

Sixth Sense

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How Sixth Form Colleges help students
progress to higher education and beyond



Sixth Form Colleges
Association



STORIES

There are currently more than 150,000 students aged 16 to 18 studying at a Sixth Form College in England. All of them have a unique story to tell. Sixth Form Colleges have always had a reputation for supporting high achieving students from prosperous parts of the country to progress to higher education and beyond. But the aim of this report is to tell some of the untold stories – stories of the many disadvantaged young people that have been inspired and enabled to progress as a result of their experience at a Sixth Form College.



Introduction

All of the photographs and case studies that feature in this report are of former Sixth Form College students that have overcome economic disadvantage (and often, many other forms of disadvantage) to progress to higher education and the world of work.

Sixth Form Colleges are engines of social mobility. Their students are more likely to have received free school meals and have lower levels of prior educational attainment than those in school and academy sixth forms. Yet as the data in this report shows, Sixth Form Colleges still manage to outperform all other providers of 16-18 education on a range of measures. Sixth Form Colleges send more young people to higher education than independent schools and almost one third of these young people come from the least advantaged areas of the country.

This report has been produced by the Sixth Form Colleges' Association (SFCA), the organisation that represents and supports official Sixth Form Colleges (SFCs) in England. Official Sixth Form Colleges are those that have been legally designated by the Secretary of State for Education; a map of our member Sixth Form Colleges can be found at the end of this report. SFCA believe that every young person in England should have the opportunity to study at a Sixth Form College. We actively campaign to increase the number of SFCs, particularly in areas where there is currently no Sixth Form College provision. For more information about our work, visit our website: www.sixthformcolleges.org

Alex's story

Throughout his time at **Barton Peveril Sixth Form College** in Hampshire, Alex looked after his mother who suffers from multiple sclerosis. Growing up as an only child in a single parent household meant that Alex had caring responsibilities from an early age, but a worsening of his mother's condition during his A level studies meant he lived alone while she was in hospital. With limited finances, Alex used the Education Maintenance Allowance to help fund his daily travel and living costs. Despite his obvious ability, Alex was concerned that he might not be able to afford to progress to university. But the staff at Barton Peveril provided Alex with the support to overcome his challenging personal circumstances and supported his application for a bursary. After achieving B grades in Physics, Maths and Product Design, Alex is now studying for a BSc in Product Design Engineering at Brunel University and has ambitions of becoming a Design Consultant.



An education success story

According to the latest data available from the Department for Education,¹ 1,374,700 16 to 18 year olds in England (70.6% of the age group) are engaged in some form of full time education. Most of these young people are either studying at a further education college (39%) or a maintained school or academy (32%). A further 6% are studying at an independent school and 11% are pursuing a full time course at a Sixth Form College (SFC).

Yet despite forming a relatively small part of the 16-18 education landscape, Sixth Form Colleges are a great education success story. The first SFC opened in Luton in 1966 and today there are 94 official or 'designated' Sixth Form Colleges across England. They offer an extensive range of courses, both academic and vocational, and their pastoral care is specialised for the 16-18 age group.

Sixth Form Colleges are experts in 16-18 education and act as a valuable stepping stone between the worlds of compulsory education, and higher education and employment. A Sixth Form College timetable can accommodate virtually all combinations of student choices and the curriculum offer is reviewed on a regular basis. In 2011, more than 150,000 16 to 18 year olds were enrolled on a course at a Sixth Form College with most (94%) studying for a level 3 qualification (A level or equivalent).²

To be a Sixth Form College is to be part of an elite, but not elitist group. On a range of measures SFCs outperform all other types of 16-18 provider.

Sixth Form Colleges outperform all other providers of 16-18 education

Sixth Form Colleges are experts in 16-18 education and act as a valuable stepping stone between the worlds of compulsory education, and higher education and employment.

Success rates show the proportion of young people that start a qualification in an institution and achieve it by the end of the required period of study. At the time the National Audit Office report was published, robust data on success rates for school and academy sixth forms was not available. But in February 2012, school and academy success rates were published as part of the government's commitment to harmonise the success and achievement measures used across the 16-18 education sector.⁵



A 2011 report by the National Audit Office³ concluded that Sixth Form Colleges "perform best on most measures of learner achievement". The report showed that:

- Learners in Sixth Form Colleges recorded higher attainment⁴ in level 3 courses than those in school and academy sixth forms or general further education colleges;
- According to the value added score (which measures the progress that learners make relative to their prior educational attainment), 58% of Sixth Form Colleges added more value than expected, compared to 29% of general further education colleges and 16% of school and academy sixth forms;
- At qualification levels 1 through to 3, Sixth Form Colleges had higher success rates than general further education colleges (84% compared to 78%).

