

Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: Reporting on National Improvement Framework Attainment and Health and Wellbeing Measures, 2023



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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Summary Infographics

Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation, April 2023



Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels

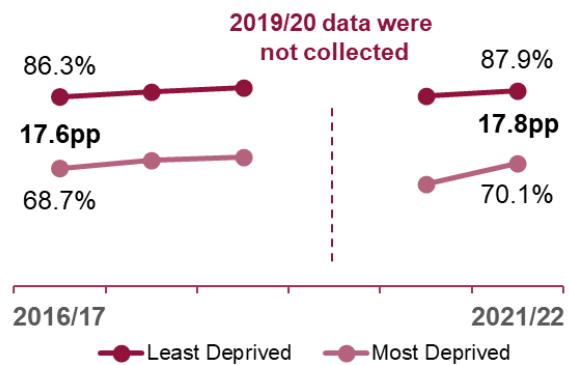
► The attainment gap between school pupils in the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas has **narrowed** since 2016/17 in **Primary Literacy**. It has **widened** since 2016/17 in **Primary Numeracy**.

Percentage of **P1, P4 and P7 pupils** combined achieving expected level by SIMD quintile, 2016/17 to 2021/22:

Primary Literacy



Primary Numeracy

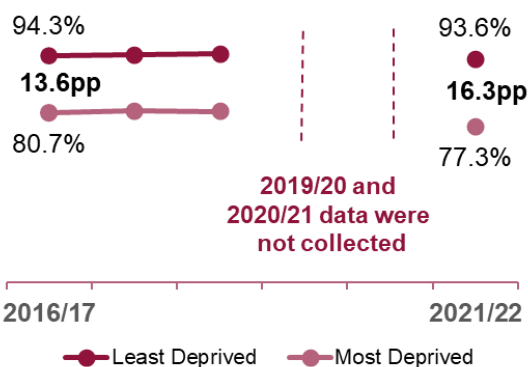


Overall, the percentage of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) achieving expected **Literacy** levels has **increased** from **69.2%** in 2016/17 to **70.5%** in 2021/22. The percentage achieving expected **Numeracy** levels has **increased** from **76.4%** in 2016/17 to **77.9%** in 2021/22.

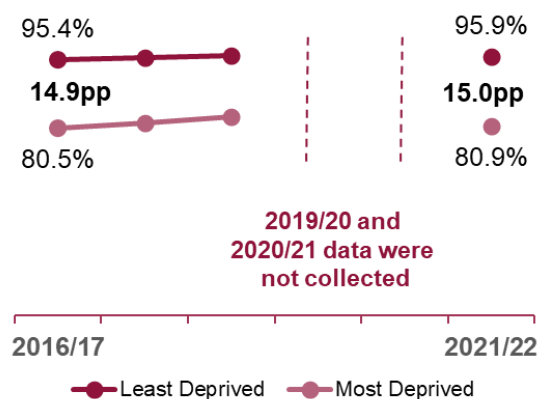
► The attainment gap between school pupils in the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas has **widened** since 2016/17 in **Secondary Literacy** and **widened slightly** in **Secondary Numeracy**.

Percentage of **S3 pupils** achieving Third Level or better by SIMD quintile, 2016/17 to 2021/22:

Secondary Literacy



Secondary Numeracy



Overall, the percentage of S3 pupils achieving Third Level or better in **Literacy** has **decreased** from **87.1%** in 2016/17 to **85.5%** in 2021/22. The percentage achieving **Numeracy** has **increased** from **88.2%** in 2016/17 to **89.1%** in 2021/22.

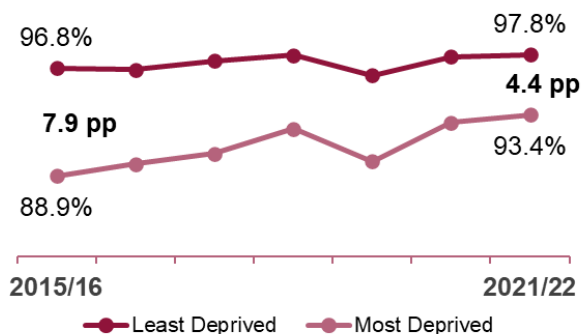
Notes:

- These statistics are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic should be borne in mind when considering changes over time. See the relevant section(s) of the publication for more details.
- pp = percentage point. Percentage point gaps are calculated from unrounded numbers.



