

# Education, Children and Young People Committee

## 24<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday 27 September 2023

### Pre-Budget Scrutiny & Scottish Attainment Challenge

#### Introduction

1. In 2022, the Committee scrutinised the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC).
2. The Committee published its report on its Scottish Attainment Challenge inquiry on [2 August 2022](#).
3. At its meeting on [28 June 2023](#), the Committee agreed to invite the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to give evidence on the SAC, with a particular focus on the budget and outcomes achieved, to inform its pre-budget scrutiny.
4. The Committee subsequently agreed to include other areas of the education budget in this session, including funding for Early Learning and Childcare and Further and Higher Education, to also inform its pre-budget scrutiny in these areas.

#### Committee meeting

5. The Committee will be taking evidence from—
  - Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills;
  - Graeme Dey MSP, Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans; and
  - Natalie Don MSP, Minister for Children and Young People and Keeping the Promise.

## **Supporting information**

6. A SPICe briefing paper is attached in **Annexe A**.
7. The Committee received a letter from the Cabinet Secretary on 19 September, including an annexe providing an update on the key recommendations that the Committee set out in its report. These can be found in **Annexe B**.

**ECYP Committee Clerks  
22 September 2023**

## Annexe A



## Education, Children and Young People Committee

**27 September 2023**

### Pre-Budget Scrutiny

#### Introduction

As part of its pre-budget scrutiny, the Committee will be taking evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. Last week, the Committee took evidence from representatives from local government and earlier in the year, the Committee explored college finances. The Committee has also had an ongoing interest in the Scottish Attainment Challenge, funded ELC, and universities.

This paper does not attempt to cover the entirety of Cabinet Secretary's portfolio and is in four further sections:

- Scottish Attainment Challenge
- Local Government finance
- Early Learning and Childcare
- Further and Higher Education

#### Scottish Attainment Challenge

The Committee undertook an inquiry on the [Scottish Attainment Challenge in 2022](#). The Scottish Attainment Challenge is the most visible additional policy that is specifically aimed at reducing the poverty related attainment gap. This is a programme of work, supported by around £200m a year through the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF), which aims to reduce the poverty related attainment gap. The approach to the SAC changed in 2022 and the ASF is now split in the following way:

- Pupil Equity Fund
- Strategic Equity Fund
- Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund
- National Programmes

The Scottish Attainment Challenge is only part of the education system's approach to reducing the attainment gap. Under the National Improvement Framework (NIF), "Achieving equity" is one of the two parts to the Vision for Scottish Education and much of the work in school education and ELC could be considered to be contributing to this goal. One of the aims of the SAC is to ensure that there is a system-wide approach to closing the attainment gap.

In March 2022, the Scottish Government published a number of documents setting out its new approach for the SAC. This included the [Framework for recovery and accelerating progress](#) ("the Framework") and a refreshed [logic model](#), covering national, regional, and school level activities. The Framework stated—

"There is a need for continued and accelerated progress to address the negative impact of Covid-19 on children's health and wellbeing and learning. "Improving leadership, learning and teaching and the quality of support for families and communities and targeted support for those impacted by poverty remain the key levers to improve outcomes for children and young people."

The framework sought to provide clarity on the roles of different actors in supporting the goal of reducing the attainment gap and to support improvement and "collective accountability".

The Pupil Equity Fund is around £130m and is allocated at a school level. PEF is based on the number of children estimated to be eligible for free school meals on a statutory basis (i.e., not through the universal free school meal offer). The Strategic Equity Fund is around £43m and split across all local authorities based on data from the DWP's Children in Low Income Families statistics. The Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund is again allocated to local authorities based on the number of care experienced children and young people. There are a variety of national programmes.

The funding under these streams was set out for the current Parliamentary session. This is an example of multi-year funding providing some certainty for local authorities and schools. However, these grants have not kept pace with inflation, and this will mean that the value of these grants is reducing year-on-year. Dr Douglas Hutchison from ADES explained that this means that PEF funding in schools in Glasgow now pays for fewer teachers than it did in the past.

The ringfenced grant for PEF in the local government circular for 2023-24 was for £130m, the same as [the allocation in 2022-23](#). The Scottish Attainment Challenge began in 2015-16 with funding for the "Challenge Authorities" and "Challenge Schools". PEF was introduced in 2017-18 with an allocation of £120m. Had PEF

increased in line with inflation<sup>1</sup> since 2017-18 in 2023-24 it would be around £145m. The total spend on challenge authorities, the schools programme and PEF in 2017-18 was £165m. This was before the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund was established. The best comparison therefore is against the PEF and SEF combined. Had this kept up with inflation<sup>2</sup>, the spend would be around £199m. PEF and SEF combined this year is around £174m. The total of the ASF this year is likely to be in the region of £200m.

The Strategic Equity Fund is also set for the current parliamentary session. The table below shows the funding allocation of SEF between 2022-23 and 2025-26. 2022-23 was the first year of SEF after moving away from funding nine “Challenge Authorities” and there are transitional funding arrangements for the old Challenge Authorities through to 2025-26, which is why the funding is reducing.

**Table 1: Strategic Equity Fund**

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
<b>SEF</b>	£44,743,505	£43,366,147	£43,020,675	£43,000,000

If these plans are kept to, the SEF will reduce in value in real terms<sup>3</sup> by around 8.5% by 2025-26 compared to 2022-23. The Cabinet Secretary’s letter to the Committee prior to this meeting included an update on the Government’s work in relation to the Committee’s recommendations. This said—

“The Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation has a focus on process evaluation in the first year of the new evaluation Strategy; this work strand considers the implementation of the SAC Refresh. It includes a survey carried out with local authority SAC Leads which will provide evidence on former Challenge Authorities views on the impact of the tapered reduction in funding and how this affects their SAC plans. It will also provide evidence on Local Authorities receiving a strategic equity funding (SEF) allocation for the first time and how they plan to utilise this funding. This Report will be published in September prior to the Committee meeting and a copy will be provided to the Committee once published.”

The current allocations for both the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund and the National Programmes are not published on the Government’s website. The [latest allocation data](#) for the CEYPPF is for 2021-22, when the fund totalled £11.5m. In 2021-22 national programmes funded under the Attainment Scotland Fund totalled £6.6m.

The Framework stated that the Scottish Government is “responsible for delivering the policy agenda of Ministers and supporting key partners to contribute to that.” Among other things, this involves: funding; collecting data; supporting and challenging areas where there is “limited progress”, and “collaborating across government and other partners to ensure a coherent and impactful policy landscape to support progress in

<sup>1</sup> Using HMT GDP Deflators, June 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Using HMT GDP Deflators, June 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Using HMT GDP Deflators, June 2023. Forecasts of inflation calculated using OBR estimates.

both the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the national mission to tackle child poverty.”

The Framework states that work in support of improving outcomes for children and young people will not be achieved by schools alone. It said—

“Prior learning and research evidence shows us that schools and education services alone will not reduce the poverty-related attainment gap. The mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge is one that must be supported by ‘collective agency’ – the range of services, third sector organisations and community partners working together with families, with a clear focus on improving the educational experiences, health and wellbeing and outcomes of children and young people. In this way educators, who are at the heart of these collaborations, will play a vital role in breaking the cycle of poverty and make a long-term contribution to Scotland’s national mission to tackle child poverty.”

The Scottish Government’s update reiterated the government’s view that “contributions of wider services supporting children and young people and their families are vital to supporting pupils’ readiness to learn”. It continues, “collaboration across services is crucial in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap”. The Cabinet Secretary’s letter stated—

“This Government has always been clear that this is a complex and long-term endeavour. Key to progress is the continued, targeted focus on the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge at school, local authority, regional and national level to support children and young people, their families and, of course, teachers. I recognise and appreciate the hard work of our teachers and school leaders and our determination to support them led to an historic pay deal which now means that Scottish classroom teachers, on the main-grade scale, are the best paid in the UK.

“All of this, as well as the ambitious aims local authorities have set, and are setting for the longer term, gives me confidence that we are making good progress and the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme is having an impact.”

## *Measurement*

Up to this year, the NIF included 11 measures to measure performance and closing the attainment gap. These were:

- 27-30 month review (children showing no concerns across all domains).
- Two Health and Wellbeing measures: Children total difficulties score at ages 4-12 and at ages 13 & 15.
- Four measures of literacy and numeracy in primary and secondary schools using the Achievement of CfE Levels (ACEL).

- Three school-leaver measures, having at least one qualification at SCQF Levels 4, 5 and 6 on leaving school.
- 16–19-year-olds participating in education, training, or employment.

This year the Scottish Government consulted on adding new key measures to this list. It has decided to add positive destinations (at 3 months after leaving school) and attendance. In future years, the intention is to include a further health and wellbeing measure covering issues such as confidence, resilience, and engagement. This will likely use data from the Health and Wellbeing Census. The results of the first HWB census were published earlier this year.

Progress across different measures is mixed and the pandemic impacted both the outcomes of young people and data collection. Evidence on the measures is [published in the NIF](#) and can be explored through an [interactive platform](#). The attainment gap is normally measured as the difference between the data for the most and least deprived.

The charts in Annexe A of this paper show the changes in the attainment gap over time under a number of these measures.

The collection of ACEL data was interrupted by the pandemic. Data for primary pupils was missed in 2019/20 and in secondary schools both 2019/20 and 2020/21. At a primary level, the data from last year (2021-22) showed an improvement in both literacy and numeracy compared to 2020-21. However, these gaps are a little higher than pre-pandemic. In secondary school, 2021-22 was the first collection since the pandemic; in both literacy and numeracy the achievement at CfE level 3 for both SIMD1 and SIMD5 was lower than in 2018/19 and the gap had grown.

The school-leaver measures are more long-standing than ACEL. Looking at qualifications, measures (i.e., the percentage of pupils leaving school with at least one qualification at SCQF at least level 4, 5 or 6), since 2012/13, we can see the trends of improvement in the data for pupils from both the most and the least deprived areas as well as a reducing gap. However, in 2021/22 the percentage of pupils that achieved one or more qualification at level 5 or better decreased for pupils living in our most and least deprived areas, and the gap increased compared to the previous year. This is also the case at level 6.

In both '16–19-year-olds participating in education, training or employment' and the positive destinations data, again the longer-term trend is one of both improvement and the gap reducing.

Attendance is measured every two years. There are three years of data presented for this indicator, 2016/17, 2018/19 and 2020/21. Here we see the attendance worsening a little for pupils from the most deprived areas and the gap growing. There is national guidance for the funds under the SAC but there is also a good deal of autonomy at the school and local authority levels in what the funds can be spent on. In 2022, local authorities submitted [stretch aims](#) which include targets of how they are improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a particular focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

On 8 December 2022, [the Government announced targets](#) it had agreed with local authorities for the core aims in closing the attainment gap and raising attainment. These core aims were a subset of the 11 measures set out in the NIF. The table below shows the national targets which were developed by aggregating the local authority targets.

	2020/21 published statistics [1]		Aggregated 2022/23 Stretch Aims [2]		Change, 2022/23 compared to 2020/21[3]	
	Overall (%)	Gap[4] (pp)	Overall (%)	Gap (pp)	Overall aim for progress (pp)	Narrowing of gap (pp)
ACEL - Primary school literacy[5]	66.9	24.7	74.2	17.3	7.3	7.4
ACEL - Primary school numeracy[6]	74.7	21.4	80.5	14.3	5.9	7.1
School leavers, 1 or more pass at SCQF 5 or better	87.7	18.2	89.5	16.0	1.8	2.2
School leavers, 1 or more pass at SCQF 6 or better	66.0	34.4	68.2	32.5	2.2	1.9
Annual Participation Measure (APM)[7]	92.2	9.3	93.4	8.1	1.2	1.2

[Footnotes available online](#)

Local authorities were also asked to [develop local “plus” aims or targets](#). Local authorities took a range of approaches for these aims. The then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills told [Parliament on 8 December 2023](#)—

“Those include aims for improved attendance and participation; aims that break down the component parts of some specific core aims—for example, focusing on the elements of reading, writing, listening and talking—aims for care-experienced children and young people; and aims that span the full learner journey. There are aims for early years and some that capture the full range of achievements of children and young people in the senior phase, including foundation apprenticeships and a focus on learner pathways.”