Eloise's story

During her time at **Wyke Sixth Form College** in Hull, Eloise lived with her two younger siblings, both of whom had special needs and her mother who was registered blind. She received the Education Maintenance Allowance and her family received income support and child benefit. It was only during Eloise's second year at college that she began to seriously consider progressing to higher education to train as a teacher, although she did not have the required GCSE in Maths. Around the same time, Eloise was diagnosed with dyslexia.

With close support from college staff, it was agreed that Eloise would complete an additional year at college to complete her GCSE in Maths and develop strategies for coping with dyslexia. A successful application for a bursary allowed Eloise to buy study aids to help with her dyslexia and subsidise her train fare to college. The enrichment activities that she was involved in at Wyke (particularly the introduction to learning disabilities course and parent and toddler groups) proved very valuable in her university applications. Eloise is now in the first year of an Education, Social Inclusion and Special Needs degree at the University of Hull and is receiving financial support for her studies through the Helena Kennedy Foundation.

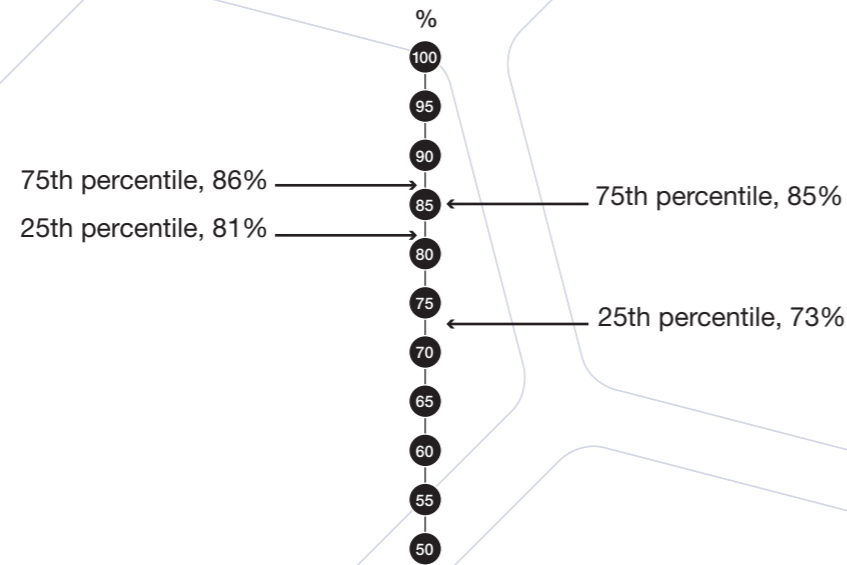


Success rates

To build on the analysis undertaken by the National Audit Office, the Sixth Form Colleges' Association commissioned research⁶ in March 2012 to compare the newly available success rate data for schools and academies with those for Sixth Form Colleges.

The final report showed that the overall success rate for schools and academies stands at 80% – four percentage points below Sixth Form Colleges (84%). But this figure drops dramatically with the size of the sixth form – the success rate for schools and academy sixth forms with fewer than 100 students is just 69% – fifteen percentage points below the Sixth Form College average. The report also included a more detailed analysis of the difference in success rates between school and academy sixth forms, and Sixth Form Colleges.

Figure 1



	Sixth Form Colleges	School/Academy sixth forms
75th percentile	86%	85%
25th percentile	81%	73%

Figure 1 uses the interquartile range to highlight the degree of variation in success rates within both provider types. This involves ranking all institutions by performance and then removing the top and bottom quarters to see what 'normal' performance – that of the middle 50% – looks like.

As Figure 1 illustrates, Sixth Form Colleges have a success rate between 81% and 86% – a range (or 'interquartile range') of just five percentage points. By contrast, schools and academies have an interquartile range of 12 percentage points (between 73% and 85%). In other words, differences in success rates between Sixth Form Colleges are typically small, but differences between schools or academies tend to be much larger. It is also striking that a full quarter of school and academy sixth forms fail to achieve a success rate of 73%, while the overwhelming majority of Sixth Form Colleges have a success rate above this level.