School leaver initial destinations

► The gap between leavers from the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas in a positive initial destination has **narrowed** since 2015/16.

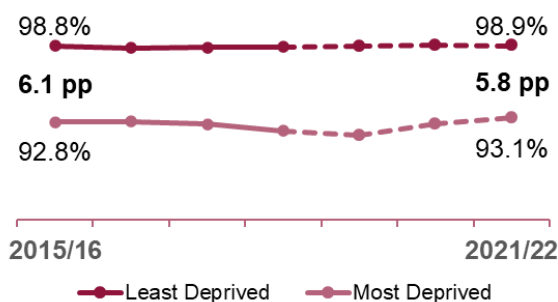


Overall, the percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination has **increased**, from **93.5%** in 2015/16 to **95.7%** in 2021/22.

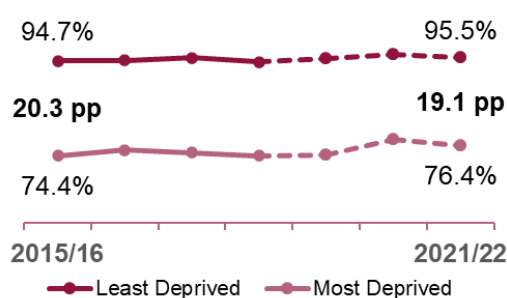
School leaver attainment

► The attainment gap between leavers from the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas has **narrowed** since 2015/16 at SCQF Levels 4 or better, 5 or better and 6 or better.

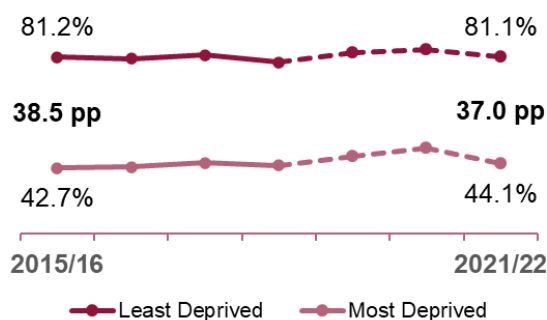
1 pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better



1 pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better



1 pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better



Overall, the percentage of school leavers with one or more qualifications has:

- **Increased slightly** at **SCQF Level 4 or better**, from **96.3%** in 2015/16 to **96.4%** in 2021/22.
- **Increased** at **SCQF Level 5 or better**, from **85.6%** in 2015/16 to **86.4%** in 2021/22.
- **Decreased** at **SCQF Level 6 or better**, from **61.7%** in 2015/16 to **61.3%** in 2021/22.

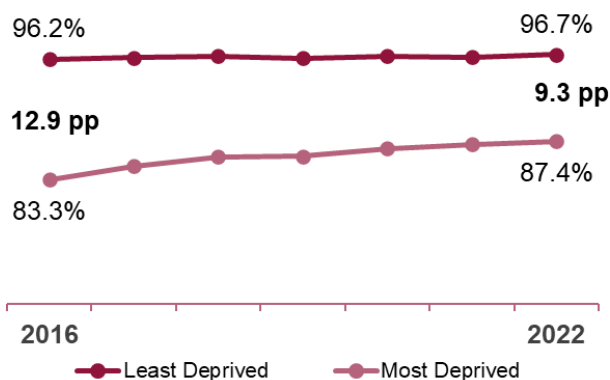
Notes:

- These statistics are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic should be borne in mind when considering changes over time. See the relevant section(s) of the publication for more details.
- Dashed line represents break in attainment data series due to the change in certification methods in 2020 and 2021. See the relevant section of the publication for more details.
- pp = percentage point. Percentage point gaps are calculated from unrounded numbers.



Annual Participation Measure

► The gap between the percentage of 16-19 year olds from the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas participating in education, training or employment has **narrowed** since 2016.

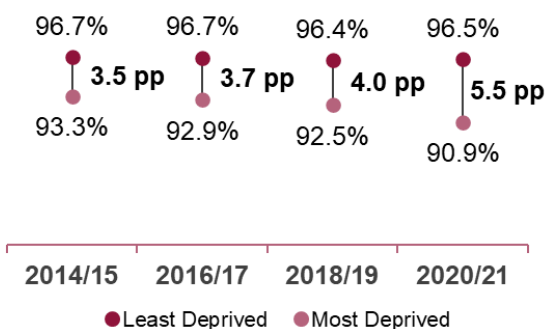


Overall, the percentage of 16-19 year olds participating has **increased**, from **90.4%** in 2016 to **92.4%** in 2022.