The Government’s update to the Committee said that regular annual data releases, published throughout the year, would show what progress is being made against the core aims in the table above. It also said that local authorities, alongside Education Scotland, are working on their next set of aims which will cover the three-year period from 2023/24 to 2025/26.

## Evaluation

In November 2022, the [Scottish Government published a new evaluation strategy for](#)



[the Attainment Scotland Fund](#); that is, the Strategic Equity Fund and Pupil Equity Fund, and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund.

The strategy stated that the new approach moves the evaluation cycle from an annual to a multi-year approach. This aims to “build an evidence base over time, offering the opportunity to explore different aspects of the programme over points in time.” It is also intended that evaluation will be undertaken “in 'real time' rather than retrospective evaluation of the previous school year” and this would be supported by “shorter, more frequent publications in place of the previous retrospective annual reporting format.”

Education Scotland has published its first three tri-annual reports based on the reports made by Attainment Advisors about the local authorities they work with. These reports cover [September – November 2022](#), [December 2022 - March 2023](#) and [April - June 2023](#). The Scottish Government’s update highlighted the following themes which have been identified through this work—

“There is evidence of greater emphasis being placed by local authorities on engaging with young people to identify and examine the challenges and barriers that impact them e.g. on their Senior Phase attainment and sustaining a positive destination. ...

“building the capacity of staff remains a continuous improvement priority for local authorities. Some are focused on improving pedagogy particularly in literacy and numeracy. Others seek to further develop data literacy across the education workforce. There is evidence of local authorities encouraging collaboration and sharing of effective practice.”

As noted above, the Scottish Government expects a report on the first year of the Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation to be published imminently.

## Local government finance

Last week, the Committee took evidence from representatives of local government officials.

The total settlement from Scottish Government to local government (revenue plus capital) increased by 2.7% in real terms between 2013-14 and 2023-24. During that period, however, some years have seen reductions in the settlement compared to previous years.

The IFS published a paper on Scotland’s [Council and School Funding](#) in February 2023. This looked at trends since 2009–10 and found “school spending per pupil aged 3–18 is estimated to have been 17% higher in Scotland in 2021–22 than in 2009–10” and that this is now 25% higher per pupil in Scotland than in England.

## *Verity House Agreement*

On 30 June 2023, COSLA and the Scottish Government announced that they had agreed a new partnership agreement (“Verity House Agreement”) setting out their vision for a more collaborative approach to delivering their shared priorities for the people of Scotland.

To summarise, some of the key points in the Agreement include:

- The Scottish Government and local government have agreed on three shared priorities – tackling poverty (particularly child poverty), transition to next zero, and sustainable public services.
- Joint leadership is required based on mutual trust and respect.
- Ring-fencing will be reduced and the default position for future funding allocations will be an assumption against ring-fencing or direction.
- A Fiscal Framework will simplify the local government settlement and allow “routes to explore local revenue raising”.
- Multi-year certainty will be provided in budgets “wherever possible”.
- Where national policies requiring local authority delivery are considered, they will be developed in a way that allows for local flexibility.
- Reporting and data collection obligations for national priorities will be proportionate with a “monitoring and accountability framework” to be agreed.
- There will be more opportunity for local government to engage in the Scottish Government’s budget process with an underlying principle of “no surprises”.
- There will be a “focus on the achievement of better outcomes locally for individuals and communities, and jointly develop simple structures for assurance and accountability that recognise local difference but reduce burdensome reporting.”

The Committee heard last week that local authorities would appreciate early understanding of the total budgets and the outcomes expected.

## *Ringfenced or otherwise directed monies*

The annual local government finance circular sets out the formally ringfenced monies provided to local authorities. The largest ring-fenced revenue grant listed in the most recent circular is the £521m Early Learning and Childcare Expansion grant. Also listed in the circular is the £130m Pupil Equity Funding<sup>4</sup> and the £4.3m Gaelic grant. Of the £775m of ringfenced grants listed in the circular, 85% clearly falls under this

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<sup>4</sup> The amount in the circular is £130m. Curiously this is more than the amount in the Scottish Government budget documents, which quote a figure of £120m.

Committee's remit.

Members will however note that there are some elements of spend that we might consider ring-fenced not listed in the paragraph above. Other elements of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, the Strategic Equity Fund and the Care Experienced Young People's Fund, tend to be allocated in year but have clear guidance around how they can be spent. In previous years, funding for the Teacher Induction Scheme has been listed as ringfenced in the circular.

Other funding streams such as money to remove curriculum charges and music tuition charges, universal free school meals, education psychologists, counsellors and so on are not listed although in some cases these had appeared in previous years' circulars. For some of these areas, we can see nominal allocations in the [Green Book which sets out the process for determining the general revenue grant](#). How the Verity House Agreement will affect all of these is at this stage unclear. The First Minister's 'mandate letter' to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills said—

"I ask you to work with your colleagues to support the Deputy First Minister in building on the constructive progress already made in developing our relationship with Local Government. I also recognise the specific issues related to education in the New Deal, including in relation to teacher numbers, the poverty-related attainment gap, existing and planned early learning and childcare commitments, and the ongoing variability in outcomes. Education constitutes the largest share of Local Government spend, and we will need to consider carefully where there remains benefit in continuing to ring-fence or direct funding elements of that, as well as developing an agreed set of outcomes and an associated accountability framework with COSLA."

The Committee has explored the Government's policy of seeking to maintain and increase the number of teachers. The panel last week argued that this approach did not take account of changing school rolls in different areas, and particularly a reducing Primary school rolls. The panel suggested that focusing on the pupil teacher ratio would be more logical, especially when facing falling rolls. Furthermore, Kirsty Flanagan from CIPFA Local Government Directors of Finance (Scotland) noted that teacher numbers are an input measure rather than focusing "on the achievement of better outcomes locally for individuals and communities" as set out in the Verity House Agreement.

Ms Flanagan also noted that the protection of teacher numbers has an impact on how local authorities can fund other services. Douglas Hutchison said that consequential financial pressures could be felt in the education service, for example, in terms of funding specialist ASL roles or other non-teaching staff. Carrie Lindsey gave other examples of where local authorities could use greater flexibility, such as early years specialists to support speech and language in early primary, counselling, and attendance support.

Ms Flanagan also said that where funding is provided for national policy commitments, such as universal free school meals, the funding is not adequately

updated for inflation. She said that shortfalls are funded through savings elsewhere. She also argued that further expansion of the universal FSM offer will require additional revenue and capital funding. Ms Lindsey indicated that while there is support for providing food to children in primary schools, she was not aware that the educational effect of the universal policy was being evaluated.

## Early Learning and Childcare

In August 2021, the number of hours of funded ELC rose to 1,140 hours per year. Funded ELC in Scotland has been around since 2002. Between 2014 and 2021, the number of funded hours was 600 hours per year.

The Committee has taken an interest in the roll out of this policy. It was one of the focuses of the Committee's pre-budget work last year and the Committee held an [evidence session in May 2022](#). The Social Justice and Social Security Committee is currently undertaking [an inquiry into Child Poverty and Parental Employment](#) and one of the themes of that work is around the provision of childcare.

On 6 October 2022, the Scottish Government published [Best Start: Strategic early learning and school age childcare plan for Scotland, 2022-26](#). This strategic plan reiterates the aims expected from the ELC expansion and now identifies these as outcomes for the broader childcare policy. These are:

- Children's development improves and the poverty-related outcomes gap narrows.
- Family wellbeing improves.
- Parents' and carers' opportunities to take up or sustain work, training, and study increase.

The Cabinet Secretary's 'mandate letter' from the First Minister [dated 5 September 2023](#) had two actions in relation to childcare. These were—

- You will take forward work to build the system infrastructure for School Age Childcare, including through investing in a range of projects across the country to test and refine approaches.
- You will begin to build the evidence base and start work to trial and evaluate models to deliver funded childcare for 1- and 2-year-olds, focusing on those who need it most.

## *Funding*

Funding for delivering the statutory hours of funded ELC is a mix of local authority core budgets and the ring-fenced Scottish Government ELC grant.

In the past three years, the ringfenced grant has remained the same in cash terms – around £522m. This money is also intended to meet costs of funded ELC for children

whose start to P1 is deferred.

Carrie Lindsay told the committee last week that maintaining a system that meets the needs of parents/carers' which can develop over time can be challenging.

The Government stated that this ringfenced grant has not increased in recent years is because the population of eligible children is lower than had been previously forecast.

A [March 2022 briefing](#) to the Committee from the Scottish Government stated—

“The number of eligible children is one of the primary determinants of the level of ELC funding. Calculations based on recent population estimates show that there are now fewer children eligible for funded ELC now than was originally anticipated when the multi-year funding agreement was reached in 2018. For example, the data shows there are 7.5% or 8,500 fewer 3- and 4-year-olds eligible for the universal offer than was projected in 2018.”

At the same time local government's net spend (i.e., not including ringfenced grants or earned income) appears to be increasing. The table below shows the data available for net spend on pre-primary by local authorities for 2021-22 to 2023-24.

	£m		
	<b>Outturn</b>	<b>Provisional Outturn</b>	<b>Budget Estimate</b>
	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>
Net LG Spend	384	494	513

The table indicates that the budget for this year's net spend on pre-primary is around 33% higher than the outturn of spend on pre-primary in 2021-22. In that period the ringfenced grant has not increased.

## *Private, voluntary and independent sector & Childminders*

A key issue the Committee has explored this session in the funding for the private, voluntary, and independent sector.

The PVI sector is key to the delivery of statutory funded ELC; it accounts for around 30% of the service nationally. Last week Carrie Lindsay from ADES said that the PVI sector's contribution is valued by local authorities, particularly as the PVI sector can be more flexible. She also said that some providers can be quite small or, in the case of childminders, single individuals; and that local authorities may need to provide significant support.

On 31 July, the Government published a [Financial Sustainability Health Check of the Childcare Sector in Scotland](#). This followed on from similar work published in 2021. This health check referenced a range of Care Inspectorate data which included the changes between March 2020 and March 2023 in the number of services and places for different types of childcare providers. These were:

- Local Authority: 42 more serviced (up 2.4%) and 10,110 more places (up 12.8%)
- Private sector: 49 fewer services (down 4.5%) and 277 fewer places (down 0.4%)
- Third sector: 126 fewer services (down 15.6%) and 2,943 fewer places (down 9.4%)
- Childminders: 1,194 fewer services (down 25.6%) and 7,313 fewer places (down 25.3%).

These data are for all services of these types, not just those delivering funded ELC. The increase in public sector delivered places almost matches the places lost in other sectors.

The health check also issued surveys to the sector. There were 108 responses to the day care of children services survey which equates to around 6% of all registered private and third sector services. There were 58 responses to the childminding services survey which represents around 1.7% of all registered childminding services. The response rate should be borne in mind when considering the report's findings.

These surveys indicated that across the sector costs had increased by around 16% between February 2022 and February 2023. The report stated—

“The cost of living crisis was the most commonly reported factor - covering a wide range of specific cost elements, including increased prices of energy, fuel, food, utilities, equipment and learning resources.”

The survey found for Day Care of Children Services (i.e., not including Childminders) the income had increased by around 5% in the same period. However, just looking at the income from providing funded ELC, the surveys suggested that overall, on average, income had changed little year-on-year; but for third sector providers and childminders the income through this source had fallen by 10%. The report provided some of the reasons given for this, which included—

“Sustainable rates for the delivery of funded ELC considered insufficient to cover current costs of delivery”.

And—

“A number of childminders reported that children moved to nurseries for their funded entitlement”.

The survey also asked questions about staffing. The results indicate that recruitment and retention is an ongoing challenge for businesses. The real National Living Wage is a requirement for all staff delivering funded ELC. However, staff in the same setting who are not delivering funded ELC may be paid less. Of those settings providing funded ELC, 73% said they planned to pay all staff the real living wage from August this year. Childminders tend to be self-employed and responders to the

survey “estimated that, on average, they paid themselves £8.21 per hour.”

In terms of overall sustainability, the picture appears to have worsened since 2021. 31% of services providing funded ELC had significant concerns regarding sustainability, compared to 9% of respondents to the 2021 survey.