Morgan's story

Morgan was brought up in Royton, on the outskirts of Oldham. His family had very little money and his mother's private pension was the main source of income, supplemented by the Education Maintenance Allowance.

A keen musician, his A level Music teacher at **Oldham Sixth Form College** supported his successful application to the Musicians Benevolent Fund for a clarinet. Morgan was also a talented mathematician and was a member of the Senior Maths Challenge team. While he always knew that he wanted

to study Maths further at university, it was only after he gained outstanding AS level grades that he began to consider applying for the University of Oxford.

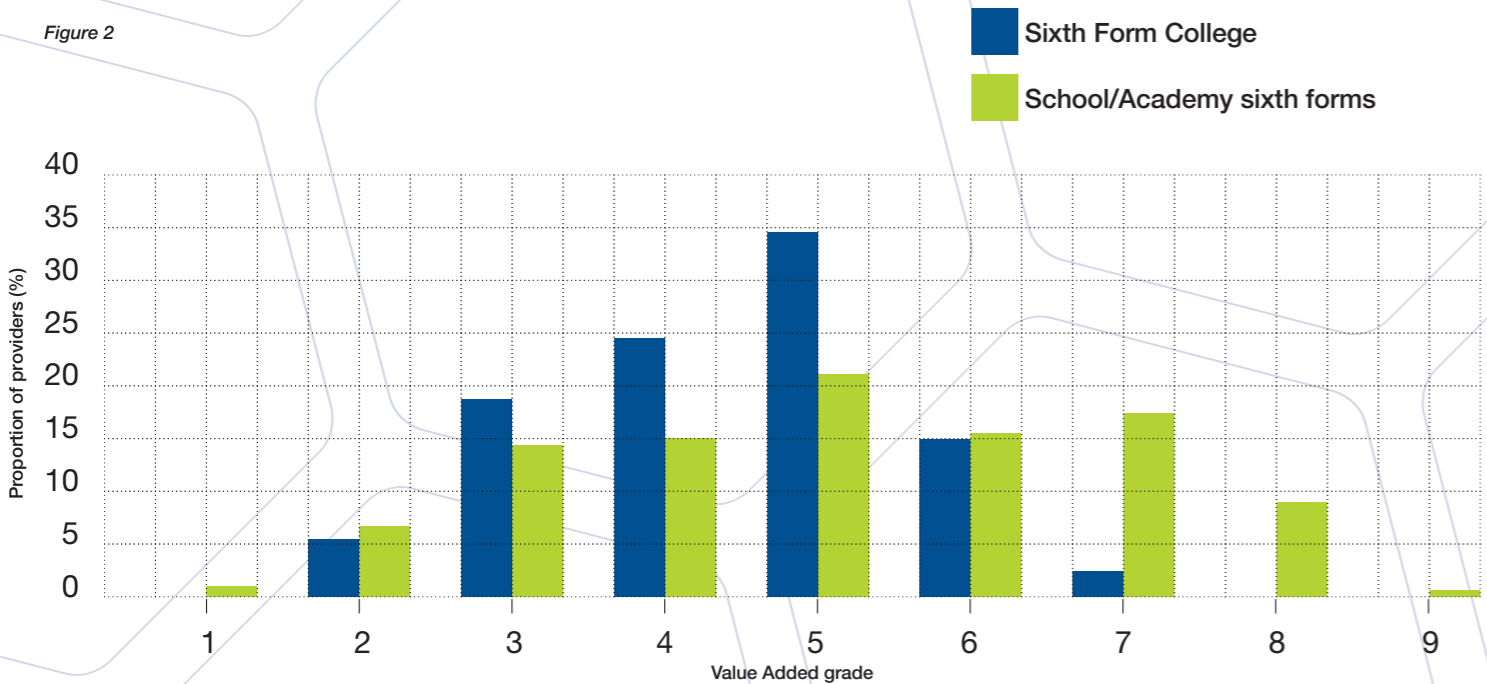
With support from the staff at Oldham Sixth Form College he attended an open day at Oxford and submitted his application. After securing A and A* grades in Maths, Further Maths, Physics and Music, Morgan is now studying Maths at Oxford.