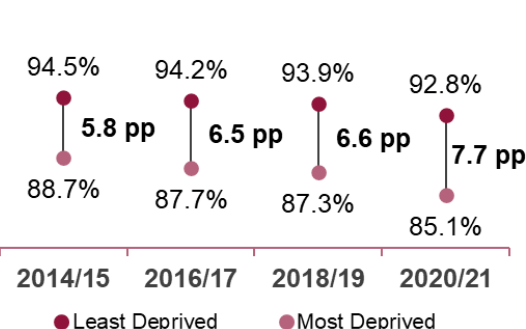
Attendance (primary and secondary)

► The gap in attendance between school pupils from the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas has **widened** since 2014/15, for primary school pupils and secondary school pupils.

Primary school attendance



Secondary school attendance



Overall, attendance for **Primary school** pupils has **decreased** from **95.1%** in 2014/15 to **94.0%** in 2020/21. Attendance for **Secondary school** pupils has also **decreased**, from **91.8%** in 2014/15 to **89.1%** in 2020/21.

Notes:

- These statistics are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the pandemic should be borne in mind when considering changes over time. See the relevant section(s) of the publication for more details.
- The attendance rate for 2020/21 refers to attendance when schools were open for pupils to attend in person.
- Attendance data is collected every two years.
- pp = percentage point. Percentage point gaps are calculated from unrounded numbers.

Section 1

Introduction

The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in February 2015 with the strategic aim of 'closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities'. The Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF), which supports the Scottish Attainment Challenge, prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing of those children adversely affected by poverty in Scotland's schools. Achieving excellence and equity in education are the key aims.

A key output of the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) Evaluation, this report summarises evidence around improvement in attainment and health and wellbeing, and the gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas. Evidence of impact draws on analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing, based on the measures for monitoring progress on closing the poverty-related attainment gap as set out in the [National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan](#).

A core objective of the [Attainment Scotland Fund - 2022 to 2026: 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.

This report draws together data from measures previously published to present evidence in support of the key evaluation question on closing the poverty-related attainment gap. This relates to:

Evaluation Question 15: To what extent did the fund contribute to a closing of the attainment gap between the most and least socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people, in line with the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission?

Refresh of Scottish Attainment Challenge

The refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in March 2022, with its new mission:

To use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.

The refreshed Programme introduced a number of changes at national, regional and local level. This includes the introduction of Strategic Equity Funding (SEF),

replacing Challenge Authority and Schools Programme Funding, and Local Stretch Aims through the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#).

Stretch Aims

A key element of the Scottish Attainment Challenge Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress was the introduction of a requirement for local authorities to set ambitious and achievable stretch aims for progress in overall attainment and towards closing the poverty related attainment gap in the 2022/23 academic year. Stretch aims are intended to be embedded in local authority education service improvement plans.

Local authority stretch aims were [published](#) and provide information on local authorities' ambitions for progress in overall attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap for 2022/23. These local aims informed an aggregated national picture also included in that publication.

The Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation

The [Evaluation Strategy for the Attainment Scotland Fund 2022-2026](#) sets out the broad terms of the Scottish Government's approach to evaluating the ASF during this parliamentary term. The Strategy has been designed following the refresh of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The evaluation cycle is moving from an annual to a multi-year approach, which aims to build an evidence base over time, offering the opportunity to explore different aspects of the Programme over points in time. This includes an in-year rather than a retrospective evaluation approach, with more frequent publications.

The Strategy sets out the analytical activity related to four key strands of evaluation focus across the multi-year evaluation:

- Process evaluation to consider implementation of the refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund, including Strategic Equity Fund, Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund;
- A thematic strand of evaluation which will respond to emerging system priorities and consider what works, for whom and in what circumstances;
- Reporting on the National Improvement Framework (NIF) measures;
- Evaluation of the impact of ASF, through a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures.

A [detailed analytical plan](#) outlining activity in support of the high level strategy is published annually and this takes account of the new evaluation approach highlighted in the Strategy.

