

Attainment Scotland Fund 2022 - 2026 Evaluation: Analytical Plan Year 2 (2023/24)



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Analytical Plan Year 2 (2023/24)

Purpose of the document

This document outlines the second annual evaluation plan for the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) 2022-26 and covers 2023-24, the second year of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge. This is a companion document to the [ASF Evaluation Strategy 2022-26](#), published in November 2022. The first Analytical Plan was published in February 2023. ¹

The document is intended to be accessible to all those with an interest in education in Scotland and beyond; including teachers, support workers, parents/carers, public bodies, and third sector organisations.

The ASF Evaluation

The ASF evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the refreshed ASF and the extent to which progress has been made towards meeting intended outcomes articulated in the Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model in support of the refreshed programme mission.

The [Evaluation Strategy for the Attainment Scotland Fund 2022-2026](#) ² sets out the broad terms of the Scottish Government's approach to evaluating the ASF during this parliamentary term. The Strategy outlines 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.

This Analytical Plan

This second annual plan, continues a refreshed approach to evaluating progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap through the Attainment Scotland Fund. Priorities in the Analytical Plan include:

- Continuing to evaluate the implementation of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge through research with a wider set of stakeholders.
- Quantitative reporting on core NIF Measures.

¹ Link to the Year 1 Plan – [ASF Evaluation 2022-2026, Analytical Plan, Year 1 2022/23](#)

² The Evaluation questions are attached at Appendix B.

- Implement an impact evaluation plan following publication of the Impact Evaluation Feasibility Study undertaken in Year 1.
- Publish three thematic evaluation reports on: readiness to learn; families and communities; children and young person voice. Plans for year two will include a focus on learning and teaching outcomes from the logic model.

Progress of the ASF Evaluation in Year 1 (2022/23)

We have worked with the Evaluation Advisory Panel³ throughout the first year of the new Evaluation Strategy taking a flexible, adaptive, and responsive approach to building an evidence base. In the first year we have seen some adaptations and changes to the Plan which are noted in Table 1.

The key research activities/outputs from Year 1 were:

- A report on the implementation of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge based on a survey of local authority attainment challenge leads.
- Publication of a report that summarises evidence around improvement in attainment and health and wellbeing, and the gap between pupils from the most and least deprived areas.
- Collaboration with National Programmes on engagement with Children and Young People on their views on readiness to learn.
- Collaboration with Education Scotland on the theme of Families and Communities.
- An impact evaluation feasibility study in collaboration with the Evaluation Advisory Panel.

Table 1: Progress of the ASF Evaluation in Year 1

Evaluation strand	Planned activities	Progress
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of existing evidence. • Survey of Local Authority Scottish Attainment Challenge Leads. • Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders and partners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey of Local Authority Scottish Attainment Challenge Leads published September 2023. • Focus Group carried out with Education Scotland Attainment Advisors.
Thematic	Thematic evaluation and	Working in collaboration with

³ The ASF Evaluation Advisory Panel is comprised of membership across key stakeholder groups and was established in 2022 to ensure external views, experience and expertise are embedded in the implementation and ongoing delivery of the ASF Evaluation Strategy. The Panel operates similarly to a Research Advisory Group throughout the duration of the Scottish Attainment Challenge Programme.

	<p>development activity including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of existing evidence on priority themes: readiness to learn; families and communities; engagement in decision-making. • Literature review on ‘readiness to learn’ to inform design of primary research in Year 2. • Scope, undertake and publish a small-scale study on engaging and supporting families and communities in the context of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. • Work with evaluation partners to explore ‘what works and what could be improved, for whom and in what circumstances’ in engaging children and young people in decision-making/voice in the context of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. 	<p>Education Scotland who have Families and Communities as the focus of their fourth Triannual Report⁴. Given that we have access to evidence collected from local authorities for Triannual Report 4, we made the decision to utilise this instead of commissioning case study research.</p> <p>A thematic summary report and three separate companion reports (for each thematic area) will be published in February 2024. This will have particular benefits in terms of highlighting the interdependencies between the thematic areas and articulating the cross cutting themes.</p>
National Improvement Framework (NIF) measures reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake analysis on the available data for NIF measures related to the 2021/22 academic year including 11 original key measures plus two new measures identified in consultation exercise. • Output: Publish a standalone summary in April 2023. 	<p>The National Improvement Framework (NIF) measures reporting published June 2023</p>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with stakeholders and partners in existing groups to develop scope/approach. • Undertake activities to assess existing and new approaches to measuring impact. • Output: Publish impact evaluation plan for Years 2 to 5. 	<p>Impact Feasibility Study completed</p>