Value added

Although Sixth Form Colleges are elite performers, they do not have an elitist approach to the recruitment or education of their students. Students in Sixth Form Colleges are more likely to have received free school meals⁷ than those attending a school sixth form and on the whole, schools and academies recruit students with a higher average GCSE score.⁸

There are a greater proportion of Sixth Form Colleges with higher value added grades than schools and academies.

Figure 2



Despite having a more comprehensive approach to admissions, Sixth Form Colleges tend to secure higher value added grades than schools and academies. The value added scoring and grading system has been developed by Alps⁹ (Advanced Level Performance System) and compares students' GCSE results¹⁰ at the start of their A level studies with their final A level results. It is a nationally recognised system

for comparing the performance of A level providers. The grades used (from 1 – best to 9 – worst) show how students have achieved taking into account their prior educational attainment.¹¹ As **Figure 2** shows, there are a greater proportion of Sixth Form Colleges with higher value added grades than schools and academies.

Dawid's story

Dawid came to the UK from Poland and originally found work in food factories working 12 hour shifts. Although he wanted to continue his education in the UK, the colleges Dawid approached told him that his English was not of the required standard to study GCSEs. But **Regent College** in Leicester saw great potential in Dawid and allowed him to study English, Law, Maths and IT at GCSE and an ICT BTEC level 2 Diploma.

His progress was so rapid that he managed to successfully complete these courses within 12 months. From there, Dawid went on to study for A levels in Law, Polish, Photography and History. Although working almost full time during his studies, Dawid played a full part in college life; captaining the rugby team, sitting on the student council and working as a mentor for fellow students. After securing a string of A and B grades, Dawid is currently studying for a BA in Archaeology and Anthropology at University College London and is predicted to get a first class degree.



I would not be at UCL if it were not for the support that was given to me at Sixth Form College. The teachers were always understanding about my financial and personal circumstances and I was given all the help I needed to succeed.



Brandon's story

Brandon is from Cameroon. He lost his parents at the age of 14, was arrested and tortured, and spent months in hiding. He eventually escaped from Cameroon to the UK where he lived alone in a bedsit in a very deprived area of Huddersfield. He initially received income support and had to use part of it to pay for his food and bills. But Brandon quickly set about making a successful future for himself, securing a part time job as a Kitchen Porter and enrolling at **Huddersfield New College**. While Brandon never felt that progressing to university was a realistic possibility, his tutor

at Huddersfield New College convinced him that it was. With her encouragement, and the support of his course teachers, Brandon secured B grades in French and Modern History, and A* grades in Sociology and English Language. He is now in the first year of a Law with French Law and Language degree at the University of Leicester. He has already completed a work placement through the Helena Kennedy Foundation and has ambitions to become a commercial lawyer.

Inspection excellence

Independent inspections have highlighted the powerful performance of Sixth Form Colleges. Ofsted, the organisation responsible for inspecting education and skills providers, uses a four-point scale to grade providers: (grade 1 – outstanding, grade 2 – good, grade 3 – satisfactory and grade 4 – inadequate). In its Annual Report for 2010/11, Ofsted reported that 70% of colleges and 70% of schools and academies were judged to be good or outstanding as at 31 August 2011.¹² However, Sixth Form Colleges were above the overall college average, with 78% judged to be good or outstanding as at 31 August 2011.



78% of Sixth Form Colleges were judged to be good or outstanding as at 31 August 2011.

What is particularly impressive about the inspection record of Sixth Form Colleges is that they are inspected and graded using a higher benchmark than schools and academies, and general further education colleges. If all provider types were graded in the same way, the superior performance of Sixth Form Colleges would be even more marked.

This also means that the small number of Sixth Form Colleges that are graded as satisfactory or even inadequate still outperform other provider types on a range of measures. For example, the research commissioned by SFCA in March 2012 found that at AS and A level:

"Over 300 school sixth forms have a success rate worse than the worst sixth form college. Many of these 300 school sixth forms have received 'outstanding' grades for both overall effectiveness of the sixth form and quality of outcomes in the sixth form".



Melissa's story

Melissa studied for A levels in Maths, Further Maths, Law and Philosophy during her time at **BSix Brooke House Sixth Form College** in Hackney, an area of high social deprivation. Although she received the Education Maintenance Allowance, Melissa had to work part time as a Maths tutor to pay for her living costs.