This publication relates to the third strand which will be reported on annually. In previous years reporting on attainment measures was contained in a chapter of the annual, retrospective evaluation reports. For this publication, and moving forward, we are taking an accessible and proportionate approach to reporting by producing a stand-alone report on attainment measures. While the measures summarised are key indicators of progress, analysis of quantitative data must be supplemented with

other evaluation evidence to provide an understanding of the progress being made and why, the views of stakeholders, and what works for whom and in what circumstance.

Measures

Evidence of impact draws on analysis of quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing based on the agreed key measures for monitoring progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap set out in the National Improvement Framework. This sets out a basket of key measures and sub-measures to assess progress. The key measures and reporting periods are shown in Table 5.1 below. The most recently available data will be presented from 2015/16 or 2015 to align with the Scottish Attainment Challenge Programme’s inception, with the exception of Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) data for which consistent data is first available for 2016/17.

Previous ASF Evaluation reporting on attainment and health and wellbeing measures consisted of a subset of the core NIF measures. The approach going forward will be to report on the core NIF attainment and health and wellbeing measures with the exception of the 27–30-month review.¹ The Scottish Government issued a consultation on the core NIF measures on attainment and health and wellbeing which closed in July 2022. As a result of the consultation two new core measures were added: Attendance rates and Initial Positive Destinations. Moving to the core NIF measures will ensure consistency and alignment with annual NIF Improvement Plan reporting.²

Table 5.1: National Improvement Framework Core Attainment and Health and Wellbeing Measures

			Dates
Attainment	Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels – Literacy and Numeracy	P1, P4 and P7 S3	2016/17 – 2021/22
	School leaver attainment in National Qualifications – SCQF Level 4, 5 and 6 or better*	School leavers	2015/16 – 2021/22
	Initial Positive Destinations	School Leavers	2015/16 – 2021/22
	Annual Participation Measure	16–19-year-olds	2016 – 2021/22
Health & Wellbeing	Attendance rates	Primary, Secondary	2016/17 – 2021/22 (biennial publication)
	Total difficulties score	Primary, Secondary	2018
	Mental Wellbeing Score (SALSUS)	Primary, Secondary	2018

¹ 27–30-month review has not previously featured in the ASF Evaluation given the focus of the ASF Funding being on school age children. This will further be considered in the impact feasibility work strand and consideration given to whether additional evaluation sub-questions will be added to encompass an early year’s focus.

² The NIF Consultation sought to consult on how to ensure that the basket of key measures to assess progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap reflects the wider ambitions of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), and the value of wider data for improvement purposes, both qualitative and quantitative, and the range of data needed by schools, education authorities and at the national level in order to fulfil their different requirements. The majority of respondents were supportive of the key principles and felt they were clear in their ambition to reflect the capacities of CfE and the need to reflect a progressive shift in what is valued in education. Respondents also felt that there should be a greater focus on wider achievement and on the whole learner journey from early years onwards (3-18).

Analysis

All of the data are available at both Scotland and local authority level. Each of the measures outlined in the above table in order to address the evaluation question are considered in terms of:

- Overall attainment
- Attainment for pupils from most and least deprived SIMD quintiles
- Percentage point gap between the most and least deprived

In addition, data for the following groups will be shown in supplementary tables:

- Each of the 32 Local Authorities

This report provides a high-level summary of national 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.

Analysis does not include detailed consideration at the local authority level but does point to patterns of variation identified. Information is provided for each measure noting the number of local authorities where it is possible to calculate where the gap has narrowed or widened in recent years. Where the overall numbers are not presented for 32 local authorities, this is due to suppression. This is because there are a small numbers of school leavers; or because the gap cannot be calculated in some years as the local authority had no pupils in either Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintile 1 and/or Quintile 5 in that year.

Section 2

Attainment Measures

Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence³

Primary School Attainment

The attainment of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 pupils combined) in literacy and numeracy is outlined below, based on analysis of Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels 2021/22 data. Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (ACEL) data in primary schools previously showed that the proportion of pupils achieving expected levels in both literacy and numeracy increased steadily from 2016/17 before decreasing in 2020/21. The period of COVID-19 related school building closures undoubtedly impacted with the figures decreasing and the gap between pupils from most and least deprived areas widening.

