



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 5: 2023 Edition

28th February 2023

This annual National Statistics publication:

- Provides information on the **attainment** and **initial destinations** of school leavers in Scotland.
- Reports **initial destinations** for young people approximately **three months** after the end of the school year.
- Includes attainment in **National Qualifications** achieved throughout all stages of a pupil's schooling.
- Covers all **2021/22 school leavers** from publicly funded mainstream schools.

This release also contains Experimental Statistics on Foundation Apprenticeships, and a wider attainment measure incorporating all Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) qualifications.

The time period covered by these statistics means that the data for some years will be affected by the **coronavirus (COVID-19)** pandemic. Care should be taken when comparing data over time. Further information can be found in Chapter 1.

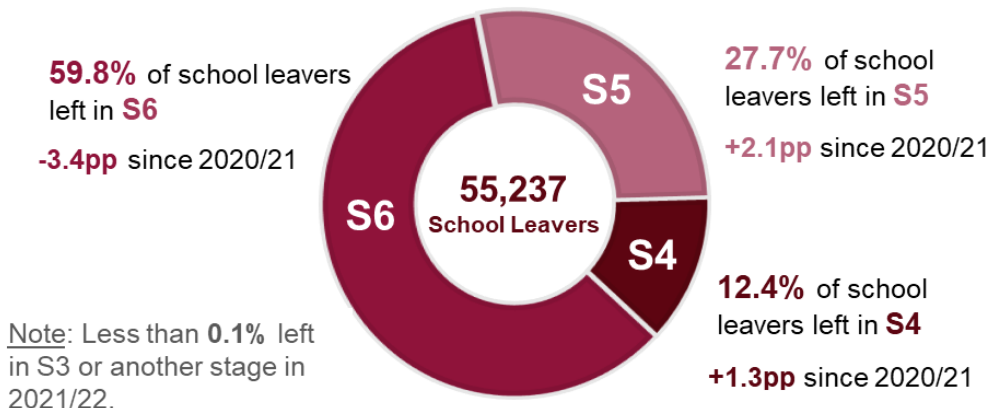
Full results are available from the [supplementary tables](#).



School Leaver Cohort

The COVID-19 pandemic affects these statistics (see chapter 1)

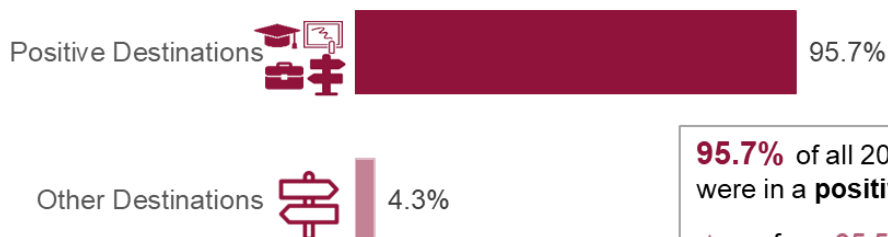
► The percentage of 2021/22 school leavers, by stage of leaving.



School Leaver Destinations

The COVID-19 pandemic affects these statistics (see chapter 1)

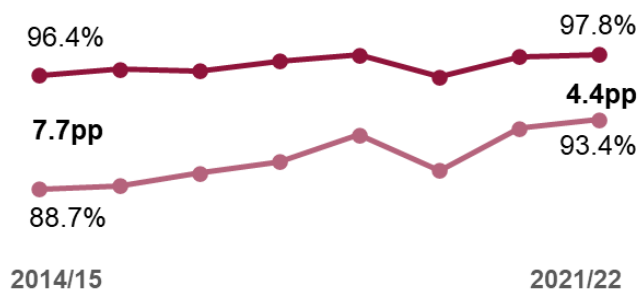
► The percentage of school leavers in initial positive destinations and other destinations, three months after the end of the school year.



95.7% of all 2021/22 school leavers were in a **positive initial destination**.

▲ up from **95.5%** in 2020/21

► The gap between leavers from the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas in a positive destination, 2014/15 to 2021/22.



The gap between leavers from the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas in a positive initial destination in 2021/22 is **4.4 pp**.

This has **narrowed** from **4.8 pp** in 2020/21.

(percentage point gaps are affected by rounding)

Notes:

- percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
- percentage point changes are affected by rounding.
- pp = percentage point.



School Leaver Attainment

The COVID-19 pandemic affects these statistics (see chapter 1)



96.4% of leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better** in 2021/22.



86.4% of leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better** in 2021/22.



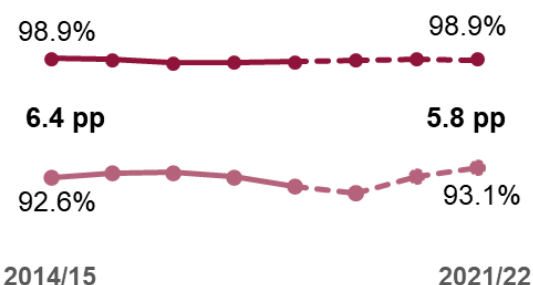
61.3% of leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better** in 2021/22.



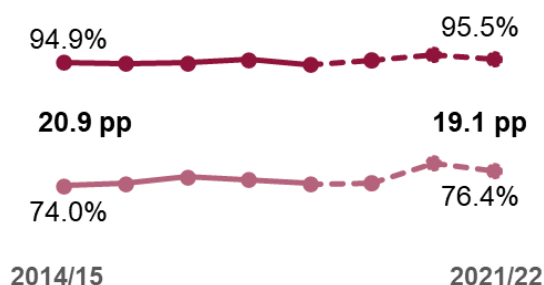
2.1% of school leavers attained **no passes at SCQF Level 3 or better** in 2021/22.

► The attainment gap between leavers from the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas, 2014/15 to 2021/22

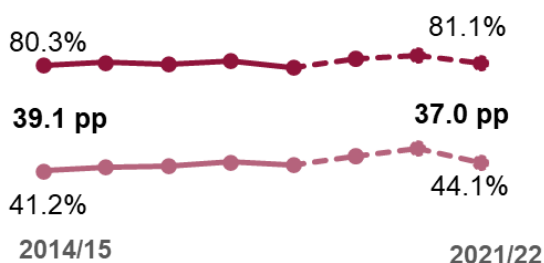
1 pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better



1 pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better



1 pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better



The gap between the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas in 2021/22 for leavers attaining 1 pass or more at:

- **SCQF Level 4 or better** is **5.8 pp**
- **SCQF Level 5 or better** is **19.1 pp**
- **SCQF Level 6 or better** is **37.0 pp**

(percentage point gaps are affected by rounding)

Notes:

- **Dashed line** represents break in series due to **change in certification methods in 2020 and 2021**
- **Caution** should be exercised when making **comparisons over time**. See chapter 1.
- Data from 2009/10 to 2021/22 available in the supplementary tables.
- pp = percentage point.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines **data sources**, **concepts** and **methodology** associated with the data used in this report and provides information on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on these statistics.

1.1 School Leavers

A school leaver is defined as a young person of school leaving age, who left during or at the end of the school year. For 2021/22 school leavers, the leaver year is 15th September 2021 to 13th September 2022.

This publication covers school leavers from **all stages** of secondary school. For most young people, S4 (≈15-16 year-olds) is the last compulsory year of school, but the majority choose to stay on and complete S5 (≈16-17 year-olds) and S6 (≈17-18 year-olds). Please note pupil ages are based on approximate age ranges; more information is available from [the pupil census supplementary statistics](#).

Figures in this report are based on pupils in **publicly funded mainstream schools**, in the 32 local authorities and one grant aided school. Figures including school leavers from publicly funded special schools are available in the [supplementary tables](#).

1.2 School Leaver Destinations

This publication provides information on the **initial destinations** of **2021/22 school leavers**, relating to outcomes approximately three months after the end of the school year (3rd October 2022).