When she moved out of Hackney during the second year of her studies, the cost of travelling to college increased dramatically. To ensure that she did not miss out on important field trips, BSix reimbursed Melissa for all travel expenses incurred on college excursions. The staff at BSix encouraged Melissa to immerse herself in college life.

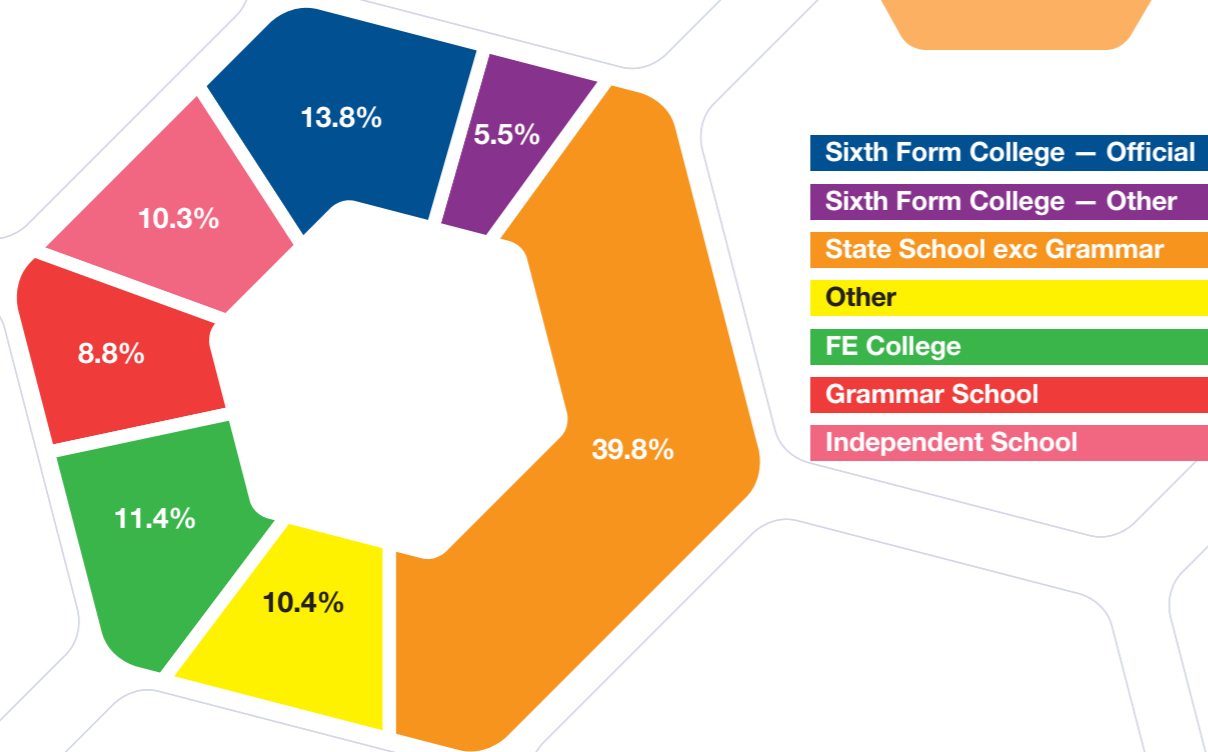
She became President of the Student Union, was a student governor and college ambassador, and volunteered with the charity Envision to raise awareness of child poverty. When it came to applying for university, the staff at BSix encouraged Melissa to aim high.

This proved to be the right approach. After securing four grade As at A level, Melissa secured a place at the University of Warwick to study Maths. She recently completed her studies but remains on the Board of BSix and returned there during the summer holidays to work as a Marketing Assistant.

Engines of progression

Sixth Form Colleges have been particularly successful in supporting the progression of their students to higher education. Data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)¹³ shows that of the 301,699 17-19 year olds accepted onto a full time undergraduate course in 2011, 13.8% came from Sixth Form Colleges. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3



This highlights the extent to which Sixth Form Colleges punch above their weight when it comes to supporting progression to HE. For just 94 institutions to account for almost 14% of acceptances to higher education is remarkable. By way of contrast, there are 164 grammar schools in England, 251 FE colleges, and many more independent schools with a sixth form.

