

Measuring the attainment gap

1. The Scottish Government has committed to making demonstrable progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap during the lifetime of this Parliament, and to substantially eliminate it in the next decade. Therefore, it is essential to have clear milestones to measure whether, and how quickly, the gap in achievement between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people is closing. We have undertaken to consult on proposals for measuring the gap and milestones towards closing it and to publish our proposals as part of the 2018 Improvement Plan in December.

Proposals for consultation

2. In developing our proposals, we have based our thinking on a number of principles:

- the most and least disadvantaged for these purposes are those children and young people from the bottom and top SIMD quintiles respectively
- focussing on a single measure is neither helpful, meaningful, and would provide a false and limited picture
- measures and milestones should be relatively simple to measure and report against
- there needs to be a clear line of sight from the agreed measures and milestones to the priorities set out in the National Improvement Framework
- there should be a focus on literacy and numeracy, complemented by health and wellbeing
- the focus should be across the age ranges – from 3-18
- they should be a credible set of measures – understood to fairly reflect progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap
- the need to avoid perverse incentives through whatever milestones or stretch aims are set.

3. There are 8 proposed key measures (2015/16 data):

Measure	All children %	Most disadvantaged (bottom 20% SIMD) %	Least disadvantaged (top 20% SIMD) %	Gap (percentage points)
27-30 month review (Children showing no concerns across all domains)	64	55	72	17
Primary – Literacy (P1, P4, P7 combined)	68	58	80	21
Secondary Literacy (S3, 3rd level or better)	82	74	91	17
Primary – Numeracy (P1, P4, P7 combined)	75	68	85	18
Secondary Numeracy (S3, 3rd level or better)	86	77	94	17
SCQF 5 or above (1 or more on leaving school)	85.6	74.4	94.7	20.3
SCQF 6 or above (1 or more on leaving school)	61.7	42.7	81.2	38.5
Participation measure	90.4	83.4	96.2	12.8

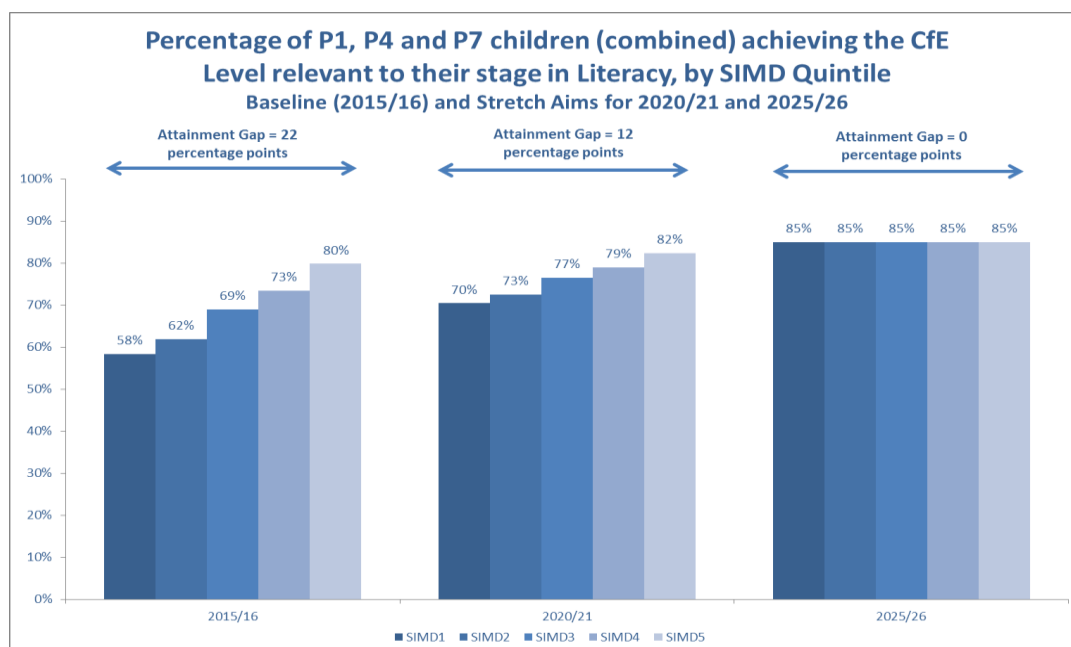
4. These 8 key measures will be supported by 17 sub-measures. These sub-measures cover attainment in literacy and numeracy at each of P1, P4, P7 and S3 to ensure that we have a picture of progress at each of these levels, as well as a number of input measures such as attendance, exclusions and health and wellbeing. These have not been included in the key measures to ensure that we have a manageable number and because the input measures are not direct measures of attainment.