⁴ Education Scotland publish Triennial Reports on the Scottish Attainment Challenge which focus on different thematic areas and also update on progress with Stretch Aims.

Evaluation priorities for 2023/24 school year

Our priorities for 2023/24 are to continue to undertake a programme of analytical activity in support of the new Evaluation Strategy, with a focus on taking forward recommendations from the Impact Feasibility Study, reporting on the core NIF measures, continuing aspects of the process evaluation and ongoing exploration of existing and newly identified thematic areas.

Process: The evaluation will continue to focus on the implementation of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge and new funding arrangements, developing insights on issues such as funding, guidance, Stretch Aims, planning and outcomes. In year 2, the focus of research activities will be schools and a wider set of stakeholders, which widens the focus from the local authority level in Year 1.

Impact: An Impact Evaluation Feasibility Study was undertaken in collaboration with the Evaluation Advisory Panel in Year 1. The study provides an in-depth consideration of the most promising potential approaches to assessing impact across Years 2 - 5. A summary of the process and options considered are contained at Appendix C. In year two, we will progress the development and initial implementation of a plan for impact assessment, in line with impact feasibility study recommendations.

NIF Attainment and Health and Wellbeing Measures: In order to maintain trend data and comparability, the core NIF measures continue to form the basis of quantitative reporting in Spring 2024 on the attainment gap. We will explore the feasibility of an expanded analysis of the NIF Attainment and Health and Wellbeing Measures.

Thematic: Analytical activity in Year 1 sought to explore 'what works, for whom and in what circumstances' on a number of priority themes including readiness to learn, families and communities, and children and young peoples engagement in decision-making/voice. We will publish a summary report and three separate companion reports on the thematic areas in February 2024. Whilst we continue to explore the thematic focus going forward with the Evaluation Advisory Panel, plans for year two will include developing a focus on learning and teaching outcomes from the logic model, and a continued focus on readiness to learn and children and children and young peoples voice in decision making. It is proposed that families and communities thematic focus will be complete in year two with the publication of the thematic report.

Our specific areas of activity are:

Table 2: Evaluation Activities 2023/24

Evaluation strand	Objective	Activities
Process	To provide learning on what worked well/what could be improved in the process of implementing ASF overall and at the funding stream level (Strategic Equity Fund, Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue review of existing evidence. • Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders and partners. • Publish the Year 2 Process Evaluation report, Summer 2024.
Thematic	<p>To provide learning and increase the evidence base on ‘what works and what could be improved, for whom, and in what circumstances’ at the thematic level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readiness to learn • Families and communities • Engagement in decision-making/Voice (children and young people, families and communities) • Learning and teaching 	<p>Thematic evaluation and development activity including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a summary report on the three thematic areas with supporting in-depth reports • Identify areas for phase 2 of the thematic areas, readiness to learn and children and young people’s voice in decision making. • Families and communities thematic strand will be complete in Year two with the publication of the Report in February 2024. • To explore learning and teaching outcomes as a new thematic focus. • Output: Publish Report February 2024 for readiness to learn, children’s voice and families and communities.
National Improvement Framework (NIF) measures reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To assess the impact of the overall fund in improving outcomes in educational attainment and achievement and health and wellbeing and closing the attainment gap between the most and least socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake analysis on the available data for NIF measures related to the 2023/24 academic year including the core NIF Attainment and health and wellbeing measures. • Output: Publish report in Spring 2024
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with stakeholders and partners in existing groups to develop scope/approach; • Undertake activities to assess existing and new approaches to measuring impact; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and initial implementation of plan for impact assessment, in line with impact feasibility study.