Sixth Form Colleges have always supported high achieving students from prosperous parts of the country to progress to higher education and beyond. But their record in helping young people from some of the most deprived parts of England to progress is perhaps less well known. **Figure 4** outlines, by type of provider, the percentage of entrants to higher education from the least advantaged areas of the UK. This is based on the POLAR2 (Participation of Local Areas 2) classification that places small areas across the UK into five groups according to their rate of young participation in higher education. In group 1, less than 1 in 5 young people enter higher education compared to well over half in group 5.

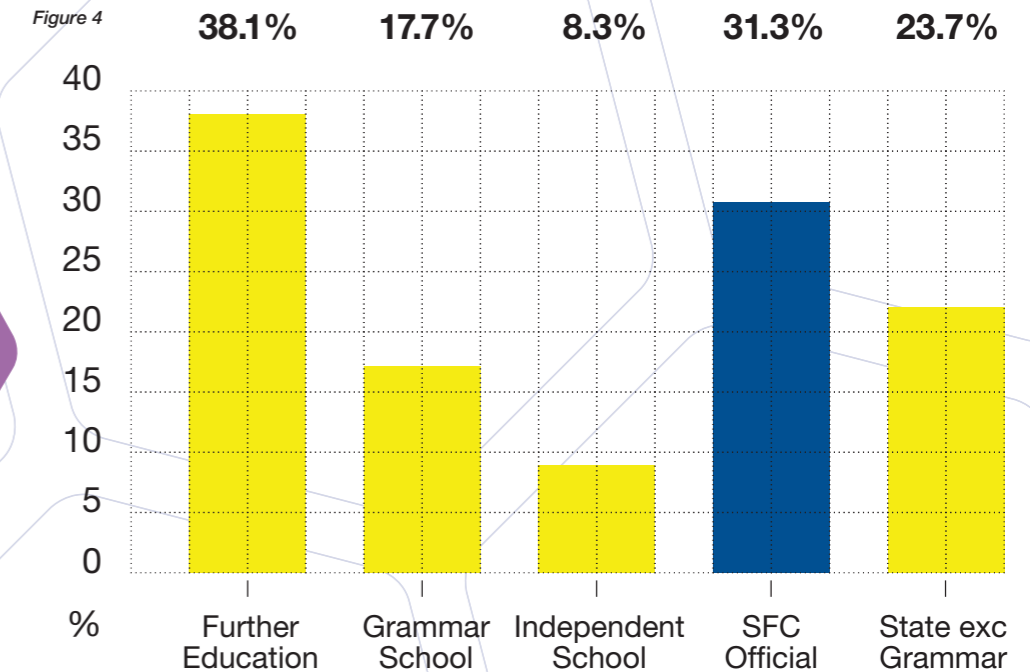
For just 94 institutions to account for almost 14% of acceptances to higher education is remarkable

We can see that almost one third of Sixth Form College students that progressed to higher education in 2011 were from the least advantaged areas of the country (POLAR2 groups 1 and 2). This underlines how Sixth Form Colleges act as engines of progression and social mobility. Despite enrolling students with lower levels of prior attainment and higher levels of disadvantage, they still support more young people to progress to higher education than providers with highly selective admissions policies.

One third of Sixth Form College students that progressed to higher education in 2011 were from the least advantaged areas of the country

Sixth Form Colleges support more young people to progress to higher education than providers with highly selective admissions policies

Percentage of UK-domiciled 17-19 year old accepted applicants from each school/centre type who are from the least advantaged areas* of the UK: 2011 cycle



* POLAR 2 quintiles 1 and 2 excludes those with unknown POLAR 2 quintiles

The future for Sixth Form Colleges

This report has shown that Sixth Form Colleges are an elite, but not elitist group. Despite enrolling young people with lower levels of prior educational attainment and higher levels of disadvantage, Sixth Form Colleges still outperform school and academy sixth forms. A combination of high quality teaching, one-to-one support and a well-rounded curriculum explains why Sixth Form Colleges are able to support so many of their students to progress to higher education. All of this is achieved whilst offering extraordinary value for money – Sixth Form Colleges receive less funding per student (on average at least £1,000 less) than schools and academies receive for all other key stages. It is easy to understand why Government ministers frequently describe Sixth Form Colleges as ‘the jewel in the crown’ of 16-18 education.