A concern for the PVI sector has been the differential between the pay and conditions for staff in the public sector compared to what the PVI sector can offer. It has been argued that this means that the PVI sector struggles to compete for staff. Over the summer, the SSSC produced research on the [Movement of Day Care of Children Staff](#). This research was based on registration data, and it found that “staff moving from the private and voluntary to the public are close to what we would predict based on the proportions the employer types”. However, it continued—

“The big difference is with the public sector which ... retains over 90% of those within it who change post. The issue therefore appears to be less about a disproportionate flow of staff from the private and voluntary to the public, than the almost complete absence of a flow from the public to the private or voluntary.”

The report also found that almost 30% of managers in the private and voluntary sectors who moved post moved to a practitioner’s post in the public sector and 20% to a practitioner’s role in another private sector service.

Last week, Douglas Hutchison from ADES pointed to additional costs on local authorities such as pension contributions. He said that the differential between the costs of provision in local authority settings and PVI settings is “baked in” to the system.

As noted above, practitioners delivering ELC must be paid the real Living Wage which currently is £10.90. This is likely to be updated in April. Separately, the recent Programme for Government said that it will—

“Provide funding to uplift pay in the PVI sector to £12 per hour for those delivering funded Early Learning and Childcare – this action is needed now to support effective recruitment and retention of staff working in the sector.”

## *Further expansion*

The Programme for Government in 2021-22 said that the government would, “work to expand funded early learning and childcare for children aged 1 and 2, starting with low-income households within this Parliament.” This is reflected in the text of the First Minister’s Mandate letter to the Cabinet Secretary.

The 2022 childcare strategy, [Best Start - strategic early learning and school age childcare plan 2022 to 2026](#), said—

“We will be taking the time to get policy design and engagement on our future childcare offers right, recognising that they must be appropriate to parents’,

carers' and families' needs and that these will differ depending on children's ages and stages, and families' circumstances. We will also work closely with providers in the public, private, third and childminding sectors throughout our design process.”

The most recent PfG changed the policy position and said that this expansion would cover children from 9 months old. This said the Government would—

“Work with Local Government and other partners to develop the local infrastructure and services needed to provide childcare from nine months to the end of primary school in specific communities in six local authority areas.”

The PfG also said the Scottish Government would—

“Work with local authority and other sectoral partners to phase in an expanded national offer for families with two-year-olds, focused on those who will benefit most. This will build on the foundations of the existing 1140 programme, which makes high quality early learning and childcare available to around a quarter of families with two-year olds on the lowest incomes.”

The Scottish Government also plans to develop a “system of wraparound school age childcare, offering care before and after school and in the holidays, which will be free to families on the lowest incomes”. To this end, the Scottish Government has provided around £15m of funding to four ‘early adopter’ communities in Glasgow, Dundee, Clackmannanshire and Inverclyde.

## *Evaluation*

The Strategic Childcare Plan said—

“It is critical that we properly evaluate a major new policy like the expansion of funded ELC to understand what is working, whether the policy is making a difference and where any challenges remain.”

The Scottish Government published its [Evaluation Strategy](#) of the expansion programme on 6 October 2022. This strategy was delayed due to the pandemic. The strategy seeks to determine whether the three main aims or outcomes above are achieved and to “assess the longer-term economic costs and benefits” and to set out the data required to support the effectiveness of the policy.

The Government intends to develop, alongside local government, an outcomes and measurement framework for funded ELC by 2025. [Last year, the then Cabinet Secretary](#) said that the project was at an early stage. This work is intended to “provide evidence to support service delivery both nationally and locally, offer greater transparency and assurance, and help ensure value for money.”



## *IT projects: SEEMiS and a new digital service*

A 2019 Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment set out plans for a new digital management information system for funded ELC provision through a module in SEEMiS, Scottish local government's Education Management Information System. This BRIA said—

“This system will accommodate the increased flexibility of provision being introduced and ease the monitoring and management of the use of blended models and cross boundary provision. The system can be made available to all funded providers including childminders, and aims to allow all funded provision for a child to be recorded in one place.”

This work has been delayed due to “unforeseen contractual issues.” A recent [answer to a PQ](#) said that “based on the existing cost estimates, the Scottish Government will have provided £2,104,833 of grant funding to support the development of the new SEEMiS Early Years system.” [Another PQ answer](#) indicated that the completion of the work is expected early 2024 but that a “go live” date had not been agreed.

The 2023-24 PfG also made reference to a digital service in relation to ELC. It said—

“[The Government will] test a new digital service to help parents and carers find, access and pay for childcare that best suits their needs, laying the foundations to transform the childcare system in the longer-term in a way that empowers parents and supports greater choice.”

While the SEEMiS module appears to be to manage funded ELC from a provider/local authority perspective, the reference in the PfG appears to be more focused on Parents and Carers. The aim of both is to support more flexibility. It is not clear, however, what the reference to transforming the childcare system in the quote above means.

## **Further and Higher Education**

### *Financial context*

The [Scottish Government's multi-year resource spending review](#) published in May 2022 set out high-level spending plans for 2022-27. The spending review set out broadly flat-cash budgets for further and higher education. These are shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Resource Spending Review, Further and Higher Education spending plans**

Level 2	2022-23 (£m)	2023-24 (£m)	2024-25 (£m)	2025-26 (£m)	2026-27 (£m)
Higher education and student support	349	349	349	349	349
Scottish Funding Council	1,502	1,501	1,501	1,501	1,501
Advanced Learning and Science	23	23	23	23	37
Skills and Training	271	270	270	270	270
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,145</b>	<b>2,143</b>	<b>2,143</b>	<b>2,143</b>	<b>2,157</b>

Source: [Scottish Government](#)

A resource funding increase of £46m - £20m for universities and £26m for colleges - was announced during the Budget Statement by the then-Deputy First Minister John Swinney MSP on 15 December 2022.

In February this year, this Committee [wrote to then-Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP](#) to ask for further information on how the £26m resource funding for colleges would be spent and whether baseline funding for colleges would change as a result of the funding.

The [Cabinet Secretary's response](#) stated the funding for colleges was intended to help them "transition to future provision". The letter also stated that indicative institution allocations were expected in Spring 2023.

On Tuesday 2 May 2023, the Minister for Further and Higher Education; and Minister for Veterans Graeme Dey [wrote to the Education Committee](#) to state that the planned £46m resource funding increase in 2023-24 would not be going ahead as the money had been identified as a "necessary saving".

In an evidence session with this Committee on 17 May 2023, the Minister provided further information, stating:

"...this is principally about the teachers' pay settlement. Members will recall that the former Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills indicated at this committee in February that the moneys owing to the teachers' pay settlement would have to come from within the education budget. That is principally what is at play here." – [Official Report, 17/05/23](#)

The previous Cabinet Secretary [told this Committee on 22 February 2023](#) that the money for teacher's pay would be "found from the education and skills budget".

In response to the funding reversal, [Universities Scotland](#) said the sector was “extremely disappointed”, and that this would “compromise our capacity to contribute to the nation’s recovery”.

[Colleges Scotland](#) said colleges were “deeply disappointed and dismayed by this U-turn”, describing colleges as “already cash strapped, making cuts to courses and winding down parts of their offer due to a lack of funding”.

[The EIS](#) said the decision would impact pay in the college sector, making it “more difficult for college lecturers to get a pay rise commensurate with that of their colleagues elsewhere in the public sector”.

[UCU Scotland](#) urged the Scottish Government to “recognise that improving the life chances of people across Scotland requires investment in education and the people delivering it.”

**Table 2** below sets out the budgets for HE and FE resource and capital from 2021-22 to 2023-24. The final column highlighted in yellow shows figures following the reversal of the planned resource funding increase.

**Table 2: Further and Higher Education Budgets (Level 3)**

Level 3	2021-22 Budget £m	2022-23 Budget £m	2023-24 Budget £m	2023-24 Budget (following 02/05/23 revision) £m
<b>HE Resource</b>	768.2	789.2	809.2	789.2
<b>HE Capital</b>	346.7	348.0	340.7	340.7
<b>Net College Resource</b>	675.7	675.7	701.7	675.7
<b>Net College Capital</b>	33.7	74.7*	82.4*	82.4*

Source: [Scottish Budget: 2023-24](#)

\*Includes £5m to be apportioned between the college, university and CLD sectors

During the [17 May Committee evidence session](#) with the Minister, the ongoing costs of the teachers’ pay settlement were raised. During the same session, the Minister was asked whether work was being done to identify savings on Scottish Funding Council (SFC) administration costs. He replied that there was but did not provide further information.

## *HE/FE in the Programme for Government 2023-24*

The [Programme for Government \(PfG\) 2023-24](#) committed to launching the Erasmus+ replacement, the Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP). The

Committee has heard evidence on SEEP in sessions on [24 May](#) and [21 June 2023](#). The PfG states an “initial test and learn project” is being delivered in 2023-24 and SEEP will build on this.

The PfG also states that a new funding model for post-school education provision will be developed, which will continue free tuition and improve parity of financial support for those studying flexibly and part time.

## *College sector flexibility*

During the Committee’s recent [inquiry on college regionalisation](#), the Committee heard calls for funding flexibility from the sector. The Committee’s final report included a recommendation that colleges should be given “as many financial and operational flexibilities as possible”, including flexibility on year end, SFC outcomes, and access to additional funds.

The [Cabinet Secretary responded to the Committee report](#) in June 2023. The response stated that from 2023-24, SFC has introduced new flexibilities for colleges. The [Minister’s July 2023 letter to the Committee](#) provided further detail:

- Credit targets for teaching funding have been removed and a credit threshold introduced.
- The value of credits has also been increased, meaning colleges receive the same level of funding for a lower number of credits.
- Colleges will also be able to claim credits for students still in active learning 5 weeks after the course start date for courses lasting more than 20 weeks. Previously, credits could only be claimed for students in learning for at least 25% of the course.
- Colleges and SFC have been exploring fiscal flexibilities within Office for National Statistics (ONS) restrictions, looking at the potential for rolling surpluses over into future years.

## *College staff pay and compulsory redundancies*

College employers and unions have been unable to agree a pay deal for lecturers and support staff for 2022-23 and 2023-24.

Following the rejection of two previous offers, in June 2023, College Employers Scotland proposed a £2,000 pay increase for the academic year 2022-23 and a further £1,500 in 2023-24. This would provide a total of £3,500 over two years. CES has said this would represent an average cumulative pay rise of 8% for lecturers and 11% for support staff. For support staff earning less than £25,000, the increase would be 14% and around 10% for lecturers at the start of their scale.

[CES has stated](#) this is the final offer and employers cannot go beyond it “as the £51m cost of delivering them will already require painful decisions to be made on jobs and

courses.” [CES wrote to the Committee in September](#) setting out further detail of its position.

The latest offer was accepted by members of the GMB Union but rejected by EIS-FELA and Unite. UNISON have not put it to members in a formal ballot as a no compulsory redundancies guarantee would be needed before doing so.

On 12 September, college lecturers began a 12-day programme of strike action. The strike dates are [available on the EIS website](#).

[UNISON](#) and [Unite](#) members in colleges held their first strike on 7 September and further dates are still to be announced.

[EIS-FELA](#) and [UNISON](#) have called on the Scottish Government to step in and provide funding for a pay deal that does not result in job losses.

A number of colleges have said they plan to make compulsory redundancies as a result of financial pressures. In his [July 2023 letter to the Committee](#), the Minister stated that colleges are “expected to adhere to” the policy of no compulsory redundancies and Public Sector Pay Policy, though colleges negotiate their own policies around redundancies with unions.