Section 2: Overview of the Analytical Plan

In order to address each of the four key evaluation strands over the duration of the Evaluation Strategy 2022-26, we have developed a high level overview of the analytical plan. This is outlined in Table 3 below. The detail of analytical activity during each year will be determined in line with the adaptive and flexible approach proposed in the Evaluation Strategy. The proposed activity for year 2, 2023/24 is set out in Appendix A.

Table 3: Analytical Plan - Years 1 to 5 Overview

Evaluation Strand	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Process	Implementation study	Implementation study	Embedded processes	-	Summative processes and implementation
Thematic	2.1 Readiness to Learn – scoping/ literature review	2.1 Readiness to Learn – Publication of Thematic Report	Continuation /identification of emerging themes and priorities for thematic focus		
	2.2 Families and Communities	2.2 Families and Communities – Publication of thematic Report			
	2.3 Voice	2.3 Voice - Publication of Thematic Report	Continuation/identification of emerging themes and priorities for thematic focus		
		2.4 Learning and Teaching – Explore with EAP	Explore Learning and Teaching new thematic area		
NIF Reporting	Annual reporting	Annual reporting	Annual reporting	Annual reporting	Annual reporting
Impact	Impact Feasibility Study	Development and initial implementation of plan for impact assessment, in line with impact feasibility study			

Appendix A: ASF Evaluation Analytical Plan Year 2 Timeline

Evaluation Strands		Evaluation Year 2 (school year 2023/24) Winter/Spring 2023/24	Evaluation Year 2 (school year 2023/24) Summer 2024	
1. Process	Process and implementation	Phase 2 - Review of existing data Gathering stakeholder views (national, regional and local representatives)		Publish Process Report
2. Thematic	2.1 Readiness to Learn	Phase 1: Publish Thematic Report, February 2024	Phase 2 – Thematic Evaluation activity	
	2.2 Families and Communities	Phase 1: Publish Thematic Report, February 2024		
	2.3 CYP Voice	Phase 1: Publish Thematic Report, February 2024	Phase 2 – Thematic Evaluation activity	
	2.4 Learning and Teaching		Exploration with EAP	Scope and plan Thematic evaluation activity
3. NIF report	Annual reporting	Drafting	Publish annual report	
4. Impact	Impact Feasibility Study	Summary Impact Report	Take forward detailed scoping of plan for impact assessment	

Appendix B: ASF Evaluation Questions

The main evaluation questions are:

1. Governance

What worked well and what could be improved in the national and local governance and support with implementation of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge?

2. Funding

What funding was allocated through the Scottish Attainment Challenge Refresh ASF to schools and local authorities, to what extent was it used within funds requirements and/or supplemented with other funding sources? What were stakeholders views on the implementation of the new funding structure introduced with the Scottish Attainment Challenge refresh?

3. Implementation

How did local authorities implement the Strategic Equity Fund alongside Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund?

4. Approaches

How do the approaches for equity support pupils (and parents) from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds?

5. Monitoring and evaluation

How are schools and local authorities monitoring, refining and evaluating their approaches to address the poverty-related attainment gap?

6. Collaboration

To what extent has the Fund resulted in established and/or strategic collaborations, and what has been the impact?

7. Data and evidence

To what extent have schools and authorities embedded use of data, analysis and evidence to drive improvements as part of the fund?

8. Engagement with and support for families and communities

To what extent has the fund embedded engagement with and support for families and communities?

9. Perceptions of local impact

To what extent did schools, local authorities and other stakeholders, including pupils, families and communities feel there had been progress towards achieving outcomes?

10. Unintended consequences

Did the changes to the funding structure with the refreshed SAC have any unintended consequences?

11. Approaches

To what extent was there awareness of and use of evidence-based approaches and to what extent were approaches embedded in the system, refined and adapted based on effective interventions in the local context?

12. Engagement in decision-making (Voice)

To what extent were children and young people and their families and communities engaged in decision-making, what was the impact of this engagement, and was there evidence of engagement becoming embedded in the learner journey?

13. Readiness to learn

To what extent was there improvement in children and young people's readiness to learn through focusing on engagement, attendance, confidence and wellbeing?