But despite the positive rhetoric from the Government, many Sixth Form Colleges fear for their future. While the Sixth Form College sector has embraced the Government’s drive to create a market in 16-18 education, the sector is threatened by the degree and nature of state interference in the way this market operates. For example, the Government actively

promotes the establishment of new 11-18 academies, 16-19 academies and free schools. Similar support for the creation of new Sixth Form Colleges is conspicuous by its absence. For the 16-18 market to function effectively, the Government should focus on creating a level playing field on which institutions can compete, rather than promoting one type of provider over another.

At a time when there is unprecedented pressure on the public finances, it also makes little sense for the Government to be actively promoting the establishment of providers that are demonstrably less efficient than Sixth Form Colleges and have little or no educational track record. These providers receive higher levels of funding per student than Sixth Form Colleges, but are judged and graded using a lower inspection benchmark. The Sixth Form College sector is also the only part of the entire education system that is not entitled to receive any form of publicly-funded improvement support.

Ironically, Sixth Form Colleges embody all of the features and characteristics that are driving the expansion of the academy programme – they are high performing, highly

efficient, independent and autonomous institutions that respond to the needs of their local communities. But rather than playing a central role in the development of 16-18 education, the Government is consigning them to the margins.

Sixth Form Colleges have grown used to dealing with the unintended consequences of government policies over the years. They do not require special treatment from the Government to maintain their high standards, but they do need to be funded, inspected and supported in the same way as other providers operating in the 16-18 market. This report has highlighted the proven track record of the Sixth Form College sector in delivering the very best education for young people. As a country, it makes sense to invest in our highest performing and most efficient sector. Failing to do so will mean losing many institutions that have successfully acted as engines of progression and social mobility for more than 40 years. Sixth Form Colleges have many more success stories to tell. They just want the opportunity to tell them.

References

1 Department for Education, Statistical First Release: Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16-18 year olds in England, 30 June 2011 <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s01011/index.shtml>

The data also shows that 12% of 16-18 year olds in full time education are studying at a higher education institution.

Further education colleges include general FE, tertiary and specialist colleges.

2 Sixth Form Colleges’ Association, Directory of Sixth Form Colleges 2011. Available to SFCA members at <http://www.sfcaforum.org.uk/members-news>

3 National Audit Office, Getting value for money for the education of 16 to 18 year olds. Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, Session 2010-11, HC 823 http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/1011/education_of_16-18_year_olds.aspx?alreadysearchfor=yes

4 According to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) points per candidate measure, which aggregates the points per entry for all level 3 courses completed by a learner. This measure reflects the number of courses taken by an individual, as well as their attainment on each course.

5 Department for Education: Data on post-16 institutions: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/b00204762/institutions/scho>

6 Allen, N. Success rates and inspection outcomes, April 2012, Sixth Form Colleges’ Association http://www.sfcaforum.org.uk/images/stories/pdfs/Publications/nick_allen_success_rates.pdf

7 Response to Parliamentary Question 21st May 2012, Column WA33: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201213/ldhansrd/text/120521w0001.htm#12052118000265>

8 Based on Alps data that compares the average GCSE scores of students enrolled at different provider types, see www.sfcaforum.org.uk/sixth-sense

9 For more information about Alps visit www.alps-va.co.uk

10 GCSE score computed from A* = 8pts, A = 7pts, B = 6pts etc, totalled and divided by the number of GCSEs taken.

11 The grading system is based on the value added scores achieved by 2,428 providers covering all schools, academies and colleges offering A levels in 2010.