**Lynne Currie, Senior Researcher (FE/HE, Children’s social work, child protection and adoption) and Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research**

### **21 September 2023**

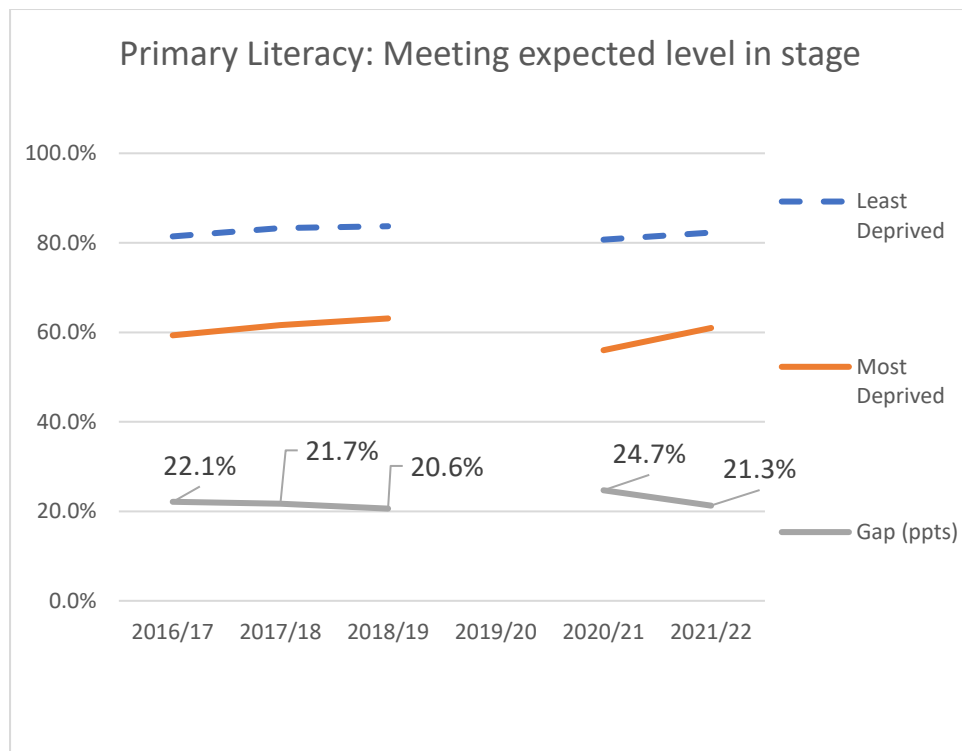
Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

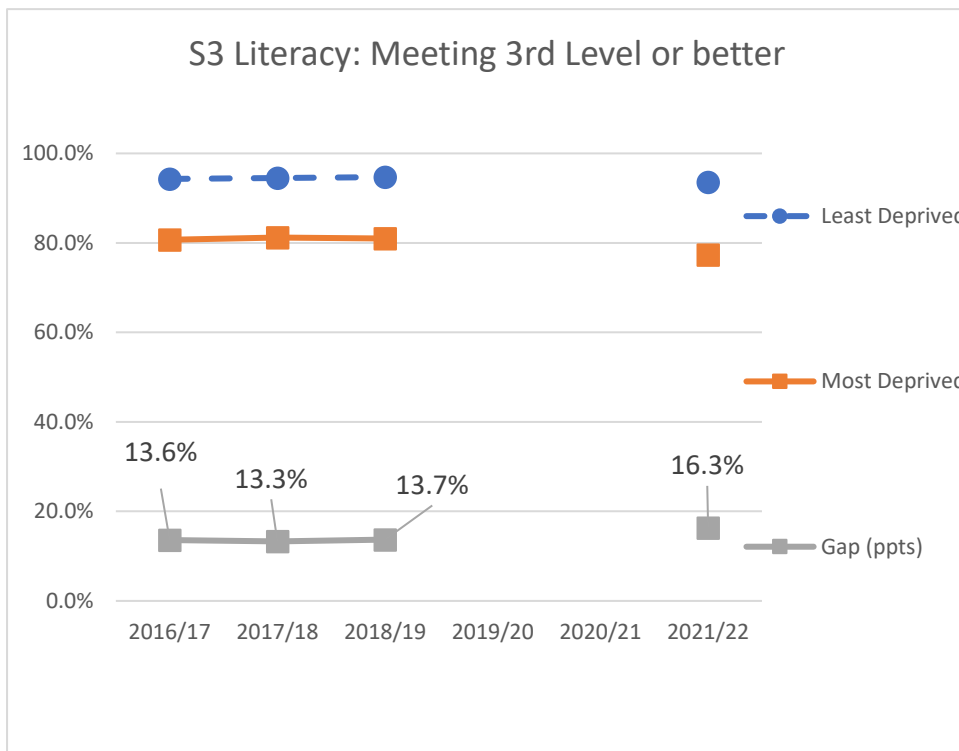
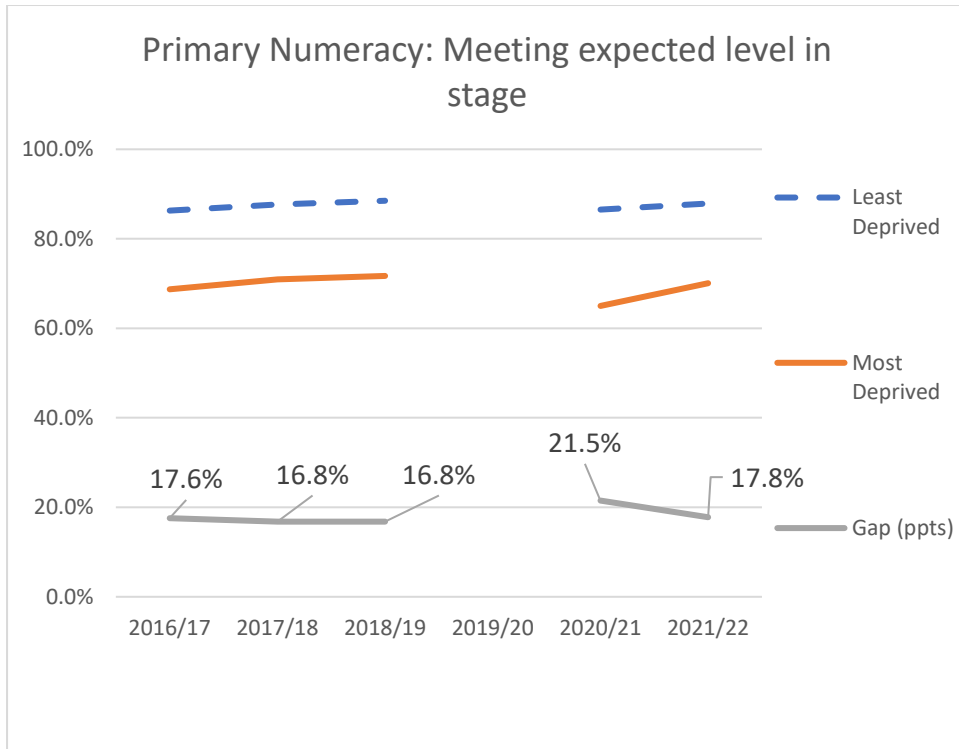
The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

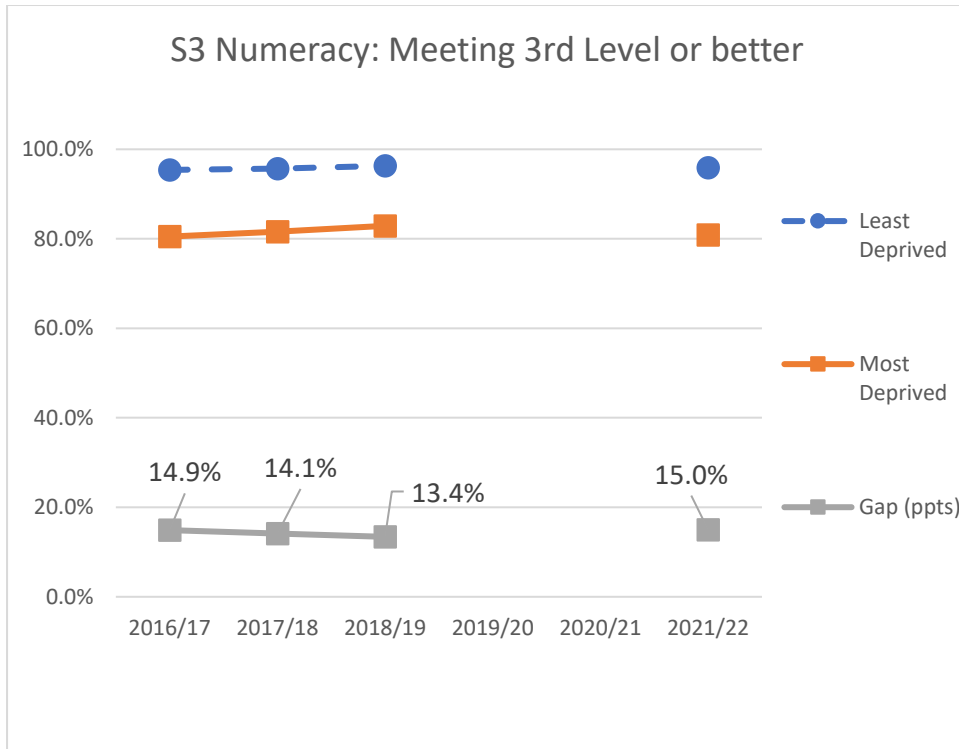
## Annexe A: Selected Charts on data on the poverty related attainment gap

Evidence on the measures used to determine the poverty-related attainment gap is [published in the NIF](#) and can be explored through an [interactive platform](#). This annexe reproduces that data over most but not all of those measures.