14. Culture and ethos

To what extent was culture and ethos based on educational equity embedded in the education system that promotes high aspirations and recognises broader achievement for all children and young people and their families.

15. Closing the gap/educational outcomes

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?

16. Achievement

To what extent did the fund contribute to an education system which encourages, reflects and values the breadth of achievements that contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people.

17. Embedded practices and culture

To what extent did the fund contribute to an embedded culture of equity at different levels of the education system?

18. Education system

To what extent did the fund contribute to an education system which actively addresses poverty, removing barriers through inclusive ethos, practice and approaches for children and young people, parents and carers and practitioners?

Appendix C: Impact Feasibility Study- Summary

Introduction

The [ASF Evaluation Analytical Plan for Year 1](#) outlined the aim of taking a collaborative approach to assessing the feasibility of using quantitative and qualitative methods of assessing impact, and to develop an impact evaluation plan for Years 2 to 5 of the Evaluation.

A feasibility study was therefore undertaken in summer/autumn 2023 to carry out the assessment of different approaches and to recommend options to take forward. The study consisted of six phases with an iterative approach including identifying impact evaluation questions; mapping existing evidence and data gaps; seeking stakeholder views; and finally developing potential approaches and options for the impact evaluation.

The feasibility study set out to examine a wide range of potential evidence sources and methodologies. However, there was a particular emphasis placed at the outset on existing quantitative data, data linkage, and potential longitudinal approaches; and a qualitative focus on the views and experiences of children and young people, and those working directly with them.

Impact Evaluation Questions

From the full set of evaluation questions included in the ASF Evaluation Strategy, the impact feasibility study identified the following individual evaluation questions for inclusion in the impact evaluation:

- 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 stretch aims?
- To what extent did the fund contribute to an education system which encourages, reflects and values the **breadth of achievements** that contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people?
- To what extent did schools, local authorities and other stakeholders, including pupils, families and communities feel there had been **progress towards achieving outcomes?**
- To what extent was there improvement in children and young people's **readiness to learn** through focusing on engagement, attendance, confidence and wellbeing?

Mapping evidence to evaluation questions

Evidence gaps and areas for further exploration were identified in the mapping phase. Based on the evidence/evaluation question mapping undertaken during the feasibility study, it was clear that there are evaluation questions that have a number of existing sources, and those where there is an evidence gap that needs to be addressed. These included:

A number of existing evidence sources/indicators provide data on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Several of these are already used in the evaluation, but others – such as PISA and the Health and Wellbeing Census – can be further utilised and existing NIF measures can be further analysed for more granular insight.

There are evidence gaps around perception data on the extent to which the Fund is contributing towards closing the poverty related attainment gap, and the factors supporting this, as well as the extent to which the full breadth of achievement is supported by the Fund.

Existing evidence sources need to be utilised and new source developed to evaluate improvement in children and young people's readiness to learn.

Feedback from stakeholders

A key element of the approach to undertaking the impact feasibility study involved working with a sub-group of the ASF Evaluation Advisory Panel. This engagement underpinned the whole approach and was particularly valuable in eliciting stakeholder views, including:

- Utilise existing reporting and evidence where possible to avoid survey fatigue.
- Interrogate data to understand who is progressing and in what circumstance.
- Evaluate at the macro (programme) level and micro (school) level, using case studies to augment national picture analysis.
- Prioritise research with children and young people, including those who are 'hard to reach', those who may not be engaged in school, and those who are care experienced.
- Engage with the National Programmes who have established networks with children and young people.
- Ensure that 'story telling' is part of the evidence that is developed, in order to detail the 'why' and 'how' of change.
- Ensure that research with schools reaches past the headteacher and into the classroom.
- Focus the evaluation on improvement – and what is driving this – rather than purely focusing on the attainment gap.

