20 will be sufficient to provide students with meaningful opportunities for personal growth.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Strongly agree	2	1%
Agree	17	7%
Neither agree nor disagree	26	11%
Disagree	109	46%
Strongly disagree	83	35%

**Table 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding your institution will be allocated in 2019/20 will be sufficient to provide students with meaningful opportunities for personal growth (e.g. sport, music, educational visits)? Base: 237**

**77%** of schools and colleges strongly disagree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding they will be allocated in 2019/20 will be sufficient to provide the support required by students that are educationally or economically disadvantaged.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Strongly agree	2	1%
Agree	20	8%
Neither agree nor disagree	34	14%
Disagree	85	36%
Strongly disagree	96	41%

**Table 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the amount of 16-19 funding your institution will be allocated in 2019/20 will be sufficient to provide the support required by students that are educationally or economically disadvantaged? Base: 237**

## E. The impact of government initiatives

When challenged about the impact of funding cuts and cost increases on sixth form education, ministers usually point to government initiatives that target funding at individual subjects or qualifications. This year's survey asked respondents to rate the impact of three of the most commonly cited initiatives. As Table 8 indicates, just **6%** of schools and colleges said funding for the advanced maths premium initiative would have a major or very major impact on their institution in 2019/20.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Very major impact	1	0%
Major impact	13	6%
Neither major nor minor impact	41	18%
Minor impact	94	40%
No impact	85	36%

**Table 8: What impact will funding for the following the advanced maths premium have on your institution in 2019/20? Base: 234**

Only **4%** of schools and colleges said funding for the large programme uplift would have a major or very major impact on their institution in 2019/20.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Very major impact	2	1%
Major impact	7	3%
Neither major nor minor impact	38	17%
Minor impact	76	33%
No impact	106	46%

**Table 9: What impact will funding for the large programme uplift have on your institution in 2019/20? Base: 229**

And only **3%** of schools and colleges said funding for T levels would have a major or very major impact on their institution in 2019/20.

Answer Options	Responses	Response Percent
Very major impact	1	0%
Major impact	8	3%
Neither major nor minor impact	24	10%
Minor impact	40	17%
No impact	159	69%

**Table 10: What impact will funding for T levels have on your institution in 2019/20? Base: 232**

## References

- <sup>i</sup> More information about the campaign can be found at [raisetherate.org.uk](http://raisetherate.org.uk). The twelve organisations supporting the campaign are: Association of Colleges, Association of School and College Leaders, Collab Group, Confederation of School Trusts, Grammar School Heads Association, NAHT, National Education Union, National Governance Association, National Union of Students, SSAT: the schools students and teachers network, Sixth Form Colleges Association and Unison.
- <sup>ii</sup> Department for Education, National Statistics, 'Participation in education training and employment: 2017', 28th June 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-in-education-training-and-employment-2017>. Provisional figures for the end of 2017 in Main Tables, Table 2 cont. show there were 437,200 16 to 18 year olds being educated in schools and 652,400 being educated in colleges at the end of 2017 (1,089,600 in total). A further 89,100 16 to 18 year olds were being educated in the independent sector, 16,100 in special schools, and 203,700 had already entered higher education.
- <sup>iii</sup> The advanced maths premium provides additional funding of £600 per year for each additional student taking a Level 3 maths qualification in comparison to a baseline: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-advanced-maths-premium>.
- <sup>iv</sup> The large programme uplift provides additional funding for students who pursue larger study programmes and achieve a minimum grade in each qualification (e.g. students who achieve 4 full linear A levels at grade B or better in each qualify for an uplift in funding of 10%): <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-large-programme-uplift>
- <sup>v</sup> T levels are a new suite of technical qualifications for Level 3 students that will be introduced between September 2020 and September 2023 when funding is set to rise to £500 million per year: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introduction-of-t-levels>
- <sup>vi</sup> Department for Education, 'Widening Participation in Higher Education, England, 2016/17 age cohort' 22nd November 2018: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/757897/WP2018-MainText.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/757897/WP2018-MainText.pdf). This data shows that 22% of A level students from state schools and colleges progressed to the most selective universities in 2014/15, compared to 61% of students from the independent sector.
- <sup>vii</sup> See for example, Rt Hon. Anne Milton MP, Minister of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, in response to a parliamentary question on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2018: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-09-04/170289/>
- <sup>viii</sup> The 16 to 18 programme funding allocated to schools and colleges in 2018/19 was £5.1 billion: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/16-to-19-allocation-data-2018-to-2019-academic-year>  
The funding allocated to the large programme uplift in 2018/19 was £7.24 million  
<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-02-18/222718/>  
The funding budgeted for the advanced maths premium in 2019/20 is £4.6 million:  
<https://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/commons/2017-11-28/116028>
- <sup>ix</sup> Department for Education, National Statistics, 'Participation in education training and employment: 2017', 28th June 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-in-education-training-and-employment-2017>. Figures for the end of 2016 in Main Tables, Table 4 cont. show that of the 896,300 students in full time education just 85,100 are studying for a technical (Tech level) qualification.
- <sup>x</sup> Rt Hon. Anne Milton MP, *Op. cit.*  
Sixth form funding was cut in 2011, 2013 and 2014. The latter cut reduced the funding rate for 18 year old students (those requiring a third year of study) to £3,300 per year.
- <sup>xi</sup> London Economics, 'Understanding the funding shortfall in sixth form education' October 2018: <https://sfcawebsite.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/document/LE-Funding-shortfall-in-sixth-form-education-1-1.pdf?t=1545389795>
- <sup>xii</sup> Institute for Fiscal Studies, '2018 annual report on education spending in England' September 2018  
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/13306>
- <sup>xiii</sup> London Economics, *Op. cit.*
- <sup>xiv</sup> London Economics, *Op. cit.*