In 2021/22, primary pupils from the least deprived areas performed better than pupils from the most deprived areas. The gap between the proportion of primary pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy narrowed compared with 2020/21 and is now similar to those seen before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy decreased from 24.7 percentage points in 2020/21 to 21.3 percentage points in 2021/22. The attainment gap on this measure narrowed for 19 local authorities and widened for 10.⁴ Between 2020/21 and 2021/22 the proportion who achieved their expected level in literacy increased more for pupils from the most deprived areas which has led to a narrowing of the gap.

For numeracy, the attainment gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas decreased from 21.4 percentage points in 2020/21 to 17.8 percentage points

³ When considering the data, it is important to note that the Scottish Government did not collect Achievement of CfE Levels data for any pupils in 2019/20; schools were closed in Scotland between March 2020 and the end of the academic year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic meaning that they were closed on the planned ACEL census date of 8th June 2020. It was concluded that it would not be possible to collect consistent data that was fit for purpose and that any attempt to do so would add considerably to other pressures on school and education authority staff. The decision was therefore taken to suspend the data collection. For 2020/21 data was collected for Primary school (P1, P4 and P7) pupils only. Secondary school and special school data was not collected due to other pressures on these schools including implementation of the SQA National Qualifications Alternative Certification Model, which was used to award National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021.

⁴ Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for Primary ACEL Literacy are based on 29 local authorities. The comparison point is between 2020/21 and 2021/22.

in 2021/22 - similar to the gap seen in 2016/17 (17.6pp). The gap narrowed for 21 local authorities and widened for eight between 2020/21 to 2021/22.⁵

Secondary School Attainment

In 2021/22, for both pupils from the most and least deprived areas, the proportion of S3 pupils who achieved Third level or better is lower than in 2018/19 (the last comparable data point). In 2021/22, the gap between the proportion of S3 pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in literacy widened to 16.3 percentage points from 13.8 percentage points in 2018/19. The attainment gap narrowed for 9 local authorities and widened for 10 between 2018/19 and 2021/22.⁶ Whilst the percentage of S3 pupils achieving the expected level in literacy fell for pupils from both the most and least deprived areas, the decrease was larger for those from the most deprived areas.

The gap between the proportion of S3 pupils from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in numeracy widened to 15 percentage points in 2021/22, from 13.5 percentage points in 2018/19. The attainment gap narrowed for 10 local authorities and widened for 9 local authorities.⁷ 2021/22 figures are similar to 2016/17 figures (14.9 percentage points).

Initial Positive Destinations Measure⁸

This measure provides information on the outcomes for young people approximately three months after the end of the academic year (the 1st Monday in October). Positive destination includes higher education, further education, training, employment, voluntary work and Personal Skills Development.

The data shows that in 2021/22 95.7 % of all school leavers were in a positive initial destination, up from 95.5 % in 2020/21.

The gap in the proportion of school leavers in a positive destination has generally been narrowing each year since 2015/16 and in 2021/22 is 4.4 percentage points compared with 7.9 percentage points in 2015/16. While the percentage of school leavers in an initial positive destination has generally been increasing for those from

⁵ Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for Primary ACEL Numeracy are based on 29 local authorities. The comparison point is between 2020/21 and 2021/22.

⁶ Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for Secondary ACEL literacy are based on data for 19 local authorities. The comparison point is between 2018/19 and 2021/22.

⁷ Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for Secondary ACEL Numeracy are based on data for 19 local authorities. The comparison point is between 2018/19 and 2021/22.

⁸ The 2019/20 and 2020/21 figures on school leavers' initial destinations will reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on choices made by, and opportunities available to, leavers in these years. Particular care should therefore be taken when interpreting changes between 2019/20, 2020/21, and other years. The pandemic will have been at least partly responsible for the relatively low proportion of 2019/20 school leavers in a positive destination compared to surrounding years and the size of the latest increase in 2020/21 should be interpreted with this in mind.

both the most and least deprived areas, the increase has been greater for those from the most deprived areas.

Between 2020/21 and 2021/22 the gap narrowed from 4.8 percentage points to 4.4 percentage points – the smallest gap since consistent records began (2009/10). The gap increased more amongst leavers from the most deprived areas than it did amongst those from the least deprived areas. The gap narrowed for 6 local authorities and widened for 4.⁹

School leaver attainment: percentage of school leavers achieving awards by Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 4, 5, 6 or better¹⁰

The measure of attainment of school leavers in Scotland is based on the Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations publication which presents attainment in National Qualifications (Nationals, Highers, Advanced Highers). The COVID-19 pandemic led to changes to the way in which results in these qualifications were determined and so care should be taken when interpreting attainment figures for 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22.