A separate publication - 'Summary Statistics for Follow-up Leaver Destinations' – will follow in June 2023 and will provide information on the follow-up destinations of 2021/22 school leavers, approximately nine months after the end of the school year (1st Monday in April 2023).

School leaver destinations data is based on the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) 'Opportunities for All' shared dataset, matched with pupil census records for the school year 2021/22. More information can be found in section 7.2.1.

Destinations are grouped in the following categories within this statistical bulletin:

Positive Destinations



Other Destinations



1.2.1 Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on School Leaver Destinations

The time series presented in this publication includes years where school leaver destinations have been affected – either directly or indirectly – by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The impacts of COVID-19 should therefore be kept in mind when considering changes over time in school leavers' destinations.

The greatest effect of the pandemic on school leaver destinations is likely to have been seen in 2019/20. However, it is likely that there has been some ongoing impact on the destinations of some 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leavers. One reason for this may be the effect of different approaches to certification of SQA qualifications in 2020, 2021 and 2022 on pupils' attainment. The pandemic may also have influenced some pupils' decisions on when to leave school.

Further information on the impact of the coronavirus on these statistics can be found in section 7.6.

How can I use School Leaver Destination figures?

Do use School Leaver Destination figures:

- as an accurate reflection of school leavers' initial destinations
- to compare the destinations of different groups of school leavers
- to make comparisons over time of the destinations of school leavers – whilst bearing in mind the impact of COVID-19.

Do not use School Leaver Destination figures:

- without considering the impact that COVID-19 may have had on the availability of particular opportunities in certain years.

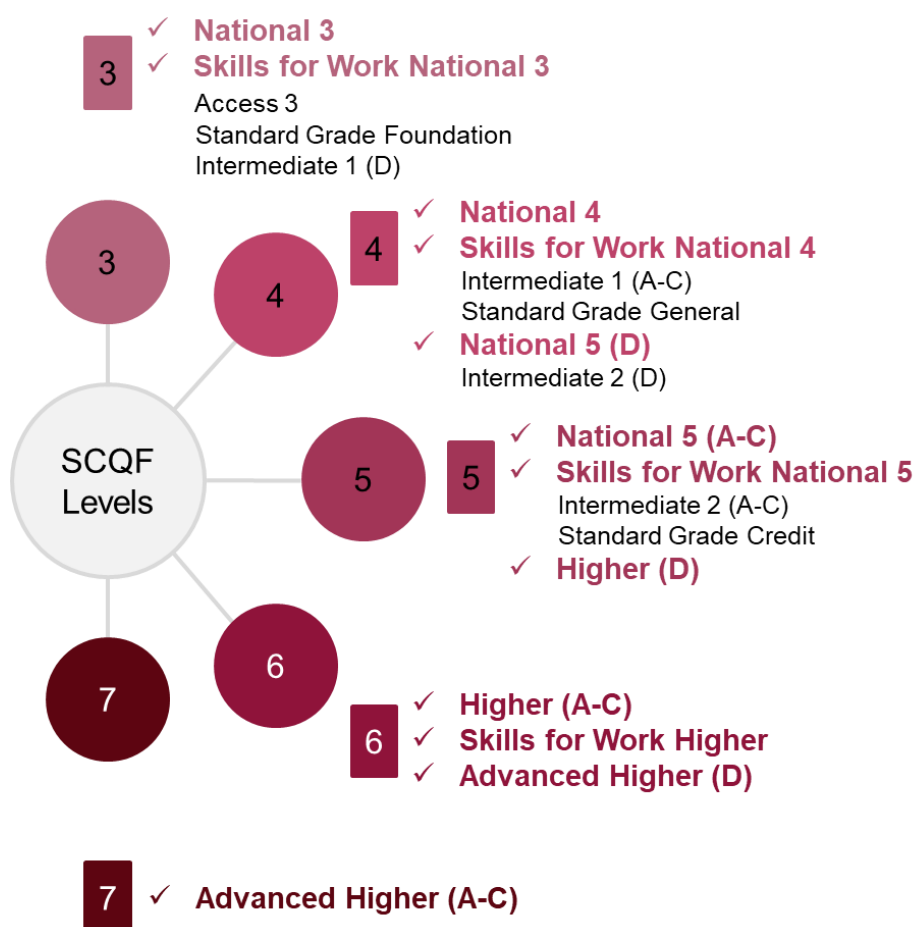
1.3 School Leaver Attainment

Within this report, the main school leaver **attainment** data found in Chapters 4 and 5 covers [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#) (SQA) **National Qualifications** achieved throughout **all stages** of a pupil's education at school. The range of qualifications included can be found in the diagram below, and cover National Courses (such as National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) as well as Skills for Work courses. The main statistics on National Qualifications do not include attainment in National Units, Scottish Baccalaureate or National Qualifications below Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 3 (such as National 1 and National 2). Plans to cover a wider range of qualifications in future are outlined in section 7.3.1.

The **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework** ([SCQF](#)) is used as the basis for reporting attainment. The SCQF is Scotland's national qualifications framework which allows broad comparisons to be made between qualifications at a similar level of difficulty. The SCQF level indicates the level of difficulty of a particular qualification. It allows learners, employers and the public in general, to understand the range of skills and learning that should be achieved at each level.

This publication reports the **number of passes** at a given SCQF level or better and the **highest** SCQF level achieved at **SCQF Levels 3 to 7**, incorporating the **National Qualifications** shown in the following diagram.

Qualifications included in the main measures within this publication:



(Current qualifications are marked with a tick ✓)

The publication uses the 'latest and best' approach for attainment data. This means that only the best result within a subject is counted. For example, if a pupil passes Higher Mathematics one year and Advanced Higher Mathematics the following year, only the Advanced Higher qualification will be counted when looking at how many qualifications at any level that leaver has achieved, by the time they left school.

In this publication, grade A to C (or ungraded pass) is considered a pass. If a pupil attains a grade D at any of these levels, this is counted as equivalent to a pass at the level below.

Highers (SCQF Level 6) are generally taken in S5 or S6 and Advanced Highers (SCQF Level 7), are generally taken in S6. Highers, sometimes along with Advanced Highers, are typically the Scottish qualifications required for entry into Higher Education.

School leavers from 2021/22 will have experienced the **Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)** throughout the entirety of the **senior phase** (S4-S6) of their school education. School leavers from 2013/14 and 2014/15 will have taken a range of awards and qualifications, including both current qualifications and older qualifications that have now been phased out. Using SCQF levels to measure attainment in National Qualifications allows for broad comparisons between qualifications to be made consistently over time.

More information can be found in section 7.2.2.

1.3.1 Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on School Leaver Attainment

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to changes to the way in which National Qualification results at SCQF Levels 5 to 7 were determined. The attainment data in this report considers all of the attainment which a school leaver gains over their time at school. This means the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 may be based on a combination of different approaches to determining results.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of 2020 and 2021 National 5 (SCQF Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) exams and alternative approaches were taken to determining grades. 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. In addition a more generous approach to grading was adopted to help ensure fairness for learners. The approaches taken to determining results in 2020 and 2021 saw pass rates in National Qualifications increase. The approach taken in 2022 resulted in pass rates decreasing from those levels, although they remained higher than pre-pandemic levels.

School leaver attainment statistics do not always follow the same pattern as National Qualification results in a given year. This is partly because school leaver attainment statistics cover attainment over several years, and also because not all pupils who sit National Qualifications in any given year leave school in that same year. However, the likely impact of the changes to how results were determined from 2020 to 2022 would be increased levels of school leaver attainment in 2019/20 and 2020/21. Whilst for 2021/22

school leavers we might expect that attainment levels would remain higher than before the pandemic but be lower than for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers.

The attainment data in this report provides an accurate reflection of the attainment with which school leavers in Scotland left school; for this reason attainment data for 2021/22, 2020/21, 2019/20 and previous years are presented together. However, a **dashed line break** in the series has been placed between 2018/19 (and before) and 2019/20 (and after). This indicates that the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 has been determined differently to that for 2018/19 and before and that care should be taken when making comparisons over time.