12 Ofsted The Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills 2010/11

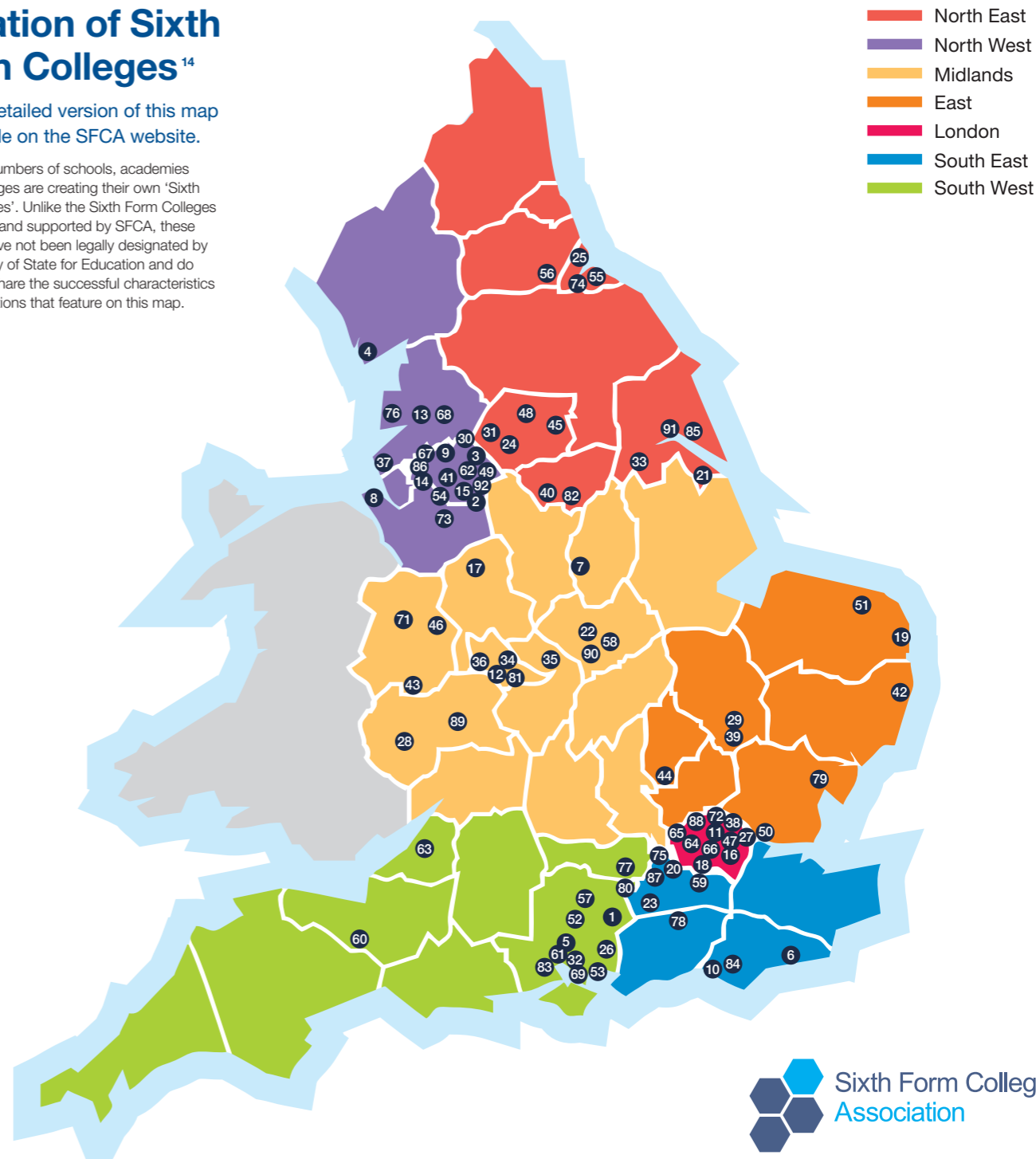
13 The UCAS data has been specially prepared for this report. It does not reflect figures within standard UCAS school and centre groupings as it distinguishes between official Sixth Form Colleges and ‘Sixth Form Colleges’ that use the name but have not been officially designated as an SFC by the Secretary of State.

14 A more detailed version of this map is available on the SFCA website. Cirencester College and John Ruskin College are designated Sixth Form Colleges but are not members of SFCA.

Location of Sixth Form Colleges¹⁴

A more detailed version of this map is available on the SFCA website.

Increasing numbers of schools, academies and FE colleges are creating their own ‘Sixth Form Colleges’. Unlike the Sixth Form Colleges represented and supported by SFCA, these providers have not been legally designated by the Secretary of State for Education and do not always share the successful characteristics of the institutions that feature on this map.



Acknowledgements

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This report has been prepared by James Kewin, Deputy Chief Executive of the Sixth Form Colleges’ Association. For more information email: james.kewin@sixthformcolleges.org Report published June 2012. Reprinted in January 2013.





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