School leaver attainment data between 2015/16 and 2021/22 shows a small decrease in the gap for pupils leaving school with 1 or more qualifications at **SCQF Level 4**¹¹ or better from 6.1 percentage points in 2015/16 to 5.8 percentage points in 2021/22. Between 2020/21 and 2021/22 the gap narrowed from 6.3 to 5.8 percentage points. This narrowing is due to an increase in the proportion of leavers from the most deprived areas who attained a pass at this level.

At **SCQF level 5** or better the gap has reduced slightly over the period 2015/16 to 2021/22, from 20.3 percentage points in 2015/16 to 19.1 percentage points in

⁹ Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for school leavers in a positive initial destination are based on data for 10 local authorities. The number of local authorities considered is due to suppression (small numbers of school leavers) and because local authorities had no pupils in either Q1 and/or Q5 in that year. The comparison point is between 2020/21 and 2021/2022.

¹⁰ When considering the school leaver attainment data, it is important to be aware that the cancellation of exams and external assessment of coursework in 2020, and the use of the Alternative Certification Model in 2021, will have affected the attainment of many 2020/21 school leavers. In 2020 grades were determined based on teacher estimates. In 2021 teachers and lecturers used their professional judgement of a learner's demonstrated attainment to determine results in line with subject-specific guidance. In 2022, there was a return to the use of exams. These were supported by a package of measures such as course modifications and revision support, which were designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching which young people had experienced, while maintaining standards. Care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leavers. Interpretation of changes must take full account of the different certification methods used in different years, and changes in the attainment levels in 2019/20 and 2020/21 should not be seen as an indication that performance has improved or worsened, without further evidence.

¹¹ We have not presented the figures for narrowing and widening of the gap for local authorities for SCQF level 4 due to suppression (small numbers of school leavers) and because local authorities had no pupils in either Q1 and/or Q5 in that year.

2021/22. However the gap widened between 2020/21 to 2021/22 from 18.2 percentage points to 19.1 percentage points. Whilst the proportion attaining 1 pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better decreased for school leavers from both the most and the least deprived areas between 2020/21 and 2021/22, it decreased by more for those from the most deprived areas, which has led to a widening of the gap. The attainment gap narrowed for 10 local authorities and widened for 8.¹²

For pupils who left school with 1 or more qualification at **SCQF Level 6 or better**, the gap narrowed between 2015/16 and 2021/22, from 38.5 percentage points to 37.0 percentage points. Between 2015/16 and 2021/22 the percentage of pupils from the most deprived areas achieving 1 or more passes at SCQF Level 6 increased whilst the proportion amongst those from the least deprived areas decreased very slightly. Between 2020/21 to 2021/22 the attainment gap widened from 34.4 percentage points to 37 percentage points. Over the same period the attainment gap narrowed for 9 local authorities and widened for 19.¹³

Annual Participation Measure (APM)¹⁴

When considering the APM as a measure in the ASF Evaluation it is important to note that the APM is measured from 1st April - 31st March annually, as opposed to the academic year considered in the ASF Evaluation. As such, the figures are not considered across a directly comparable time period.

The proportion of 16-19 year olds participating in education, training or employment was 92.4 % in 2022. This represents an increase of 0.2 percentage points compared to 92.2% in 2021 and is the highest rate since the inception of the APM. Previous figures showed a slight increase year on year with the exception of 2019.

In the 2022 participation measure, those who live in the most deprived areas remain less likely to be participating than those from the least deprived. However the participation gap between those who live in the 20% most deprived areas and those in the 20% least deprived areas continues to show a narrowing of the gap. There was a 0.3pp increase in participation between 2021 and 2022 for those living in the most deprived areas. Between 2021 and 2022 the proportion of 16-19 year

¹² Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for SCQF Level 5 are based on data for 18 local authorities. The comparison point is between 2020/21 and 2021/22.

¹³ Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for SCQF Level 6 are based on data for 28 local authorities. The comparison point is between 2020/21 and 2021/22.