Also, as reported in [last year's publication](#) the size and make-up of the leaver cohorts in 2019/20 and 2020/21 indicated that some pupils may have chosen to remain at school for an additional year as a result of the pandemic, leaving in 2020/21 rather than in 2019/20. For some pupils this may have influenced their total attainment while at school. It is another reason why care should be taken when comparing school leaver attainment figures in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22, and to pre-pandemic years.

Further information on the impact of the coronavirus on these statistics can be found in section 7.6.

How can I use School Leaver Attainment figures?

Do use School Leaver Attainment figures:

- as an accurate reflection of the attainment with which school leavers in Scotland left school in different years
- to make factual comparisons of the proportions of school leavers attaining at different SCQF levels over time
- to compare the attainment of different groups of school leavers within years.

Do not use School Leaver Attainment figures:

- as an indication that performance in 2019/20, 2020/21 or 2021/22 was better or worse than in previous years, without further evidence
- without taking full account of the different approaches to certification in 2020, 2021 and 2022 compared to previous years.

1.4 Additional Qualifications

Whilst the main measures in this report focus on National Qualifications, Chapter 6 covers other qualifications that pupils may leave school with. Chapter 6 covers:

- Attainment statistics relating to vocational qualifications associated with Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (section 6.1).
- Experimental Statistics on Foundation Apprenticeships (section 6.2).
- Experimental Statistics covering a wider attainment measure incorporating all SQA qualifications (section 6.3).

Experimental Statistics are new Official Statistics that are undergoing evaluation. Further information on the reasons for publishing these new figures under this status are presented in sections 6.2 and 6.3.

Chapter 2: School Leaver Cohort

- **55,237** pupils left school in 2021/22 - an increase from 50,746 school leavers in 2020/21, and the largest school leaver cohort since 2009/10.
- **59.8 per cent** of the 2021/22 school leaver cohort were in **S6**, down from 63.2 per cent in 2020/21.
- **27.7 per cent** were **S5** leavers (up from 25.6 per cent in 2020/21) and **12.4 per cent** were **S4** leavers (up from 11.2 per cent in 2020/21).

The 2021/22 school leaver cohort was 55,237 pupils. It is the largest leaver cohort since 2009/10, when the current time series started. It has increased by 4,491 pupils from 2020/21 (when it was 50,746).

The biggest increase between 2020/21 and 2021/22 – in absolute numbers – was in S5 leavers, which rose from 12,995 leavers in 2020/21 to 15,308 in 2021/22, an increase of 2,313 pupils. S4 leaver numbers increased by 1,204 pupils (from 5,659 in 2020/21 to 6,863 in 2021/22). S6 leaver numbers had the smallest increase, rising by 974 (from 32,065 in 2020/21 to 33,039 in 2021/22).

As Chart 1a shows, the size of the school leaver cohort fluctuates each year. It is affected by both the number of pupils starting the relevant stages (e.g. S4, S5 and S6) each year, and also the decisions then made by pupils on whether to leave school that year, or to continue on to the next school year. Almost all S6 pupils in any academic year will leave school during or at the end of that year.

Chart 1a: Number of leavers by stage of leaving, 2009/10 to 2021/22

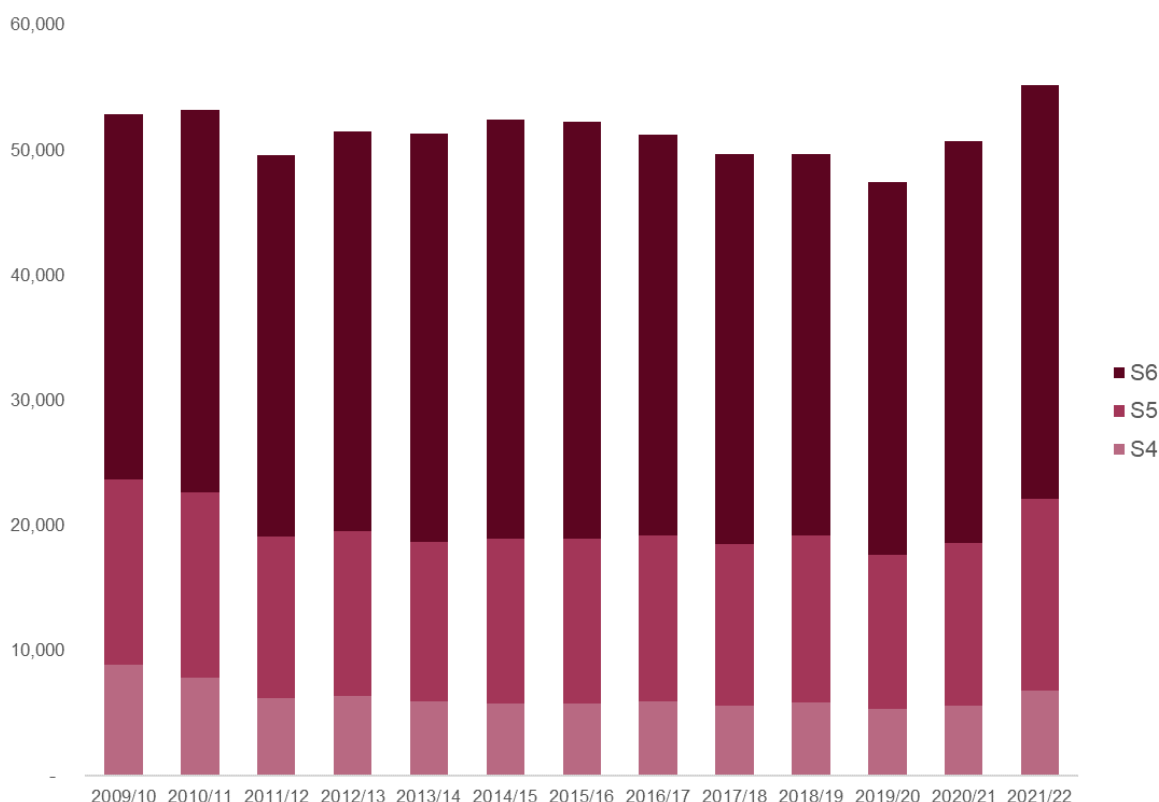
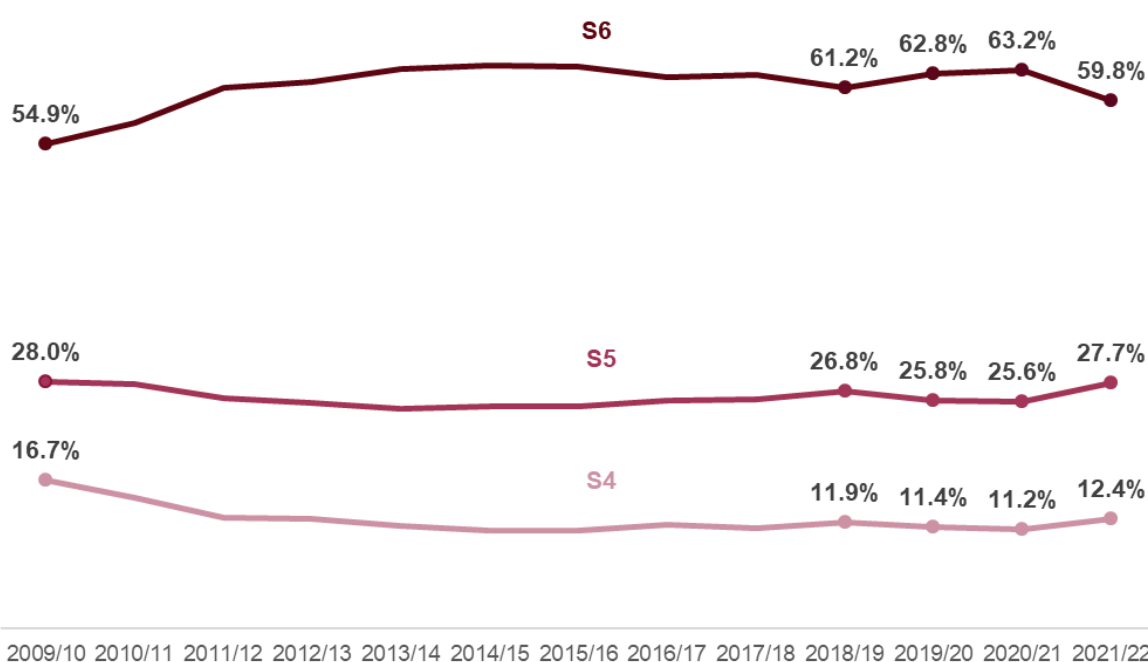


Chart 1b shows the percentage of school leavers by stage, between 2009/10 and 2021/22. In 2021/22 the percentage of all leavers who are from S6 has decreased compared to 2020/21, while the percentage of leavers from S4 and S5 has risen.