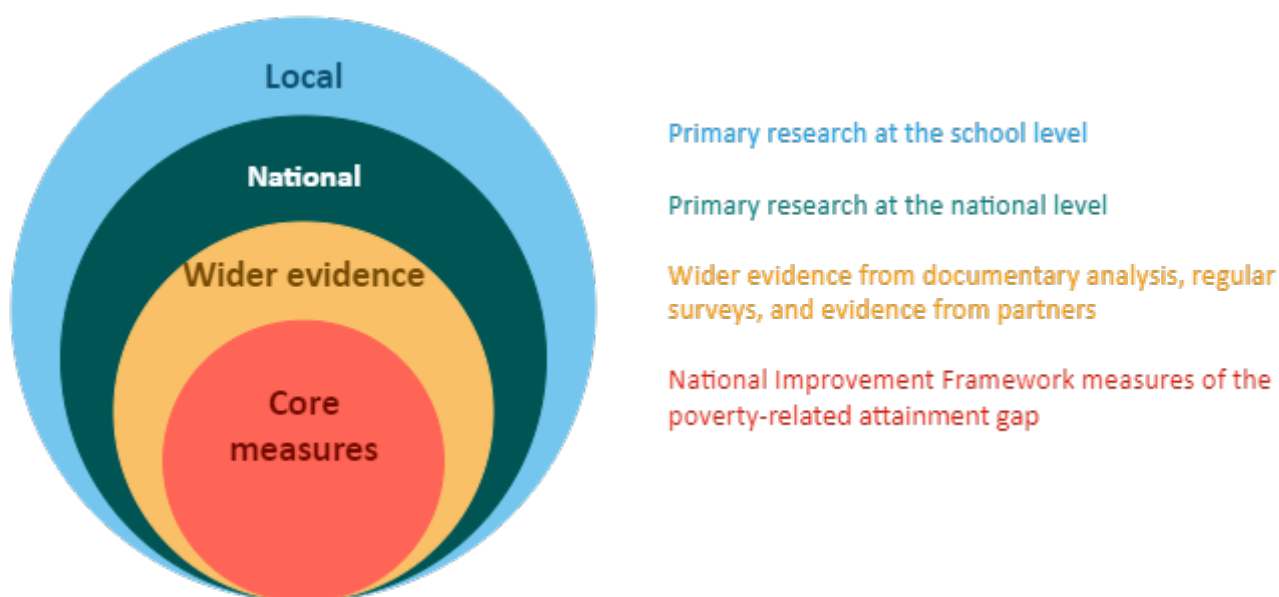
Impact Evaluation Approach and Options

Based on the different phases of the feasibility study – including examining existing data/evidence, other UK evaluation approaches, and feedback from a range of stakeholders – a set of potential options for the impact evaluation have emerged. It is unlikely that all options can be addressed to the same degree in the impact evaluation, however they provide a guide to how activities and timelines should be designed.

These options are organised based around four levels which have been identified through the feasibility study as important for the impact evaluation. Figure 1 below outlines the four levels.

It will be important that the impact evaluation includes elements across each level, which will be brought together into a coherent whole to evaluate the extent of change, the contribution the Fund is making towards this change, and (if possible) why the change is occurring.

Figure 1: Diagram showing the proposed structure of the Impact Evaluation



Mixed method approach

A mixed method approach will be required for the impact evaluation, combining quantitative measures with national and local level qualitative measures. This approach is recommended for a number of reasons, including:

- The impact evaluation questions included in this feasibility study will require both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address them;
- Learning from UK evaluations of similar programmes demonstrated the importance of mixed method approaches;

- The ASF Evaluation Advisory Panel, which provided their views and expertise for this feasibility study, stressed the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative evidence to understand the change that is being achieved and what is contributing towards it.

Next Steps

The next steps are to bring a range of options together into one coherent approach to the impact evaluation. This would take a mixed methods approach to gathering data across all four levels (core measures/wider evidence/primary data at macro/national and micro/local).

A cross-sectional approach will be developed which will involve undertaking primary research at different points in time to understand the impact of the Fund. This could seek to incorporate some longitudinal elements at repeated time series. This will include primary research at the national (macro) and local (micro) level with a wide range of stakeholders, including children and young people, practitioners and wider stakeholders. The primary research will be supported by analysis of core NIF measures and wider evidence, including evidence from documentary analysis, regular surveys and evidence from partners.



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