¹⁴ The effects of Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and associated lockdown measures and re-opening of the economy may have influenced the choices made by young adults across the period covered by the 2022 statistics. In addition, for most of the period covered by the 2022 statistics data from DWP about Universal Credit claimants was received. This enabled identification of claimants who were both out of work (unemployed seeking and unemployed not seeking) and in work (employed and self-employed). However, for previous years, this data was not received from DWP. The impacts of the pandemic and the absence of Universal Credit data in prior years should be kept in mind when making comparisons between 2022 and 2021, and when comparing 2022 data with earlier years.

olds in the most and least deprived areas remained at 9.3 percentage points. The attainment gap narrowed for 14 local authorities and widened for 14.¹⁵

The participation measure shows the gap between the proportion of 16-19 year olds in the most and least deprived areas participating in education, training, and employment has steadily decreased from 12.9 percentage points in 2016 to 9.3 percentage points in 2022. This is largely driven by an increase in the proportion of 16-19 year olds from the most deprived areas participating in education, training and employment from 83.3% in 2016 to 87.4% in 2022. Over the same period the percentage of 16-19 year olds from the least deprived areas participating in education, training or employment has largely remained the same, ranging from 96.2% in 2016 to 96.7% in 2022.

Health and Wellbeing Measures

Attendance Rates¹⁶

Information on attendance at schools is collected on a biennial basis. Children's ability to attend school was impacted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and this should be borne in mind when interpreting attendance rates. The 2020/21 data shows that school attendance rates have fallen slightly compared with 2018/19. The gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas showed a pattern of widening pre pandemic. While the attendance rates decreased for pupils from both the most and least deprived areas, the decrease was larger for those from the most deprived areas. In 2020/21, the gap in attendance rates between children living in the most and least deprived areas of Scotland was 6.3 percentage points. This compares with 4.9 percentage points in 2018/19.

The gap in attendance rates was more prominent in secondary schools than primary schools. In both primary and secondary schools the gap in attendance rates increased over time. The attendance of primary school pupils from least deprived areas was fairly stable over time.

For primary school pupils the gap in attendance rates increased between 2018/19 to 2020/21 from 4 percentage points to 5.5 percentage points. The gap narrowed for 1 local authority and widened for 23 over the same time period. Similarly for secondary schools the gap widened from 6.6 percentage points in 2018/19 to 7.7 percentage points in 2020/21. The gap narrowed for 8 local authorities and widened

¹⁵ Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for 16–19-year-olds participating in education, training or employment are based on data for 28 local authorities. The comparison point is between 2021 and 2022.

¹⁶ The attendance rates reported here for 2020/21 use the 'attendance or absence – schools open' measure. This measure includes attendance or absence only for the occasions when schools were open to pupils and are therefore comparable to attendance rates from previous years provided the impact of COVID-19 is borne in mind.

for 21 indicating a pattern of a widening attendance gap across local authorities but not universal with variation at the local authority level.¹⁷

Health and Wellbeing

For health and wellbeing data, the Total Difficulties Score and the Mental Wellbeing score (SALSUS/WEMWBS) has been considered in previous evaluation reports to assess progress. The last available data was collected in 2018, and was reported on in the ASF Year 5 Report (2019/20).

Going forward, the Health and Wellbeing Census will be utilised in the ASF Evaluation to assess progress towards closing the poverty related health and wellbeing gap. The results from the first Health and Wellbeing Census 2021/22 were published in February 2023, focusing on the indicators included in the key existing frameworks, and includes the previously published measures. Local authority tables will be published in May 2023 providing further detail at local authority level on the published measures. The data are the aggregated results for the 16 local authorities who collected data. This is the first large scale health and wellbeing dataset in Scotland available for data linkage for P5 – S6 children and young people, bringing together data across the wellbeing SHANARRI¹⁸ indicators.

Further analysis will be explored, analysing key topics, in future ASF Evaluation reporting.

Section 3

Conclusion and Discussion

The Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) Evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and the extent to which the aims of ASF are being met in terms of closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Specifically the analysis of quantitative measures for attainment and health and wellbeing seeks to assess to what extent the fund contributed to a closing of the attainment gap between the most and least socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people.

It is important to note that there are a wealth of data available to use to measure progress and consideration of the quantitative measures alone is not an appropriate way in itself to draw definitive conclusions. This is why a broad basket of core NIF attainment and health and wellbeing measures is utilised and analysis of these measures will be triangulated with other key Evaluation evidence in summary reporting in Year 3 (2024/25).