Just under three-fifths (59.8 per cent) of 2021/22 school leavers left in S6, a decrease from 63.2 per cent in 2020/21. Over a quarter (27.7 per cent) of 2021/22 school leavers left in S5 (an increase from 25.6 per cent in 2020/21) and 12.4 per cent left in S4 (an increase from 11.2 per cent in 2020/21). Less than 0.1 per cent of 2021/22 school leavers left in S3 or another stage (similar to 2020/21).

Chart 1b: Percentage of leavers by stage of leaving, 2009/10 to 2021/22



Comparing the leaver cohort to the pupil census from September 2021 suggests that the rise in the total numbers of leavers in 2021/22 could be partly explained by a rise in the total number of pupils starting in S4 – S6 in September 2021. However it also indicates that a larger proportion of S4 and S5 pupils left school during or at the end of 2021/22 than has been seen in recent years.

The larger proportion of S4 and S5 leavers this year compared to last year – and the smaller proportion of S6 leavers – may have had an effect on the total attainment of 2021/22 leavers compared to 2020/21.

Chapter 3: School Leaver Destinations

- **95.7 per cent** of 2021/22 school leavers were in a **positive initial destination**. This is an increase from 2020/21 (95.5 per cent) and the highest since consistent records began in 2009/10.
- The most common initial destination was **Higher Education**, with 41.2 per cent of leavers in this category. This is a decrease from 2020/21 (45.1 per cent).
- **25.1 per cent** of leavers were in **Employment**. This is an increase from 2020/21 (22.6 per cent) and the highest since consistent records began.
- The percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination has increased for leavers from both the (20%) most deprived and (20%) least deprived areas, compared to 2020/21.
- The gap between the two groups has decreased from 4.8 percentage points in 2020/21 to **4.4 percentage points in 2021/22**, the lowest it has been since consistent records began in 2009/10.

As described in section 1.2.1, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) will have had an impact on the initial destination choices made by, and opportunities available to, school leavers. The greatest effect of the pandemic on school leaver destinations is likely to have been seen in 2019/20. However it is likely that there has been some ongoing impact on the destinations of some 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leavers. The impacts of COVID-19 should be kept in mind when interpreting changes between 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22, and when comparing these to other years.

3.1 Destinations of School Leavers

Table 1 shows that 95.7 per cent of all 2021/22 school leavers were in a positive initial destination. This was higher than in 2020/21 (95.5 per cent) and the highest since consistent records began in 2009/10.

The proportion of leavers in Higher Education decreased from 45.1 per cent in 2020/21 – which was the highest since consistent records began in 2009/10 – to 41.2 per cent in 2021/22. This decrease brings the proportion of school leavers in Higher Education in 2021/22 back into line with figures seen before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The proportion of school leavers in Further Education increased from 23.3 per cent in 2020/21 – the lowest on record since 2009/10 – to 25.5 per cent in 2021/22. While this was an increase from the record low in 2020/21, it was still the second lowest proportion of leavers in Further Education since 2009/10.

Combining the results for these two categories shows that 66.7 per cent of 2021/22 school leavers were in Higher or Further Education three months after the end of the school year. This is a decrease from 2020/21 (68.4 per cent) and was driven by the reduction in the proportion of leavers in Higher Education.

The percentage of school leavers in Employment three months after leaving school increased from 22.6 per cent in 2020/21 to 25.1 per cent in 2021/22, a rise of 2.5 percentage points. This is the highest proportion since consistent records began in 2009/10.

The percentage of school leavers who were Unemployed (either Unemployed Seeking or Unemployed Not Seeking) decreased from 4.2 per cent in 2020/21 to 3.9 per cent for 2021/22 school leavers. This is the lowest proportion since consistent records began.

Table 1: Percentage of school leavers by initial destination category, 2016/17 to 2021/22 [note 1] [note 2] [note 3] [note 4] [note 5]

Destination Category	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Higher Education	40.7	41.1	40.3	44.2	45.1	41.2
Further Education	26.8	26.5	27.3	28.1	23.3	25.5
Training	2.2	1.9	3.5	3.7	3.7	2.9
Employment	22.0	22.7	22.9	16.2	22.6	25.1
Voluntary Work	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4	0.5
Activity Agreement	1.2	1.2	[z]	[z]	[z]	[z]
Personal Skills Development	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.8	0.5	0.5
Positive Destinations	93.9	94.6	95.0	93.3	95.5	95.7
Unemployed Seeking	4.4	3.7	3.1	4.1	2.5	2.3
Unemployed Not Seeking	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.8	1.7	1.5
Unknown	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.7	0.3	0.4
Other Destinations	6.1	5.4	5.0	6.7	4.5	4.3
Number of Leavers	51,300	49,748	49,760	47,454	50,746	55,237

Note 1: From 2018/19, support previously recorded as Activity Agreements is recorded in the Training category. As a result, the proportion of school leavers recorded in the Training category is not directly comparable prior to and post 2018/19. For more information see section 7.3.1.

Note 2: The 'Unknown' status in 2019/20 may have been affected by local partnerships' ability to track school leavers through home visits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Note 3: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Note 4: Data from 2009/10 to 2021/22 are available in the [supplementary tables](#).

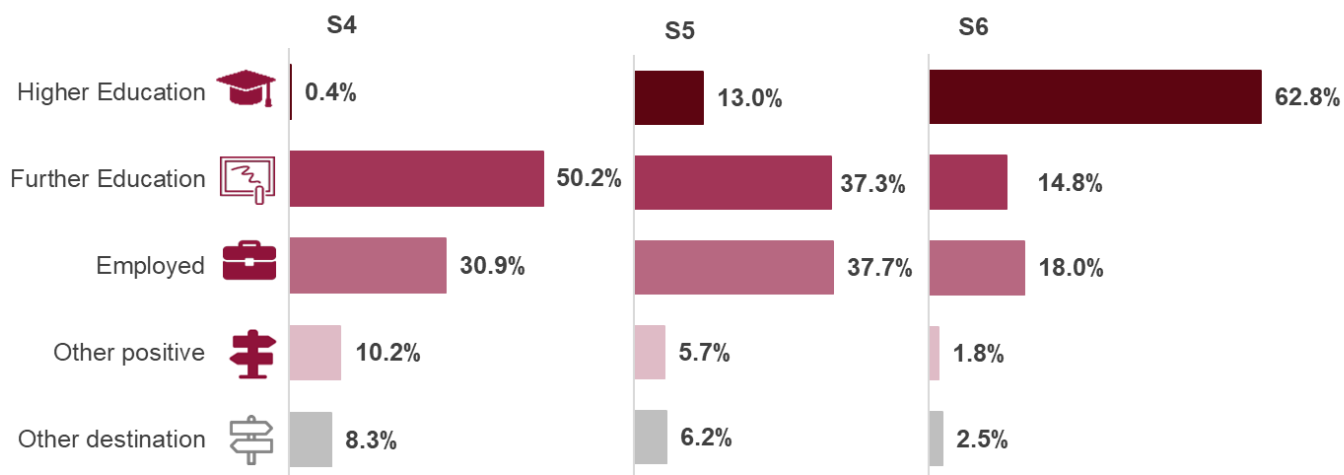
Note 5: [z] = not applicable (see section 7.4.2 for a full list of symbols used in tables).