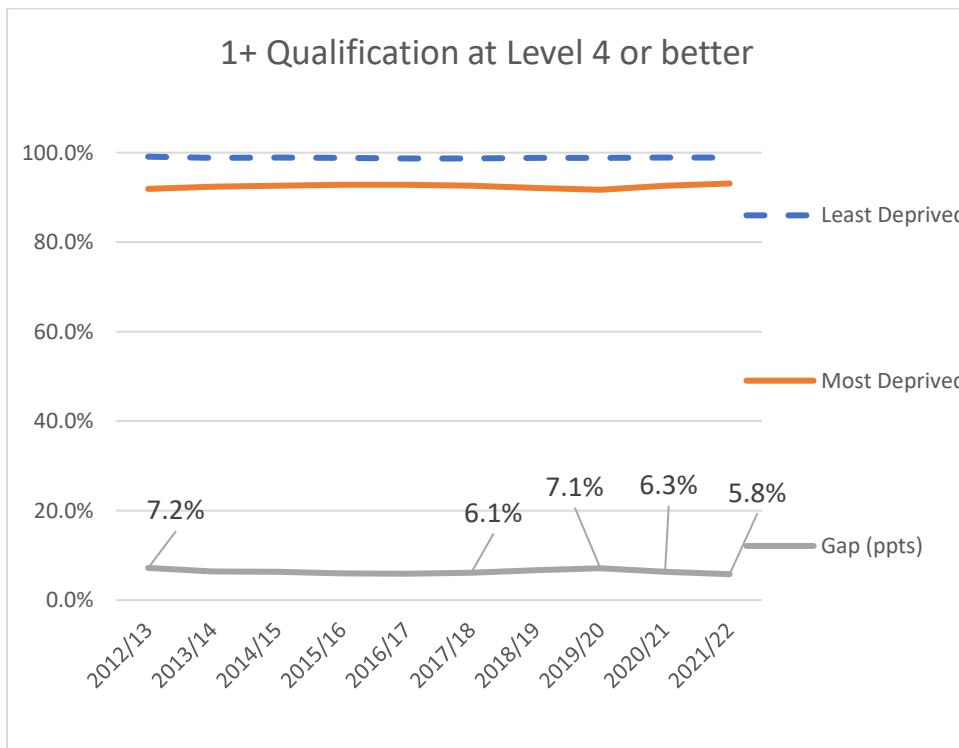
### *Achievement of CfE Levels*



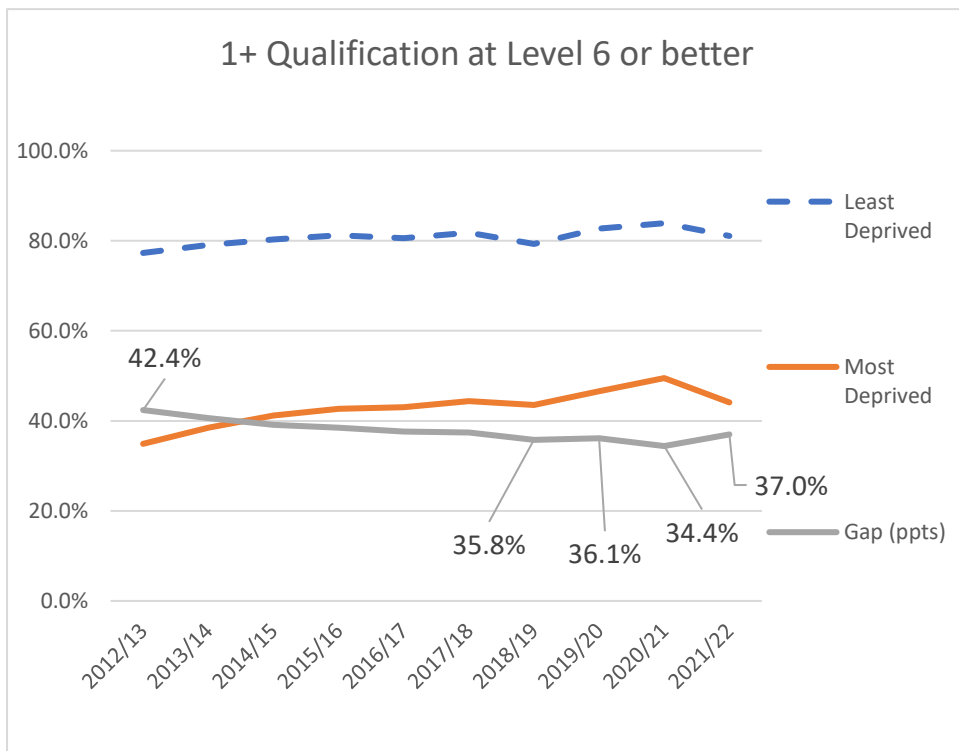
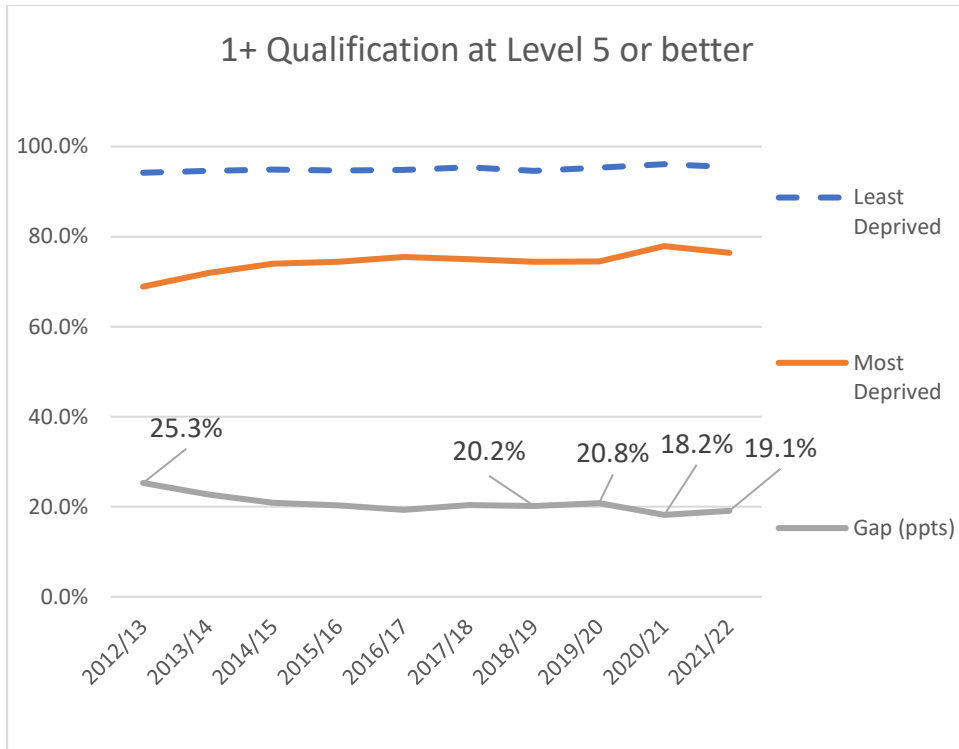




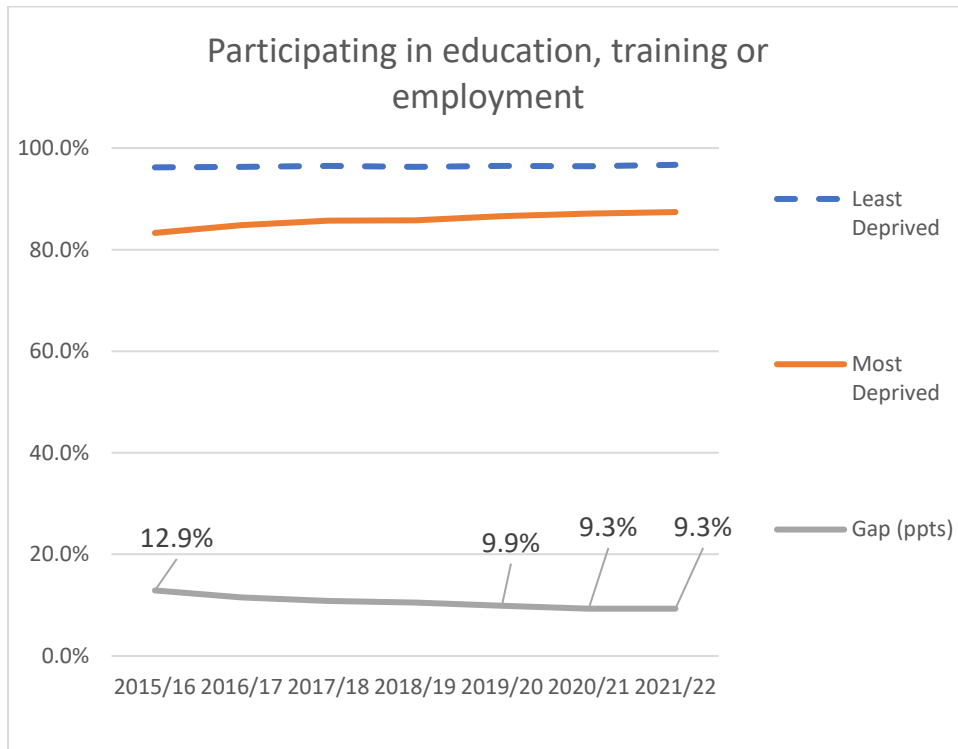
## Qualifications upon leaving school



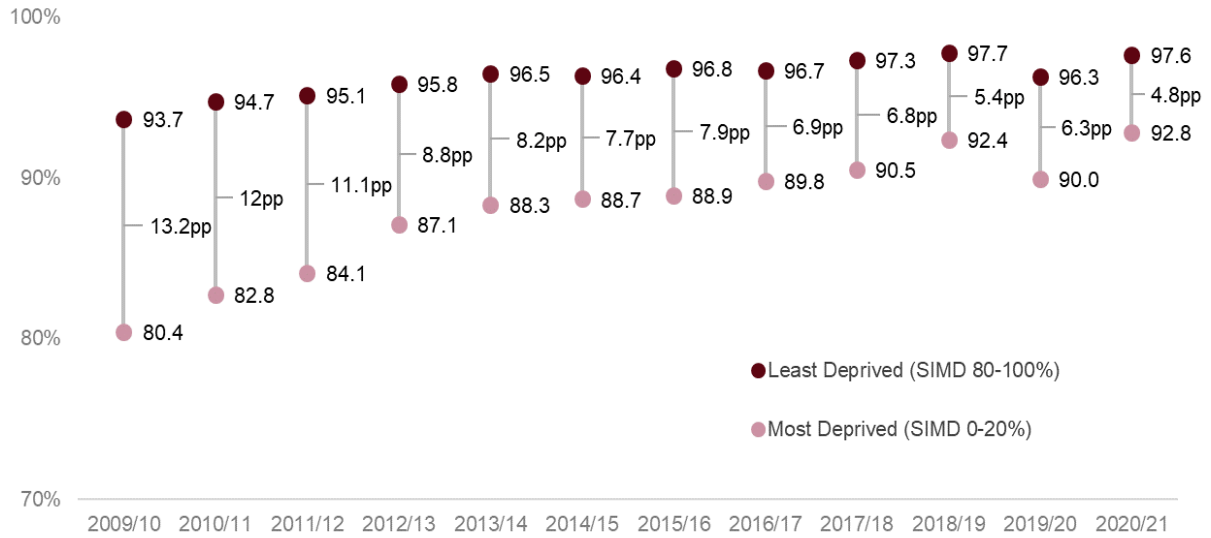




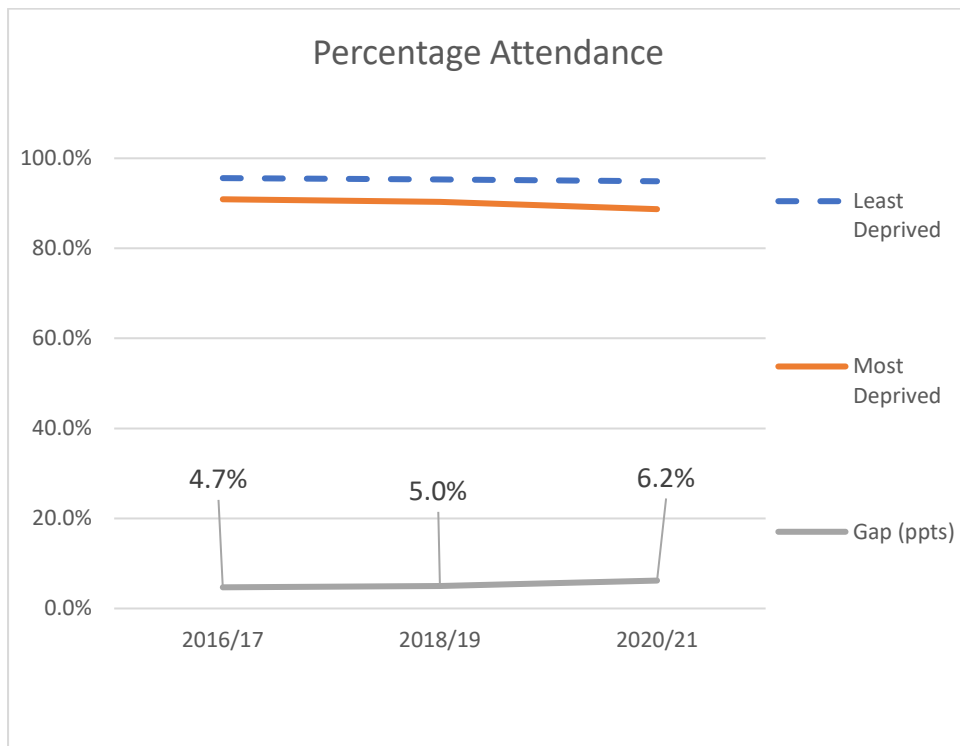
### Participating in education, training or employment (new measure)



## Initial Positive Destinations (New measure)



## Attendance (new measure)



## Annexe B

Sue Webber MSP  
Convener Education,  
Children and Young  
People Committee  
The Scottish  
Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

19 September 2023

Dear Convener

Thank you for the invitation to attend the session on 27 September looking at the Scottish Attainment Challenge. I look forward to attending and providing an update on progress made in relation to the recommendations in your report from August 2022. I attach the Scottish Government's update on each of the recommendations with this letter.

I would like to reiterate that the Scottish Government remains focussed on closing the poverty related attainment gap - using our investment in the Scottish Attainment Challenge to further empower headteachers and Local Government to achieve their ambitions to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty.

It is important also to recognise that the lasting impact of the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis has deepened inequity. In my conversations with teachers, parents and pupils, these messages come through time and time again. It is the responsibility of this government, and indeed this Parliament, to retain our relentless focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap and we are making progress. I trust I have the Committee's support with this endeavour.

The poverty related attainment gap remains narrower than it was pre-pandemic for National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers. The gap at advanced higher is narrower than both 2022 and 2019.

Additionally, we've seen good progress in recovery and closing the gap in primary school literacy and numeracy. The latest attainment levels showed the biggest improvement in reducing the attainment gap in one year on record. And we have seen a record low poverty related attainment gap in positive destinations for 2021/22 school leavers 9 months after leaving school of 7 percentage points. This gap has narrowed from 18.7 percentage points in 2009-10. This all points to progress in both education recovery and closing the poverty related attainment gap over the longer term.