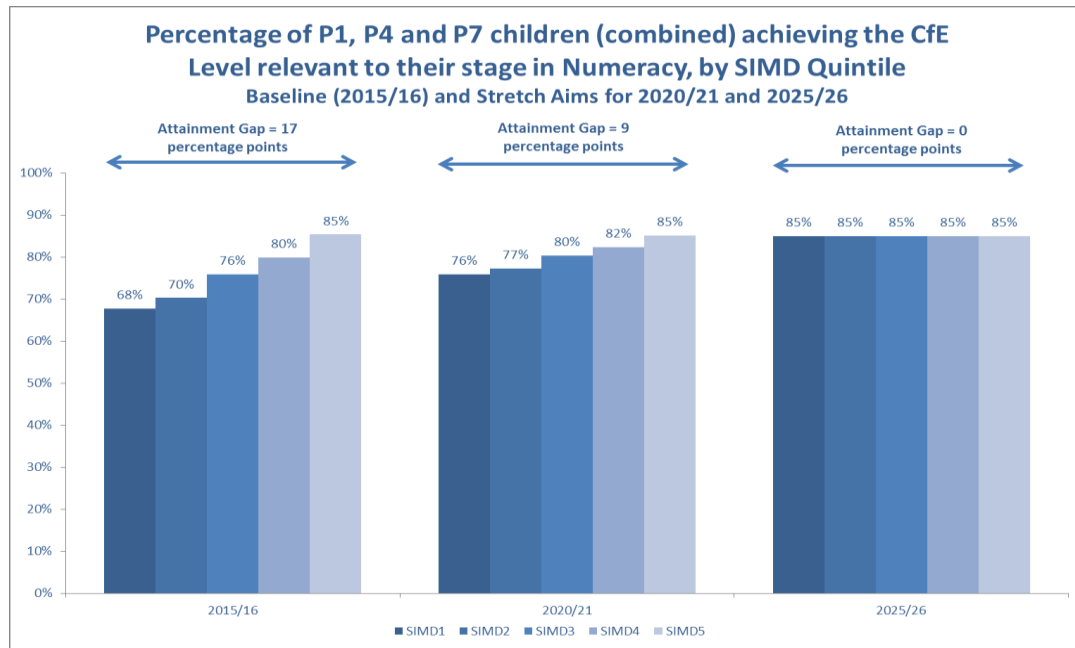
Milestones

5. We are not proposing to set milestones simply related to reducing the gaps identified for each measure, eg a 25% reduction in that gap by 2020. While achieving this milestone would demonstrate that the gap was closing, it would not necessarily mean that attainment was increasing.

6. It is suggested therefore that the most effective way of measuring progress is to use stretch aims, similar to those set out in the Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative, which sets aims that reflect improvement in every quintile. Stretch aims for improvement purposes are specifically focussed on the improvement which a system needs to make in order to reach a particular goal (i.e. closing the gap) – they do not generally articulate the goal itself, although achieving the aims would also mean significant steps towards achieving the goal.

7. The graphs below give an illustration of possible stretch aims for two of the key measures to give an indication of what this would look like and the positive impact achieving them would have on closing the gap.





Questions

- Are these the right principles?
- Do you agree with having a basket of key measures to assess the progress made?
- Are the proposed key measures the right ones?
- Is the use of stretch aims, by SIMD quintile, the right way to set milestones?

National Improvement Framework Unit, August 2017