3.2 Destinations by Stage

Chart 2 shows the initial destinations of 2021/22 school leavers by stage of leaving. It shows that:

- the majority of **S6 leavers** entered Higher Education (62.8 per cent);
- the most common initial destination for **S5 leavers** was Employment (37.7 per cent) followed closely by Further Education (37.3 per cent);
- half of **S4 leavers** entered Further Education (50.2 per cent).

Chart 2: Initial destinations of school leavers by stage of leaving, 2021/22
[note 6] [note 7]



Note 6: 'Other positive' includes Personal Skills Development, Training and Voluntary Work.

Note 7: 'Other destination' includes Unemployed Seeking, Unemployed Not Seeking and Unknown.

3.3 Destinations by Deprivation

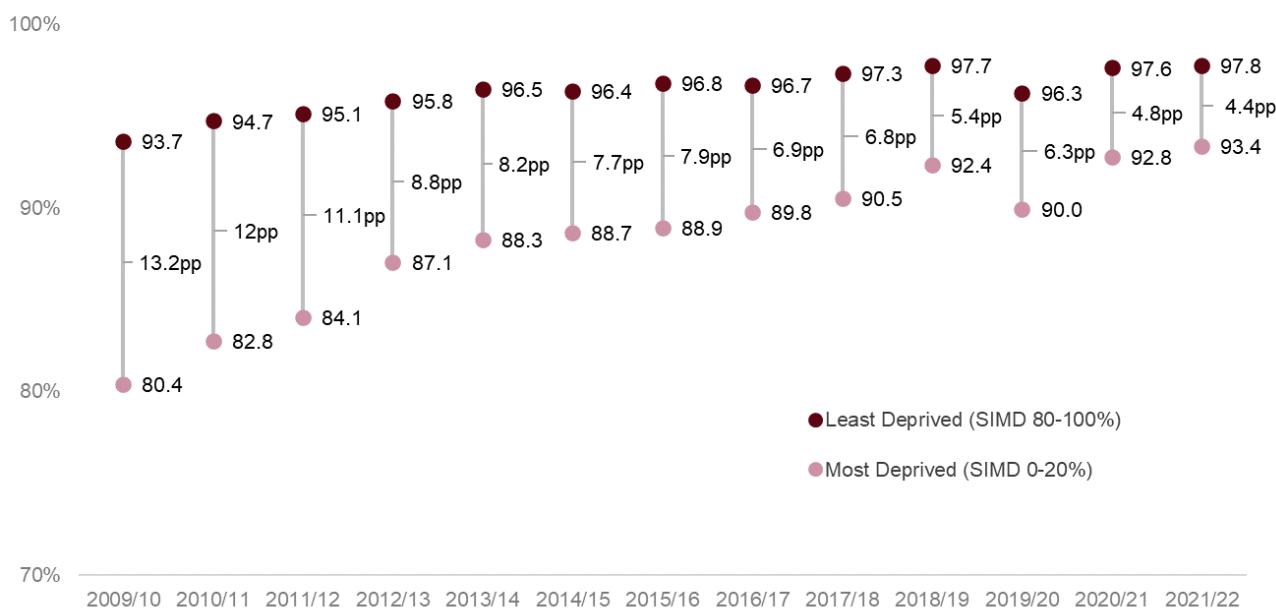
The [National Improvement Framework](#) uses a range of measures to monitor the poverty-related attainment gap. Following a user consultation in 2022, school leaver initial destinations was added as a new key measure. This section presents the data for this measure. Three other key measures, relating to school leaver attainment, are also presented in this report, in section 4.3

Chart 3 shows that the percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination increased in 2021/22 compared to 2020/21, for leavers from both the (20%) **most deprived** and (20%) **least deprived areas**, based on the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\)](#) (see section 7.2.4).

Between 2020/21 and 2021/22 the proportion of school leavers in a positive initial destination increased by more amongst leavers from the most deprived areas than it did amongst those from the least deprived areas. This led to a decrease in the deprivation gap, from 4.8 percentage points in 2020/21 to 4.4 percentage points in 2021/22 – the smallest gap since consistent records began in 2009/10. The proportion of leavers from the most deprived areas in a positive destination increased from 92.8 per cent in 2020/21

to 93.4 per cent in 2021/22. The proportion of leavers from the least deprived areas in a positive destination increased from 97.6 per cent to 97.8 per cent.

Chart 3: Percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination, by SIMD, 2009/10 to 2021/22 [note 8] [note 9]



Note 8: pp = percentage point difference between most deprived and least deprived SIMD quintiles

Note 9: Based on SIMD 2009 for 2009/10 and 2010/11, SIMD 2012 for 2011/12 to 2015/16, SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2019/20 and SIMD 2020 for 2020/21 and 2021/22.

More information can be found on the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#)

Time series data of destinations by deprivation (available in Table 2 in the [supplementary tables](#)) suggests that the narrowing of the gap between 2020/21 and 2021/22 is mainly due to the proportions of school leavers in employment. Whilst the proportion of school leavers entering employment increased across all SIMD groups between 2020/21 and 2021/22, the size of the increase was greater amongst school leavers from the most deprived areas (2.8 percentage points) than amongst those from the least deprived areas (1.7 percentage points).

Table 2 provides a breakdown of initial school leaver destinations by SIMD for 2021/22. It shows, for example, that pupils from the most deprived areas continue to be less likely to enter Higher Education than those from the least deprived areas.

In 2021/22, the most common destination for leavers from the most deprived areas was Further Education at 35.6 per cent.

In 2021/22, 6.0 per cent of leavers from the most deprived areas were unemployed, compared to 2.0 per cent of leavers from the least deprived areas.

Table 2: Percentage of school leavers by initial destination category by SIMD, 2021/22 [note 10] [note 11] [note 12] [note 13]

2021/22 Initial Destination	0-20% (Most Deprived)	20-40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100% (Least Deprived)	Percentage point gap	Total
Higher Education	26.4	32.4	39.1	48.3	62.3	35.9	41.2
Further Education	35.6	30.7	25.0	20.1	14.5	-21.1	25.5
Training	5.8	3.7	2.2	1.7	0.8	-4.9	2.9
Employment	24.3	27.2	28.7	25.9	19.4	-4.9	25.1
Voluntary Work	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.1	0.5
Personal Skills Development	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.2	-0.7	0.5
Positive Destinations	93.4	94.9	95.9	97.0	97.8	4.4	95.7
Unemployed Seeking	3.7	2.9	2.3	1.4	1.2	-2.5	2.3
Unemployed Not Seeking	2.3	1.7	1.1	1.4	0.8	-1.5	1.5
Unknown	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.2	-0.4	0.4
Other Destinations	6.6	5.1	4.1	3.0	2.2	-4.4	4.3
Number of Leavers	12,152	10,837	10,540	11,178	10,530	[z]	55,237

Note 10: Based on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020](#).

Note 11: The percentage point gap measures the difference between leavers from the most and least deprived areas.

Note 12: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Note 13: [z] = not applicable. (See section 7.4.2 for full list of symbols used in tables.)

3.4 Destinations by Pupil Characteristics

Table 3 shows the percentage of school leavers who entered a positive initial destination by various characteristics.

The percentage of 2021/22 school leavers in positive initial destinations has increased for almost all groups, compared to 2020/21.