This Government has always been clear that this is a complex and long-term endeavour. Key to progress is the continued, targeted focus on the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge at school, local authority, regional and national level to support children and young people, their families and, of course, teachers. I recognise and appreciate the hard work of our teachers and school leaders and our determination to support them led to an historic pay deal which now means that Scottish classroom teachers, on the main-grade scale, are the best paid in the UK.

All of this, as well as the ambitious aims local authorities have set, and are setting for the longer term, gives me confidence that we are making good progress and the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme is having an impact.

I very much welcome the Committee's continued focus on the important work of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, and trust that the detail in my attached response will assure Members that their findings are receiving due attention.

Yours sincerely

**JENNY GILRUTH**

## **EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE SCOTTISH ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE INQUIRY**

### **UPDATE ON KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

1. The Committee recognises and commends the excellent work being done by individual schools and local authorities. The commitment of teachers and headteachers who spoke to the Committee was striking and inspirational. In this report, despite the challenges that were set out in evidence, the Committee wants to highlight this work as well as making some recommendations aimed at improving the attainment challenge policy.

#### Update

- We welcome the recognition the Committee has given to the commitment and dedication of teachers as they work to support children and young people impacted by poverty.

### **SCOTTISH ATTAINMENT CHALLENGE**

#### **The attainment gap**

2. The Committee notes the conclusion from Audit Scotland that the poverty-related attainment gap remains wide with limited progress on closing the gap and that inequalities have been exacerbated by Covid-19.

#### Update

- The poverty-related attainment gap remains narrower than it was pre-pandemic for National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers. Additionally, we've seen good progress in recovery and closing the gap in primary school literacy and numeracy, with the latest data showing the biggest reduction in the gap on record. And we have seen a record low poverty related attainment gap in positive destinations for 2021/22 school leavers 9 months after leaving school of 7 percentage points - narrowed from 18.7 percentage points in 2009-10. This points to progress in both education recovery and closing the poverty related attainment gap over the longer term.
- All of this, as well as the ambitious aims local authorities have set and are setting for the longer term, gives me confidence that we are making good progress and the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme, in which we are investing £1bn this parliamentary term, is having an impact. We remain focussed on closing the poverty related attainment gap - using our investment in the Scottish Attainment Challenge to further empower headteachers and Local Government to achieve their ambitions to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty.

- We are investing £1bn in the Scottish Attainment Challenge this parliamentary term - this includes over £520 million Pupil Equity Funding for headteachers, direct funding for all 32 local authorities for the first time, and additional funding to support care experienced children and young people's attainment and wellbeing.

### **Focus on equity**

3. Whilst work to tackle the impact of poverty on educational outcomes was being done in some schools and local authorities before the start of the attainment challenge, the Committee notes evidence that the attainment challenge has heightened knowledge and awareness of the barriers faced by children and young people living in poverty and what works in trying to tackle them.

### Update

- The refreshed SAC mission, the Framework for Recovery & Accelerating Progress launched in March 2022 was refreshed in 2023. It sets out clear roles and responsibilities for LAs, schools, Education Scotland and SG. All 32 LAs are now actively engaged in the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Local Authorities are currently in the second year of setting stretch aims for overall improved attainment and for progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap. Attainment Advisors report on progress their link Local Authority is making through tri-annual reports, a national summary of which is published three times a year.

### [Education Scotland First National Summary Report for the Scottish Attainment Challenge 2022-2023](#)

### [Education Scotland Second National Summary Report for the Scottish Attainment Challenge 2022-2023](#)

- There is evidence of greater emphasis being placed by local authorities on engaging with young people to identify and examine the challenges and barriers that impact them e.g. on their Senior Phase attainment and sustaining a positive destination.  
(Ref: National Summary 2 - section 1.3 - p 11&12; section 2.3 - p 21)
- We know from our triannual reporting of progress that building the capacity of staff remains a continuous improvement priority for local authorities. Some are focused on improving pedagogy particularly in literacy and numeracy. Others seek to further develop data literacy across the education workforce. There is evidence of local authorities encouraging collaboration and sharing of effective practice.
- There continues to be a focus on children and young people adversely affected by socio-economic disadvantage; and a recognition of the significant role of local authorities in driving forward a strategic vision for equity at local

level. Headteachers are clearly focused on improving outcomes for learners and accelerating progress for those who are under-performing, and continue to monitor their own school 'gaps.

### **Impact of the pandemic**

4. It is important to understand the full extent to which the pandemic has impacted on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. There is a need to establish a national baseline on which to base post-pandemic targets. The Committee asks the Scottish Government to set out how it will, as a matter of urgency, establish a national baseline for measuring progress in closing the attainment gap following the pandemic.

### Update

- We are clear that we want to see greater progress at a quicker pace than we've seen in the past.
- There is a range of data published by Scottish Government and partners on a regular basis which will allow us to compare pre and post pandemic to understand the progress made towards recovery. The data and evidence include:
  - Attendance, Absence and Exclusion statistics
  - Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels data
  - Summary Statistics for School in Scotland (teacher and pupil numbers)
  - School Leaver Attainment and Initial Destinations statistics
  - Follow up leaver destination statistics
  - Educational Outcomes for Looked After Children
  - Health and Wellbeing Census results
  - Regular updates to the National Improvement Framework Evidence Report
- We are encouraged by the 2023 exam results in comparison to pre-pandemic data and know that local authorities are already setting stretch aims for the next three years.
- Whilst stretch aims themselves won't be what makes that progress, our expectation is that by setting ambitious aims local authorities (and their schools) will consider and reconsider their local approaches to do what they can to make as much progress towards their ambitious aims as possible.
- We will know how local authorities have progressed against their 2022/23 stretch aims later in the year – December for primary school literacy and numeracy; and February for school leaver awards.
- Education Scotland teams are working with LAs as they set their next set of stretch aims, supporting and challenging them to be as ambitious as possible in the context of both previous years' progress and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children and young people. Of course, it's vitally important that



these aims are underpinned by high quality, evidence based local plans, taking into account local circumstances.

### **New funding approach**

5. The Committee recognises that there is poverty everywhere in Scotland, including in rural and less deprived areas. The Committee supports the policy of funding local authorities through the Strategic Equity Fund to ensure that targeted support is available to all children and young people living in poverty in Scotland.

#### Update

- We now support all local authorities through Strategic Equity Funding to develop local strategic approaches to closing the poverty related attainment gap. This comes alongside both Pupil Equity Funding which reaches 97% of schools and Care Experienced Children and Young People funding for all local authorities.

6. However, the Committee acknowledges the evidence received on the impact of the reduction in funding to the challenge authorities. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government works with local authorities to examine and monitor the impact of the tapered reduction in funding on the challenge authorities and reports its findings to the Committee, along with any proposed action to mitigate any detrimental impact.

#### Update

- The Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation has a focus on process evaluation in the first year of the new evaluation Strategy; this work strand considers the implementation of the SAC Refresh. It includes a survey carried out with local authority SAC Leads which will provide evidence on former Challenge Authorities views on the impact of the tapered reduction in funding and how this affects their SAC plans. It will also provide evidence on Local Authorities receiving a strategic equity funding (SEF) allocation for the first time and how they plan to utilise this funding. This Report will be published in September prior to the Committee meeting and a copy will be provided to the Committee once published.
- Education Scotland's Attainment Advisors are continuously working with local authority SAC lead officers to ensure appropriate planning for effective use of Strategic Equity Funding is taking place in order to maximise its impact.
- Whilst some LAs will naturally receive smaller allocations as the tapered roll out of SEF takes place, we are clear that this is a fairer distribution of resource that better reflects local need. Additionally, through the guidance for the various SAC funding streams and the Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress, we are clear that local authorities should work collaboratively to make best use of the SAC funding they receive. However,

this funding is additional funding and should not be the only funding that supports local work targeted towards supporting the education and health and wellbeing of children and young people impacted by poverty.

- Education Scotland is supporting the system through the ongoing engagement of Senior Regional Advisors and Attainment Advisors, the introduction of universal, targeted and intensive support and its work with ADES to undertake a programme of collaborative improvement.

## **FREEDOM WITHIN A FRAMEWORK**

7. The Committee notes the role played by headteachers in the deployment of PEF in schools. Headteachers' capacity is the key factor in the performance of the attainment challenge. The Committee notes concerns about current challenges with recruitment and retention of headteachers. Given the critical role headteachers play in delivery and accountability for PEF spending, the Committee asks the Scottish Government to set out what steps it is taking to address recruitment and retention issues.

### Update

- We continue to work with education stakeholders to explore issues around headteacher recruitment and retention, and the Headteacher Recruitment and Retention Working Group continues to consider a range of actions that will improve headteacher recruitment and retention.
- We continue to support delivery of the Into Headship programme for aspiring headteachers, backed by investment of £800,000 in 2023/24. This programme has been specifically designed to help experienced teachers meet the requirements for the Standard for Headship, which is a requirement for all permanently appointed headteachers in publicly funded schools in Scotland.
- We remain committed to supporting the recruitment of teachers, and we are providing local authorities with £145.5m in this year's budget to protect teacher and support staff numbers.
- The Strategic Board for Teacher Education, which is made up of a range of education bodies, is considering issues around the recruitment and retention of teachers in Scotland in detail. This includes, for example, geographical and subject-specific issues, as well as how we can increase diversity within the profession and improve support for early career teachers.

## **Involvement of parents, carers, children, young people and teachers**

8. The Committee supports the emphasis on the need for meaningful engagement of teachers, parents and carers, children and young people and other key stakeholders throughout the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating approaches for spending PEF. Protected time for headteachers and teachers is key to creating space for such engagement. The Committee asks the Scottish Government what steps it is

taking to ensure that headteachers have the capacity to work with teachers, parents, carers and pupils to consult them in a meaningful way on the deployment of PEF within their schools.

### Update

- Education Scotland's Attainment Advisors continue to play a key role in working closely with local authorities and schools to ensure the aims of the national PEF guidance are highlighted and can be achieved at local level. Attainment Advisors provided support and guidance which contributes to PEF planning and evaluating approaches. Attainment Advisors hold regular PEF clinics for headteachers and school staff also. Through support and challenge professional dialogue AAs and SRAs are ensuring that the SAC funding is spent on interventions that are making a real difference to those children and young people most impacted by poverty. ES is working with a few Local Authorities to further develop approaches to tracking and measuring the impact of interventions. Following a successful piece of work between the Attainment Advisor and Perth and Kinross council which has been shared, a number of LAs are now developing more specific tools to track, monitor and measure the impact of interventions. This work has potential to become a national resource.
- Our Pupil Equity Funding guidance states that schools are expected to incorporate details of their Pupil Equity Funding plans and explicitly report on the impact on outcomes for learners impacted by poverty. This should be done within existing local authority reporting processes to their Parent Council and Forum, including in their annual School Improvement Plans and Standards and Quality Reports. These plans and reports must be made publicly available so that parents and carers can easily access, understand and where appropriate, challenge, what is happening in their school with regard to Pupil Equity Funding.
- A focussed number of Attainment Advisors now have a link partnership role to strengthen support in building the capacity of national organisations who receive Attainment Scotland Funding through the National Programme strand of the programme. Youthlink Scotland and Young Scot, whose work with children and young people includes capturing their voice on key issues such as readiness to learn, are supported by AAs to fulfil their responsibilities within Recovery and Accelerating Progress and improve evaluation of their impact.
- Education Scotland is engaged in dialogue with ADES about how to strengthen approaches to participatory budgeting to ensure a stronger stakeholder voice in their local communities.

9. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government tasks Education Scotland with monitoring practices in schools and local authorities to ensure that the voices of teachers, parents, carers and children and young people are at the centre of plans for attainment challenge spending.

