

We do need a shake up of sixth-form education

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Rishi Sunak [has suggested](#) that the A-level curriculum in the UK should be reformed. The implication is that six formers should study a wider range of subjects to the age of 18, including compulsory maths and English.

I rarely agree with Rishi Sunak, but I do on this issue, subject to a massive caveat. This is that the maths and English to be taught on a compulsory basis in sixth forms across the country should be applied maths and applied English. That requires an explanation.

Applied maths means that the maths to be taught should relate to the real-world experience that students will have either when they are at school or sixth form college, or in the world that they will join when leaving, whatever their future career trajectory. In other words, what day should be taught would include:

- * Practical budgeting.
- * Real-world statistics, most of which will relate to understanding percentages.
- * How the tax system works, including not just income tax and national insurance, but also VAT and other indirect taxes that people pay.
- * The basics of government budgeting so that people are familiar with what millions, billions, and even trillions mean when they are talked about by politicians, economists and others.
- * The use of spreadsheets, because these are so fundamental to so many aspects of life.
- * Understanding the basics of what a set of accounts looks like.

As a matter of fact, well over 90 per cent of people in sixth forms do not need to learn about algebra, quadratic equations, differentiation and integration, trigonometry and much of the statistics that crowds out the current maths curriculum. They do need to know about the things that I refer to above. If they did then this country would be a lot better off, as would be those who received this education.

Turning to applied English, I again suggest that most of what is taught in the current English curriculum will be a little further advantage to most of those studying this subject in the sixth form. What is, instead, required is the ability to:

- * Write a coherent email or letter.
- * Work out the question a person is asking, and then answer it.
- * Write in plain English.
- * Eliminate basic grammatical errors without ever needing to understand the terminology of grammar, which is utterly irrelevant in real life.
- * Structure an argument and an essay, which, in my experience far too few students can do when they arrive at university.

Again, teaching these things would be invaluable.

It might, of course, be that neither of my suggestions imparts academic skills, to which my response is, so what? The ability to survive in real life is a lot more important.