School leavers in 2021/22 with an Additional Support Need (ASN) were less likely to be in a positive initial destination (93.4 per cent) than leavers without a recorded ASN (97.3 per cent). This result is consistent with previous years. These statistics relate to leavers from mainstream schools only; similar statistics relating to destinations of mainstream and special school leavers combined are available in [supplementary table](#) L3.1.

Leavers in 2021/22 who were declared or assessed disabled were also less likely to be in a positive initial destination (92.3 per cent) than leavers who were not (95.8 per cent).

The proportions of school leavers in a positive initial destination increased for most ethnic groups between 2020/21 and 2021/22. Some figures have been suppressed due to the small numbers of school leavers involved. Amongst those groups for which data can be reported, the highest proportion of school leavers in a positive initial destination in 2021/22 was amongst African/ Black/ Caribbean leavers (98.8 per cent).

Female pupils continue to be more likely to enter positive destinations than male pupils: 96.3 per cent of female school leavers were in a positive initial destination in 2021/22, compared to 95.2 per cent of male leavers. This result is consistent with previous years although the gap has narrowed in 2021/22.

Accessible Rural and Remote Rural areas had the highest proportions of leavers in positive initial destinations in 2021/22 (both 96.6 per cent), whilst Remote Small Towns had the lowest (93.9 per cent).

More information on destinations by pupil characteristics is available in the [supplementary tables](#).

Table 3: Percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination, by pupil characteristic, 2016/17 to 2021/22 [note 14] [note 15] [note 16] [note 17] [note 18]

Pupil Characteristic	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Sex						
Male	92.9	93.5	94.2	92.1	94.7	95.2
Female	94.9	95.6	95.9	94.6	96.2	96.3
Ethnicity						
White - Scottish	93.7	94.4	94.9	93.2	95.5	95.6
White - non-Scottish	94.7	95.1	95.8	93.3	95.1	95.6
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	94.9	95.5	93.8	92.3	96.5	94.6
Asian - Indian	[c]	97.2	97.2	[c]	[c]	[c]
Asian - Pakistani	96.5	95.8	97.1	97.2	96.7	98.6
Asian - Chinese	[c]	98.0	[c]	[c]	[c]	[c]
Asian - Other	96.4	97.0	[c]	95.0	97.0	97.4
African/ Black/ Caribbean	95.3	96.9	96.4	94.7	97.5	98.8
All other categories	93.7	91.7	93.7	93.4	94.9	96.3
Not Disclosed/Not known	92.7	91.5	92.8	91.2	92.7	95.5
Urban/Rural						
Large Urban Areas	93.0	93.6	95.0	93.1	95.6	96.3
Other Urban Areas	93.4	94.4	94.5	92.7	94.9	95.0
Accessible Small Towns	94.5	94.8	95.7	94.2	95.7	96.2
Remote Small Towns	94.7	95.0	94.9	92.9	94.7	93.9
Accessible Rural	95.5	95.9	96.1	94.7	96.5	96.6
Remote Rural	96.0	96.7	95.8	94.5	96.7	96.6
Additional Support Needs						
ASN	89.8	90.9	91.9	89.6	92.8	93.4
No ASN	95.3	96.0	96.5	95.4	97.0	97.3
Disabled status						
Declared or assessed disabled	91.8	92.1	93.3	90.0	92.6	92.3
Not declared or assessed disabled	93.9	94.6	95.1	93.4	95.6	95.8
All Leavers	93.9	94.6	95.0	93.3	95.5	95.7

Note 14: Some categories have been grouped together due to small numbers. Some categories (typically 'Asian – Indian', 'Asian – Chinese' contain between 100-200 leavers and due to relatively small numbers may be subject to fluctuation. Comparisons between groups should take this into account.

Note 15: The 'African/ Black/ Caribbean' category includes 'African', 'African - Other', and the 'Caribbean or Black' categories.

Note 16: 'All other categories' includes 'Other - other' and 'Other - Arab'.

Note 17: Pupils who have a Coordinated Support Plan (CSP), Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) or Child's Plan are assessed or declared disabled or have another need.

Note 18: [c] = value suppressed to protect against the risk of disclosure of personal information. (See section 7.4.2 for full list of symbols used in tables.)

Chapter 4: School Leaver Attainment

- **86.4 per cent** of school leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better** in 2021/22. This is a decrease from 2020/21 (87.7 per cent).
- **61.3 per cent** of school leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better** in 2021/22. This is a decrease from 2020/21 (66.0 per cent).
- **2.1 per cent** of school leavers attained **no passes** at SCQF Level 3 or better in 2021/22. This is the same as in 2020/21.
- The different approaches to determining results in 2020, 2021 and 2022 should be kept in mind when considering changes in school leaver attainment between years.
- **96.3 per cent** of leavers attained **literacy** at SCQF Level 3 or better in 2021/22.
- **95.9 per cent** of leavers attained **numeracy** at SCQF Level 3 or better in 2021/22.

4.1 Attainment Data

Attainment data in this section accounts for **National Qualifications** achieved throughout **all stages** of a pupil's education at school. The range of qualifications included in the main measures in this publication can be found in the diagram in section 1.3.

The **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)** is used as the basis for reporting attainment. This publication reports the **number of passes** in National Qualifications at a given SCQF level or better and **highest SCQF level** achieved at **SCQF Levels 3 to 7**. SCQF levels, in ascending order, indicate the **level of difficulty** of a particular qualification, and allow for broad comparisons to be made between qualifications. For more information, see sections 1.3 and 7.2.2.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of 2020 and 2021 National 5 (SCQF Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) exams and alternative approaches were taken to determining grades. 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. In addition a more generous approach to grading was adopted to help ensure fairness for learners. Pass rates for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher were higher in 2020 and 2021 than they had been in 2019 (the last pre-pandemic year of exams). In 2022 pass rates reduced compared to 2020 and 2021, although they remained above 2019 levels.

These different approaches to awards and grading between 2020 and 2022 will have affected the attainment of many 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20 school leavers presented in this report. A **dashed line break** in the series has therefore been placed between 2018/19 and 2019/20. This indicates that 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, 2020/21 and 2021/22 should not be seen as an indication that performance has improved or worsened, without further evidence.

4.2 Attainment of School Leavers

Table 4 shows the highest SCQF level achieved by school leavers. In 2021/22, 1.5 per cent of school leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 3 as their highest level, 10.0 per cent with one pass or more at SCQF Level 4 and 25.1 per cent with one pass or more at SCQF Level 5. A total of 36.7 per cent of 2021/22 school leavers therefore left with one pass or more at SCQF Levels 3 to 5 as their highest qualification. This was an increase from 2020/21, when 32.0 per cent left with one pass or more at SCQF Levels 3 to 5 as their highest qualification.

Table 4 also shows that 39.8 per cent of 2021/22 leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 as their highest level, and 21.5 per cent left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 7.

A small proportion (2.1 per cent) of school leavers attained no passes in National Qualifications at SCQF Level 3 or better in 2021/22. This was the same proportion as in 2020/21. Some of these school leavers have attainment either in courses at SCQF Levels 1 or 2, or in courses/units not covered in these statistics (such as National Progression Awards, National Certificates and Awards). Details can be found in [supplementary tables A1.4a and A1.4b](#).

Table 4: Percentage of school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved, 2016/17 to 2021/22 [note 19]

SCQF Level	Percentage					
	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
No passes at SCQF 3 or better	2.0	2.2	2.2	2.0	2.1	2.1
SCQF Level 3	1.7	1.6	1.9	2.2	1.8	1.5
SCQF Level 4	10.2	10.3	10.9	10.1	8.5	10.0
SCQF Level 5	24.9	23.8	24.5	21.8	21.7	25.1
SCQF Level 6	41.9	42.0	41.4	40.6	41.8	39.8
SCQF Level 7	19.3	20.2	19.1	23.2	24.2	21.5
Number of leavers	51,300	49,748	49,760	47,454	50,746	55,237

Note 19: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20. This reflects the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leaver attainment. Further information can be found in sections 1.3.1, 4.1 and 7.6.