## Update

- Education Scotland provides further professional dialogue and support aligned to UNCRC at every level of the system. This includes professional learning for elected members and a continuation of the 'train the trainers' approach for local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) who have not previously participated, or who have requested further input. Specific targeted professional dialogue and support has been undertaken with the South West and Tayside RICs, and Moray and Highland councils. (Action relates to UNCRC).
- Education Scotland has a lead officer for supporting UNCRC who continues to receive regular requests for professional learning and advice around embedding rights-based approaches and effective learner participation. Professional Learning for all ES staff is in train and is increasing ES capacity to support the system including a focus on Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments.
- The lead officer is working with third sector partners to develop a 'skills and knowledge framework' around incorporation and implementation of UNCRC. All other support is ongoing, with renewed input for the West Partnership, Orkney and Aberdeenshire. It is anticipated that staff in all sectors will have a more in-depth understanding of how to embed rights based approaches. Elected Member Training is being planned as incorporation is expected later this year. On average all professional engagement is rated as 4.5/5
- The Young Leaders of Learning Programme is also now progressing with local authority leads taking this forward following initial input from Education Scotland. Colleagues including Attainment Advisors and Curriculum Innovation Team are promoting this programme as an innovative approach to involving learners in their learning
- HMIE have now completed the programme of ELC and school inspection for 2022/23. This is the first year since inspections were paused in 2020 due to the pandemic. All inspections continue to have a strong focus on engagement with children and young people with their views contributing to the overall inspection findings.

## **Consistency and sharing best practice**

10. The Committee notes with concern evidence on variation in education performance across local authorities in Scotland. It is important that children and young people's outcomes are not dependent on where they live. There is a key role for Education Scotland to play in tackling these variations. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland is tasked with undertaking urgent work to investigate the reasons for these variations and with setting out the action it is taking to achieve consistency across the country. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland reports back to the Committee on progress with this work within 6 months of the publication of this report.

Update

- The Scottish Government, has been working in partnership with Education Scotland, COSLA and ADES to gain a better understanding of the different approaches to educational improvement in each local authority, and the impact these can have on the outcomes young people achieve. This has led to the development of a joint approach to improving educational outcomes and experiences for children and young people which was set out in the 2023 National Improvement Framework.
- This work has clearly demonstrated the importance of taking full account of the context of individual schools and local authorities when making comparisons between them. In order to make meaningful comparisons and support improvement at the local level, the Scottish Government provides two key tools that allow schools and local authorities to compare the performance of a local authority or school to that of a comparator made up of other pupils who have similar key demographic (and other) characteristics to the pupils in the local authority or school of interest:
  - Insight, senior phase benchmarking tool (uses a virtual comparator)
  - Broad General Education (BGE) Tool (uses a comparator score)
- Neither of these tools is publicly available. They were developed for teachers, schools and local authorities to use in order to help them interrogate their own data, and to use the data to inform improvements and ultimately improve outcomes for their learners. Individual local authorities have also developed their own tools for tracking and monitoring learner progress and reporting local performance. A consultation on the future of Insight was undertaken earlier this year. Analysis of the consultation responses is currently underway and will inform consideration and planning for Insight moving forward.
- Alongside this, given their duty for the provision and improvement of school education, local authorities are also working independently and collaboratively, including in RICs, to further understand what more can be done to improve education in all parts of the country.
- This is an extremely complex issue linked to geographical, demographic, historical and capacity issues within local authorities alongside the wider societal impacts. Addressing the variation in outcomes therefore requires collective responsibility remembering that the primary responsibility for improvement lies with local government with appropriate support and challenge from Education Scotland.

Work is underway with senior ADES colleagues to explore how a revised combination of data indicators and intelligence (including outcomes from Collaborative Improvement) can be utilised. The aim is for a matrix of indicators of collaboration to be developed to determine which local authorities

we provide proportionately more support to in 2023/24, with the aim of accelerating progress and improving outcomes.

- Education Scotland continue to link with ADES to develop the work of the four 'Data for Improvement' project teams that have been established to take forward a range of interdependent activities to further strengthen local, regional and national interface. These multi-disciplinary project teams aim to weave together the knowledge and skills of colleagues working across a range of policy areas such as Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), National Improvement Framework (NIF), Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC). This includes work on understanding and tackling variation in performance across the system.
- Throughout 2022/23 Education Scotland has intensified its work with Scottish Borders, Highland and Clackmannashire through a planned programme of engagement focused on Recovery and Accelerating Progress in these areas. This has resulted in additional resources being allocated to work with local authority and school staff in these areas. Progress has been made with building capacity in all three local authorities. Plans are now being revised to ensure continued targeted support where needed but also to release resources to support other LAs in 2023/24.
- Education Scotland, working in partnership with ADES has now completed Collaborative Improvement engagements with 22 LAs. The remainder will take place over session 23/24.

11. The Committee notes that the attainment challenge has been in place since 2015 and during that time many new interventions have been adopted, adapted and, in some cases, abandoned. With the introduction of the refreshed approach, it is vital that lessons learned during that period are shared widely and systematically. Given the mixed evidence on whether this is happening on the ground, the Committee asks the Scottish Government to closely monitor how effectively and consistently best practice is being shared by Education Scotland.

#### Update

- Education Scotland work closely with Scottish Government to ensure effective practice is shared widely.
- Through Scotland's Equity Toolkit, the Equity Sway and Education Scotland SAC website, Education Scotland delivers regular signposting of key national guidance, national and international research and think pieces on leadership, pedagogical approaches and partnerships which support children, families and communities impacted by poverty.
- The Equity Toolkit was launched as a prototype in 2022. A public consultation was launched as part of the service design approach to developing the

resource and responses to the consultation were reviewed and applied to the final version which went live in June 2023.

- Attainment Advisors work closely with local authorities to provide continued advice and guidance based on research and evidence.
- Education Scotland have established a Local Authority Scottish Attainment Challenge Leads network. Through collaborative planning and delivery between ES AAs and LA SAC leads, this network provides regular opportunities for local practice and lessons learned to be shared across the system.
- At the beginning of 2022-23 Education Scotland reinstated triannual reports with themes for these set out and shared with local authorities. Themes link to the Logic Model, the SAC Self-Evaluation Resource and the three big drivers of Leadership, Learning, Teaching and Assessment and Families and Communities.
- Reports detail strategies and practices which are working well. Education Scotland shares the findings of these reports through a range of approaches including SAC Lead events. A national summary is published following each triannual reporting period. This is a high-level evaluative publication which provides an overview of what is going well within the themes of the report.

12. The Committee notes the role of RICs in supporting local authorities and schools and promoting consistency in outcomes. The role of HM Inspectorate of Education is explored later in this report; the Committee recommends that the performance of RICs is evaluated by HM Inspectorate of Education as part of its ongoing work.

### Update

- There is a clear process and timeline in place for review of RIC plans which was agreed at our regular RIC Strategy Group meeting. Peer discussions of draft plans involving duos or trios of RIC Leads supported by SRAs are completed yearly. Education Scotland review RIC Plans and share commentary with RIC Leads before being finalised.
- On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023, the Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills announced that there would be a rapid review of the impact that Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) have had on supporting pupils and practitioners. Planning for this is well underway and the review is currently on track to be completed by the end of October.
- The Scottish Government has agreed to work closely with RICs, COSLA and Education Scotland in delivering this Review. In developing this commission, we have therefore considered the themes from the draft self-evaluation framework currently being developed by the RICs to frame our request for evidence and shared this commission in draft for consideration and comment prior to issue.

- There will be some limited evidence available through the ASF Evaluation SAC Leads Survey in relation to the role of the RICs in the Challenge. This will be contained in the process evaluation report expected to be published in September 2023.

### **Life outside school and the role of the third sector**

13. The Committee notes that the poverty-related attainment gap cannot be tackled by schools alone. There is a need for strong collaboration with stakeholders, including third sector organisations which can often facilitate the vital link between school and home. The Committee is aware that the short-term nature of funding is a long-standing problem for many third sector organisations. The Committee invites local authorities to consider how multi-year funding can be offered to third sector organisations within the parameters of the Framework. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland monitors how local authorities are, where appropriate, ensuring stability of funding for third sector partners and evaluating how such longer-term relationships impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families.

#### Update

- Attainment Advisors continue to work with local authorities to support effective use of the Attainment Scotland Fund and ensure that local authority decision making is in line with national guidance for the various strands of the Fund, including third sector spending. SRA and AA work with Local authorities to consider effective use of PEF alongside strategic dialogue with ADES and COSLA.
- The contributions of wider services supporting children and young people and their families are vital to supporting pupils' readiness to learn. Collaboration across services is crucial in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap. Our guidance documents encourage partners to consider the totality of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and work collaboratively to enhance local plans to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and contribute to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- A small number of Attainment Advisors now have a link partnership role to strengthen support in building the capacity of national organisations who receive Attainment Scotland Funding through the National Programme strand of the programme such as Youthlink and Young Scot to fulfil their responsibilities within Recovery and Accelerating Progress and improve evaluation of their impact

### **PEF: free school meals metric**

14. The Committee notes evidence that free school meals is not a reliable metric for calculating PEF allocation to schools and that this formula excludes a number of schools from receipt of PEF. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government make an early start in considering what metric it may use to determine



any future allocation of school-level national funding. The Committee would welcome details of the timescales of this work and what form it will take.

### Update

- In order to support long term planning, last year PEF allocations were confirmed and published for the next four years, giving local authorities and schools certainty for their longer-term planning. PEF Allocations totalling over £520 million funding this parliamentary term are empowering headteachers to achieve their ambitions to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty.
- A further avenue being explored for any future PEF model is the possibility of using data on receipt of Scottish Child Payment as an alternative to Free School Meal data. The Scottish Government does not currently have authorisation to use this Scottish Child Payment data for deprivation-related spending allocations. Officials have opened dialogue with Social Security Scotland to discuss the feasibility of using of this data and explore the issues around gaining access and the Committee will be updated with progress.

### **Additionality**

15. The Committee considers that greater clarity on the level of discretion available in relation to additionality would be helpful for school leaders in determining how to spend these funds. Such clarity would also be helpful to those who ought to be part of the decision-making process at the school level, i.e. pupils, parents/carers and teachers.

### Update

- Refreshed [2023 National PEF Operational Guidance](#), published in June 2023, helps schools plan how they will most effectively and fully invest their Pupil Equity Funding allocation to improve the educational outcomes of children affected by poverty. The refreshed PEF guidance includes the following key principles which should be adhered to:-
  - Headteachers will have access to their school's full allocated amount of Pupil Equity Funding and should work in partnership with each other, and their local authority, to agree the use of funding. Local authorities should not 'top slice' Pupil Equity Funding.
  - Pupil Equity Funding must enable schools to deliver activities, approaches or resources which are clearly additional to universal local improvement plans.
  - Teachers, parents and carers, children and young people and other key stakeholders should be meaningfully involved throughout the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating approaches.
  - Schools should be able to access ongoing advice and guidance from the Attainment Advisor team to maximise improved outcomes for children and young people as a result of Pupil Equity Funding. Attainment Advisors can be integral to facilitating good communication

between headteachers, helping to share best practice and providing guidance on effective planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions in schools, local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives.

## **Rural schools**

16. There is an active role for Education Scotland to make sure that the needs of rural schools are taken into account as part of the attainment challenge. The Committee was not convinced by the response from Education Scotland when asked what steps it takes to tackle the specific barriers faced by rural schools in closing the attainment gap. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government sets out how barriers to progress in rural schools will be tackled through the Framework and reports back to the Committee with proposals for ensuring that these schools have the same opportunities to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils as their urban counterparts.

### Update

- We know that nationally recognised data sets are suppressed due to low numbers and do not accurately reflect the barriers and poverty faced in rural communities. Therefore effective action to support families facing disadvantage relies heavily on local knowledge..
- We continue to focus on enhancing our use of child poverty data and intelligence, developing an improved, shared understanding of the actions that are effective at the local level, and considering how further improvements can be supported through bespoke solutions, rooted in local communities, and placing children and families at the centre of interventions.
- Education Scotland has supported local authorities in setting their stretch aims, as part of which appropriate adjustments to the Framework requirements have been discussed and agreed to take account of the demographics of rural areas.
- Education Scotland, Scottish Government colleagues and representatives from three island authorities have been working very closely to develop a 'three-island' data set. To date, progress has been made in developing a data set that will support collaborative working across schools and across the three islands. In addition, a trial is being developed of a data set that will allow for more identification of the poverty-related attainment gap, taking into account rurality.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

### **Monitoring and evaluation – conclusions**

17. Closing the attainment gap is a complex endeavour. The Committee notes the plan for stretch aims to be set at local authority level and for this to be aggregated

into national targets. The Committee seeks assurances from the Scottish Government that there will be sufficient challenge in this process to ensure that both local and national targets are ambitious and that appropriate milestones are set. The Committee also asks the Scottish Government to set out how robust national data will be produced on outcomes when local authorities may use different metrics within the 'core-plus' model of setting stretch aims.