¹⁷ Figures presented on the number of local authorities where the gap has narrowed or widened for attendance rates in primary and secondary are based on data for 24 and 29 local authorities respectively. The comparison point is between 2018/19 and 2020/21.

¹⁸ To support understanding of wellbeing the Scottish Government has described wellbeing in terms of eight indicators which are safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. Known as the acronym SHANARRI.

The analysis presented in this report, as in previous annual ASF annual evaluation reports, continues to indicate at a national level that on several measures there is positive progress in closing the attainment gap, however, this is varied depending on the measure under consideration and the time period comparison point. The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the attainment gap cannot be underestimated and the current cost of living crisis has deepened inequity, however at the national level there are indications of recovery with the 2021/22 ACEL data showing the biggest single year decrease in the attainment gap in primary literacy and numeracy since the data collection began in 2016/17.

The measures around initial destinations and participation also show clear and consistent progress at the national level, with the poverty-related gap narrowing and young people from the most deprived areas more likely to be in a positive destination than in the past. In 2021/22 the poverty related attainment gap for positive initial destinations shows the smallest gap since consistent records began. These figures were affected by the impact of the pandemic, but have recovered and moved beyond pre-pandemic levels.

Attainment at SCQF levels show a positive trend nationally, with school leavers from the most deprived areas more likely to have at least one pass at SCQF levels 4-6 than in 2015/16, with a narrowing of the gap with those from the least deprived areas. Whilst the trends indicate progress, care must be taken in the interpretation of the data, particularly given the alternative approaches taken to determining grades in 2020 and 2021.

Progress around ACEL and attendance appear more mixed. In terms of ACEL, while, compared to 2016/17, the proportion of pupils achieving their expected level has increased at a national level for all pupils and for pupils from the most deprived areas (aside from secondary literacy), the attainment gap is wider (apart from in primary literacy). However, it should be noted that the pandemic appears to have had an impact of these figures. In both literacy and numeracy, ACEL levels amongst primary school pupils increased, and the gap reduced, between 2020/21 and 2021/22, indicating a degree of recovery following the pandemic.

Attendance in both primary and secondary schools has decreased since 2014/15, alongside a widening of the gap in attendance between school pupils from the most deprived and least deprived areas. There was a trend in reducing attendance prior to 2020 which appears to have been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic.

Whilst this analysis does not seek to draw comparisons between local authorities themselves, the supplementary tables show that there is variation in progress to close the attainment gap amongst local authorities themselves. It is worth noting that the Scottish Attainment Challenge Programme was refreshed to help address this variation and increase the pace of progress.¹⁹ In addition it is important to highlight that these local authorities are all starting from different points as a result of their own unique demographics, local contexts and the impact of COVID-19.

¹⁹ Scottish Attainment Challenge: Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress - [Scottish Attainment Challenge: framework for recovery and accelerating progress - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/attainment-challenge-framework)

Where data on attainment measures has been presented at the local authority level in this report, there is evidence of a narrowing of the poverty-related attainment gap on a number of measures at local authority level. This includes some attainment measures, initial destinations and participation measures. The picture is more mixed related to attendance, although local authority variation remains.

As previously stated, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people's learning and on attainment data is significant and must be borne in mind when considering trends in the data over the years of the Fund. In addition to the pandemic the current cost of living crisis has deepened inequity and is likely to impact on the poverty-related attainment gap in future years. This further necessitates the need for a relentless focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap.

While the measures summarised above are key indicators of progress, analysis of quantitative data will be supplemented with other evaluation evidence to provide an understanding of the progress being made and why, the views of stakeholders, and what works for whom and in what circumstance. This includes consideration of activities at the school, local, regional and national level to support children and young people. The Evaluation will continue to gather evidence as the Scottish Government and Education Scotland remain focused on closing the poverty related attainment gap - using the significant investment in the Scottish Attainment Challenge to further empower Local Government partners and headteachers to achieve their ambitions to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty.²⁰

This report is an initial key output from the new ASF Evaluation Strategy and will form part of the overall body of evidence developed over the course of 2022/23 and into future years of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Summary reporting is scheduled for Year 3 (2024/25), which will triangulate evidence from a planned survey and development work on assessing impact as well as the thematic areas work strands.

²⁰ [Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership - A fresh start](#) - This publication sets out the First Minister's vision for Scotland and the outcomes he and his government aim to achieve by 2026.



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