Table 5 provides information on the number of passes achieved by school leavers at each SCQF Level or better. In 2021/22, 86.4 per cent of school leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better, and 61.3 per cent left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better. These proportions have both decreased from 2020/21, when 87.7 per cent of school leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better, and 66.0 per cent left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better.

A time series from 2009/10 to 2021/22 is presented in Table 5 in the [supplementary tables](#).

Table 5: Leaver attainment by SCQF Level or better and number of passes achieved, percentage of leavers, 2018/19 to 2021/22 [note 20]

2021/22							Percentage
SCQF Level	1 pass or more	2 passes or more	3 passes or more	4 passes or more	5 passes or more	6 passes or more	7 passes or more
3 or better	97.9	96.5	94.5	92.1	88.3	81.2	68.9
4 or better	96.4	94.1	91.7	88.8	84.4	77.7	65.6
5 or better	86.4	79.5	73.0	66.4	59.2	51.6	42.6
6 or better	61.3	52.4	45.7	38.6	30.7	19.9	9.9
7	21.5	9.5	3.3	0.4	[low]	[low]	0.0

2020/21							Percentage
SCQF Level	1 pass or more	2 passes or more	3 passes or more	4 passes or more	5 passes or more	6 passes or more	7 passes or more
3 or better	97.9	96.5	94.6	92.4	89.1	82.9	70.6
4 or better	96.2	93.9	91.8	89.2	85.5	79.3	67.6
5 or better	87.7	81.9	76.3	69.9	62.6	54.1	43.6
6 or better	66.0	57.7	50.5	43.4	35.3	23.6	12.2
7	24.2	11.0	3.7	0.4	[low]	0.0	0.0

2019/20							Percentage
SCQF Level	1 pass or more	2 passes or more	3 passes or more	4 passes or more	5 passes or more	6 passes or more	7 passes or more
3 or better	98.0	96.3	94.1	91.8	88.1	81.2	67.9
4 or better	95.8	93.3	90.9	88.1	84.1	77.6	64.9
5 or better	85.7	79.2	73.0	66.4	59.2	51.0	40.5
6 or better	63.9	55.2	47.9	40.9	32.9	21.5	10.7
7	23.2	10.4	3.5	0.3	[c]	[c]	0.0

2018/19							Percentage
SCQF Level	1 pass or more	2 passes or more	3 passes or more	4 passes or more	5 passes or more	6 passes or more	7 passes or more
3 or better	97.8	96.1	94.0	91.6	87.7	80.5	66.3
4 or better	95.9	93.6	91.2	88.2	84.0	77.1	63.5
5 or better	85.1	77.6	70.5	63.4	55.8	47.8	37.6
6 or better	60.5	50.6	43.0	36.1	28.7	18.5	8.9
7	19.1	8.0	2.7	0.3	[c]	[c]	0.0

Note 20: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20. This reflects the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leaver attainment. Further information can be found in sections 1.3.1, 4.1 and 7.6.

4.3 Attainment by Deprivation

As outlined in section 3.3, the [National Improvement Framework](#) monitors the poverty-related attainment gap based on a basket of key measures. Three of these measures are based on school leaver attainment by deprivation, namely:

- The proportion of leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better
- The proportion of leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better
- The proportion of leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better

Chart 4 shows the proportions of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas who attained 1 pass or more at SCQF Levels 4 or better, 5 or better and 6 or better. As described in Sections 1.3.1 and 4.1, care should be taken when making comparisons between 2021/22 and earlier years. Any increase or decrease should not be interpreted as indicating improving or worsening performance without further evidence.

At SCQF Level 4 or better, the gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas attaining 1 pass or more was 5.8 percentage points. This is a narrowing from 6.3 percentage points in 2020/21, due to an increase in the proportion of leavers from the most deprived areas who attained a pass at this level.

Following a steady narrowing of the gap from 2009/10 (11.3 percentage points) to 2016/17 (5.9 percentage points), the gap then widened each year until 2019/20, when it was the widest it had been since 2012/13 (7.1 percentage points). In 2021/22 the gap has narrowed and is now the narrowest it has been since 2009/10.

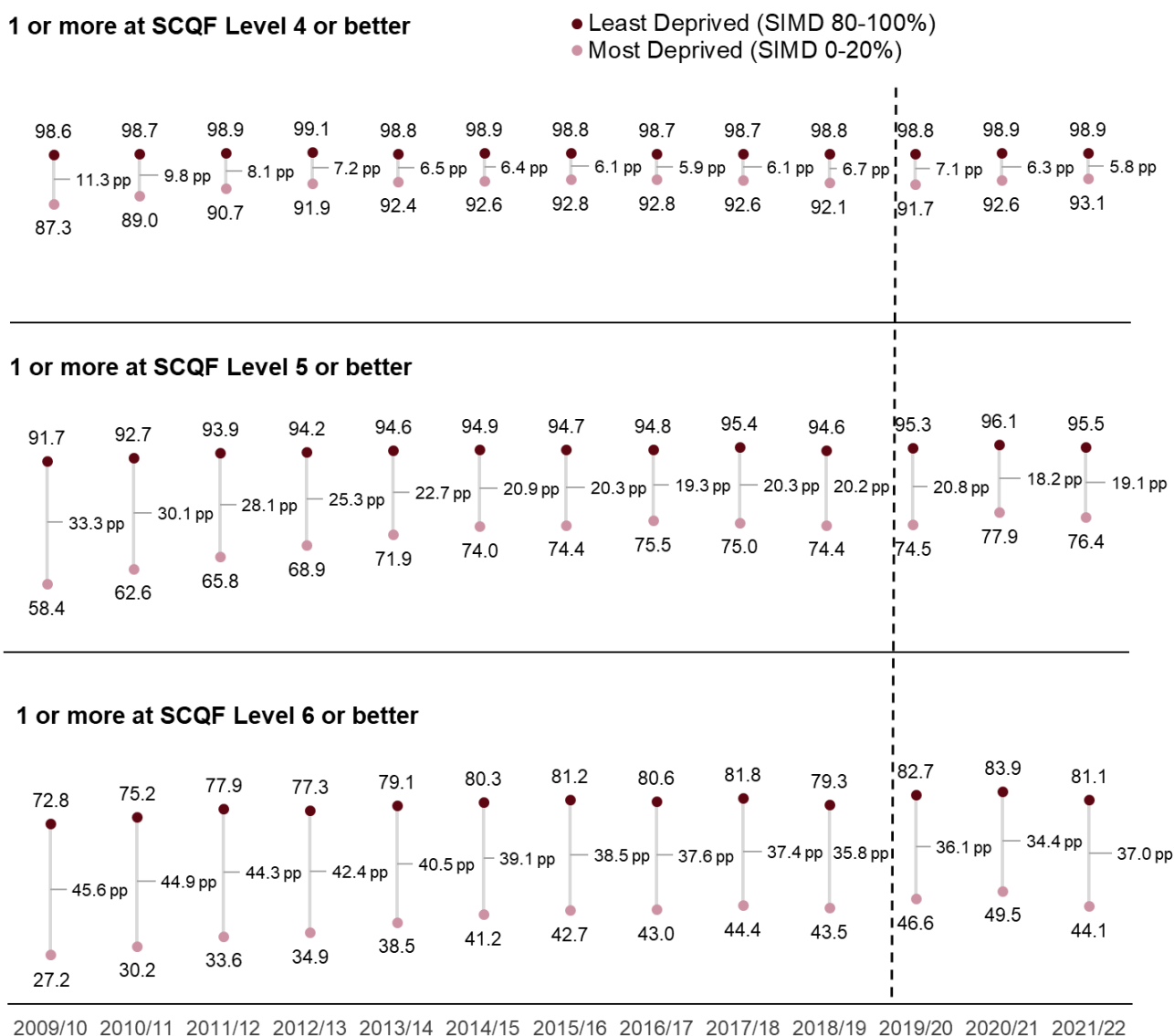
At SCQF Level 5 or better, the gap was 19.1 percentage points in 2021/22. This is wider than in 2020/21 (18.2 percentage points). The proportion attaining 1 pass or more decreased for school leavers from both the most and the least deprived areas between 2020/21 and 2021/22. But it decreased by more for those from the most deprived areas, which has led to the gap between the two groups widening.