### Update

- Aggregated local stretch aims for 2022/23 are published here: [Scottish Attainment Challenge - local stretch aims: 2022 to 2023 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/AttainmentChallenge-localstretchaims2022to2023)
- Having a set of core aims ensures we are able to understand progress across a set of consistent measures, with a robust understanding of progress available as national data becomes available at various points in the year.
- The value of the “plus” element recognises that local authorities work across a range of different local contexts and will, rightly, have a range of further local priorities.
- We will know what progress has been made for the core aims based on national data at various points:
  - December for primary school literacy and numeracy;
  - February for senior phase SCQF levels 5 and 6 as we focus on leavers rather than cohorts; and,
  - August for the SDS APM data.
- For both overall attainment and in terms of closing the poverty-related attainment gap in literacy and numeracy, the collective stretch aims of local authorities demonstrate ambitions to work towards achieving the biggest two year improvement recorded since the introduction of the Challenge (in the years for which data is available).
- Given the effect of Covid-19 on pupils' achievement of Curriculum for Excellence levels in 2020/21, the aggregation of these aims represents significant local ambition for recovery back to and beyond the national position pre-pandemic.
- We've seen that progress has been made in at primary school level for 2021/22, where data showed the biggest improvement in reducing the attainment gap in one year on record and we hope to see more progress for 2022/23.
- LAs are setting their next set of aims, which will be set for the three-year period from 2023/24 to 2025/26. ES are working closely with Local Authorities to provide support and challenge through the introduction of universal, targeted and intensive support, whilst Local Authorities themselves, through

ADES and RICs, are sharing practice and peer reviewing the aims they're developing.

- As highlighted earlier, there will be evidence in the SAC Leads Survey on the processes that local authorities took to develop stretch aims in the first year and we will share that with the Committee when it is available.

18. The Committee heard evidence that it can be challenging to attribute an improvement in attainment to specific interventions. The Committee is concerned that this makes measuring outcomes from the large investment in the attainment challenge difficult. The Committee notes the work ongoing in improving measurement of outcomes and considers that this work is vital to enable the impact of the attainment challenge to be properly measured. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland is tasked with ensuring that every local authority has access to relevant external expertise to enable them to measure the effectiveness of interventions.

### Update

- Building capacity in effective use of data remains a high priority for Education Scotland. It is a fundamental role for Attainment Advisors and all 32 LAs continue to have access to this expertise.
- The introduction of local stretch aims has significantly increased LA and school focus on effective use of data to plan and measure improvement. SRAs and AAs continue to play a strong partnership role in supporting all LAs in setting appropriately ambitious stretch aims and reviewing progress with these throughout the year.
- Education Scotland continues to review and enhance approaches to professional learning and leadership and provision of professional advice and support in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. They continue to lead improvement and build capacity, share practice and broker connections with partners. Working collaboratively with local authorities and stakeholders, Education Scotland's attainment advisors, SRAs and other relevant staff support the identification of any gaps in service provision and provide support, where required, to address these.
- Scotland's Equity Toolkit aims to provide an accessible and adaptable resource for local and sectoral needs to support the refreshed mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The toolkit has been designed to support practitioners in their practice and decision making by providing access to a range of evidence, research and practice, and importantly identify the conditions contributing to success in one place. It includes key information which may be helpful to consider or guide implementation and sustainability in different settings. The toolkit is underpinned by existing research and evidence and is updated regularly to ensure it contains high quality information that is relevant and impactful.

- Education Scotland have successfully introduced a professional learning programme on “Self-evaluation for Continuous Improvement” which includes a module on effective use of data. This programme has been rolled out to 21 LAs. Through this programme ES have engaged with head teachers and depute head teachers from all sectors as well as involving quality improvement lead officers, education managers, SAC leads and CLD teams to deepen their skills and understanding of outcomes and measures to ensure effective evaluation of SAC work at local level.
- Our AA reporting also indicates an increase level of support and challenge to schools from local authorities who have strengthened their guidance on this aspect of SAC work.
- The ‘PKC Closing the Gap Tool’ has enabled schools to plan, track and evaluate the impact of interventions including PEF. In the 2022-23 academic year, the authority could evidence the impact of 920 interventions delivered to over 10,000 learners. The information is analysed and used to evaluate impact and inform future improvement planning and activity. This work is gaining increased interest from authorities across Scotland. A similar approach has now been developed in West Lothian and the tool has been shared with colleagues in Wales interested in links to their Challenge work. .
- The ASF Evaluation Strategy has a focus on measuring impact and an Impact Feasibility Study is currently underway and will Report in early October 2023. The Feasibility Study specifically looks at approaches to assess impact for years 2-5 and we would be happy to share these findings with the Committee in due course.

19. The Committee heard in evidence that there is a lack of transparency and accessibility to data on the outcomes of the attainment challenge. The Committee notes that the Scottish Government publishes a National Improvement Framework Evidence Report which provides data on education performance and closing the attainment gap nationally and at a local authority level. The Committee would welcome details of how the Scottish Government will present this data alongside local stretch aims and how parents/carers will be supported to use this tool to better understand their local authority's performance.

#### Update

- In June 2023 we published [Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: Reporting on National Improvement Framework Attainment and Health and Wellbeing Measures 2023](#). A core objective of the ASF Evaluation Strategy is to assess the impact of the overall fund in improving outcomes in educational attainment and achievement and health and wellbeing and closing the poverty-related attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.
- The Report provides a high-level summary of progress, presented as a concise narrative with infographics. In addition, supplementary tables are

provided separately for each of the attainment measures and the Attendance health and wellbeing measure.

- The Report constitutes a key piece of Evaluation evidence which will be triangulated with other key evidence sources in interim summary reporting in 2024/25.
- In March 2023, we published a [more accessible version of the 2023 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan](#) which summarises the vision and priorities for Scottish education, and the national improvement activity that needs to be undertaken to help deliver those key priorities.

### **Role of the HM Inspectorate of Education**

20. There is an opportunity with the forthcoming education reforms to ensure that the schools inspectorate plays a full role in monitoring the effectiveness of the implementation of plans to close the poverty-related attainment gap. The Committee believes it is essential that this is factored into the design of the new education agencies, which is currently ongoing.

#### Update

- On 22 June the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced to Parliament, that we will take forward the recruitment of an interim HM Chief Inspector for education, who will play a critical role in driving quality improvement, providing strategic guidance and leadership to education inspection as part of the reform agenda.

### **Longitudinal study**

21. Given the size of the budget and scale of ambition, it is vital that the long-term impact of the attainment challenge funding is measured. Evaluating what types of interventions and policy approaches create better outcomes in the long-run is a vital part of any policy approach, be that at a local or national level. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government commissions a longitudinal study into the impact of the attainment challenge policy. The study should cover the impact of the policy at a national, regional and school level.

#### Update

- Prior to the launch of the refreshed SAC programme in March 2022 a review was undertaken of the SAC Logic Model on a collaborative basis with key system stakeholders. This underpins the new [Evaluation Strategy](#) which was published in November 2023. The development and publication of the SAC Logic Model has supported understanding of the Programme outcomes and the shared endeavour of the Challenge.
- The ASF evaluation work strands are:
  - Process Evaluation – Considering the implementation of the SAC refresh

- Thematic – readiness to learn
  - Thematic – families and communities
  - Thematic – CYP voice
  - NIF Attainment and health and wellbeing measures reporting
  - Impact Feasibility Study
- The Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation Strategy includes in 2022/23 an impact feasibility study. This study involves reviewing all available data and evidence and working collaboratively with the Evaluation Advisory Panel members to consider approaches to assessing impact for years 2-5 of the SAC Refreshed Programme. This includes consideration of a longitudinal study focused on the impact of the Attainment Scotland Fund on children and young people's outcomes.

### **Positive destinations**

22. The Committee welcomes the good work being carried out by teachers, schools and local authorities to assist young people in finding positive destinations on leaving school. The Committee notes the evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on the narrowing of the gap between young people from the most and least deprived areas participating in education, training, and employment on leaving school. There were mixed views in the Committee regarding the value of positive destinations as they are currently defined. The Committee did not examine the details of the types of destinations being counted under this measurement as part of this inquiry.

### Update

- The latest figures demonstrate continued improvement in this area#, with a record low poverty related attainment gap in positive destinations for 2021/22 school leavers 9 months after leaving school of 7 percentage points. This gap has narrowed from 18.7 percentage points in 2009-10.
- Positive destinations information is managed and hosted by Skills Development Scotland on behalf of the Opportunities for All partners.
- This information gives us a better understanding of the intended and actual destination of young people after they leave school. It enables front line staff to be better placed to provide support for young people who are not in training, learning or work and are at risk of disengagement. Information sharing is about ensuring young people reach their full potential.
- It is crucial that the right support for our school pupils and leavers is in place. Effective information sharing between partners allows us to quickly identify and engage with a young person who has not secured a positive destination after school, has failed to complete a course of learning/training or has not started working.

- It is about helping and supporting them to make a positive transition from school to the wider world of education, training and employment. Information sharing gives partners the confidence that each young person has received the most appropriate support for them

23. The Committee believes that it is important to consider outcomes of the attainment challenge in terms of sustainable post-16 positive destinations and the life-long learning agenda. The Committee notes evidence that the use of the system varies across the country and the current measure of positive destinations is not always capable of following a young person when their location changes. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland takes steps to address these issues so that the long-term sustainability of positive destinations can be fully tracked and measured.

#### Update

- The Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation Strategy includes in 2022/23 an impact feasibility study. This involves consideration of all available data sets and evidence and includes investigating the potential use of GUS data in future impact evaluation.
- Education Scotland's Senior Regional Advisors and Attainment Advisor provide support and challenge to local authorities in the setting of stretch aims which includes the proportion of 16–19-year-olds participating in education, employment or training based on the Annual Participation Measure. Data is analysed and used to inform planning and interventions. Evidence of progress from across local authorities is captured through reporting cycles
- We have seen a record number of Scottish students from deprived areas enrolling in university for the first time in recent years and a report from the Commissioner for Fair Access made clear that Scotland continues to set the pace in the UK in terms of fair access to higher education. Since we established a Commission on Widening access in 2014, there has been a 41% increase in the number of university students from deprived areas and the Scottish Government provides universities with additional investment to fund extra places targeted at learners from Scotland's most deprived communities.

#### **Accountability**

24. Education Scotland has a key role in the Framework to provide challenge and support to local authorities, headteachers and classroom teachers. Given the number of stakeholders involved in delivering the attainment challenge, it is crucial that the education agency takes ownership and demonstrates accountability for outcomes. This must be incorporated into the design of the new education agency.

#### Update

- Education Scotland continue to support and challenge local authorities through their regional teams, including an attainment advisor for each local authority.



Attainment advisors work closely with Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) leads within each local authority to implement the refreshed framework. Support and challenge are provided at local authority level as well as school level, particularly in areas where children and young people are most deprived.

- Education Scotland is also supporting the system through its programme of universal, targeted and intensive support. Through regional teams and the work of attainment advisors, tailored support is provided to schools and local authorities. Education Scotland, in consultation with local authorities, continue to consider where further support is required both at school and local authority level based on levels of deprivation, performance data and contextual analysis. Key areas considered include: leadership of progress and achievement of stretch aims, outcome trends in identified measures and self-evaluation processes and their impact along with core data sets.
- Education Scotland are also supporting the system through its work with Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) to undertake a programme of Collaborative Improvement. The aim of Collaborative Improvement is to share what works well at a local authority level and to support improvement in areas of local authority activity that have been identified as in need of further development. Collaborative Improvement aims to promote partnership working to ensure that we achieve sustainable improvements for all children and young people, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is consistent with the national goal of achieving excellence and equity and can also help to promote increased consistency of outcomes for learners.