From 2009/10 to 2016/17 the attainment gap at SCQF Level 5 or better narrowed steadily, from 33.3 percentage points to 19.3 percentage points. From 2017/18 to 2018/19 it remained broadly stable at just over 20 percentage points, then widened to 20.8 percentage points in 2019/20 before narrowing to 18.2 percentage points (the narrowest gap on record) in 2020/21. The 2021/22 attainment gap (19.1 percentage points) is the second narrowest on record.

At SCQF Level 6 or better, the gap was 37.0 percentage points in 2021/22. This is wider than in 2020/21 (34.4 percentage points). The proportion attaining 1 pass or more decreased for school leavers from both the most and the least deprived areas between 2020/21 and 2021/22. But it decreased by more for those from the most deprived areas, which has led to the gap between the two groups widening.

Longer term, the gap has narrowed most years, starting from 45.6 percentage points in 2009/10. The gap in 2021/22 is wider than in it was 2018/19 (35.8 percentage points), but the proportion attaining one pass or more is now higher for leavers from both the most and least deprived areas.

Chart 4: Percentage of school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 4 to 6 or better, by SIMD quintile, 2009/10 to 2021/22 [note 21] [note 22] [note 23]



Note 21: pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived quintile.

Note 22: Based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2009 for 2009/10 and 2010/11, SIMD 2012 for 2011/12 to 2015/16, SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2019/20, and SIMD 2020 for 2020/21 and 2021/22. More information on the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).

Note 23: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20. This reflects the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leaver attainment. Further information can be found in sections 1.3.1, 4.1 and 7.6.

4.4 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics

Table 6 shows school leaver attainment by pupil characteristic, such as sex and ethnicity. It shows that female pupils are continuing to outperform male pupils at SCQF Levels 4 to 6 or better, with the gap being wider at higher SCQF levels.

Asian-Chinese pupils continue to have high levels of attainment compared to other groups, with 93.6 per cent achieving one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better.

Pupils with a recorded Additional Support Need (ASN) are less likely to achieve SCQF Levels 4 to 6 or better than pupils without an ASN. Similarly, pupils who are declared or assessed disabled are less likely to achieve SCQF Levels 4 to 6 or better than pupils who are not. In both cases, the gap is wider at higher SCQF levels.

In 2021/22 pupils living in Accessible Rural areas and Accessible Small Towns are the most likely to achieve at SCQF Level 4 or better. Those living in Accessible Rural and Remote Rural areas are most likely to achieve at SCQF Level 5 or better. And at SCQF level 6 or better pupils living in Accessible Rural and Large Urban areas have the highest levels of attainment. Pupils living in Remote Small Towns are the least likely to achieve at SCQF levels 4 to 6 or better.

Broad patterns in attainment by pupil characteristic are typically stable year on year, although small numbers in some characteristic groups mean fluctuations do occur. Table 6 shows that a higher percentage of 2021/22 school leavers achieved one pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better than in 2020/21, across almost all characteristic breakdowns. However in most groups a lower percentage achieved one pass or more at SCQF Levels 5 and 6 or better.

Table 6: Percentage of school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 4 to 6 or better, by pupil characteristic, 2020/21 and 2021/22 [note 24] [note 25] [note 26] [note 27]

Pupil Characteristic	2020/21			Percentage 2021/22		
	1 or more at SCQF Level 4 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 5 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 6 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 4 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 5 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 6 or better
Sex						
Male	95.6	85.8	60.6	96.0	85.5	56.9
Female	96.8	89.5	71.5	96.8	87.4	65.8
Ethnicity						
White – Scottish	96.1	87.3	64.9	96.3	85.9	60.0
White – non-Scottish	95.6	87.9	66.4	96.5	86.4	62.0
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	97.1	91.3	76.2	97.0	91.0	71.0
Asian – Indian	[c]	[c]	84.9	[c]	[c]	83.6
Asian – Pakistani	99.2	93.6	79.8	98.7	93.3	76.6
Asian – Chinese	100.0	[c]	94.7	[c]	[c]	93.6
Asian – Other	[c]	91.4	81.4	98.2	93.6	76.2
African/ Black/ Caribbean	98.2	93.9	83.7	98.8	95.1	78.1
All other categories	96.0	88.4	63.9	96.1	85.6	63.7
Not Disclosed/Not known	93.1	83.2	61.5	94.9	82.9	55.9
Urban/Rural						
Large Urban Areas	96.0	87.8	67.8	96.1	86.0	63.0
Other Urban Areas	96.0	86.2	63.8	96.3	85.4	59.3
Accessible Small Towns	96.4	89.1	67.2	96.9	87.6	62.5
Remote Small Towns	95.3	85.5	62.4	95.8	84.2	55.8
Accessible Rural	97.1	90.0	68.6	97.2	89.1	63.8
Remote Rural	97.0	90.8	67.1	96.8	89.3	62.6
Additional Support Needs						
ASN	92.1	75.4	47.1	93.0	75.0	42.9
No ASN	98.6	94.8	77.0	98.6	93.8	73.3
Disabled status						
Declared or assessed disabled	85.6	66.7	40.1	87.3	66.1	34.5
Not declared or assessed disabled	96.5	88.3	66.8	96.7	87.1	62.2
All Leavers	96.2	87.7	66.0	96.4	86.4	61.3

Note 24: Some categories have been grouped together due to small numbers. Some categories (typically 'Asian – Indian' and 'Asian – Chinese') contain between 100-200 leavers and due to relatively small numbers may be subject to fluctuation. Comparisons between groups should take this into account.

Note 25: The 'African/Black/Caribbean' category includes 'African', 'African – Other' and 'Caribbean or Black' categories

Note 26: 'All other categories' includes 'Other – other' and 'Other – Arab'.

Note 27: Pupils who have a Coordinated Support Plan (CSP), Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) or Child's Plan are assessed or declared disabled or have another need.

4.5 Literacy and Numeracy

Literacy and numeracy are key skills for any school leaver. **Literacy** is taken to be the ability to communicate by reading, writing and listening and talking. **Numeracy** is defined as the ability to use numbers in order to solve problems by counting, doing calculations, measuring, and understanding graphs and charts.

A range of courses are included in the literacy and numeracy measures, as set out in background note 7.2.2. These courses are selected based upon the outcomes and assessment standards for **SQA's literacy and numeracy units at National 3, 4 and 5**, with the key criterion being that the main purpose of the qualification or award is to improve literacy and/or numeracy skills.

When looking at achievement in literacy and numeracy, a pass in relevant units (rather than full qualifications, for example) can count as achieving literacy or numeracy at that level. With unit-based courses, a pupil who did not pass the full course, but did achieve the relevant units, would be counted as achieving literacy or numeracy at that level.

Mandatory unit assessments were removed from National 5s in 2017/18 and from Highers in 2018/19. This means that it is no longer mandatory for a pupil to complete unit assessments in order to achieve National 5 and Higher qualifications. This change is likely to have an effect on the literacy and numeracy attainment figures over time.

Table 7 shows the percentage of school leavers attaining literacy and numeracy at SCQF Levels 3 to 5 or better. At each level, more leavers attained literacy skills than numeracy skills, and this was more marked at higher SCQF levels.

At SCQF Level 3 or better, 96.3 per cent of 2021/22 school leavers attained literacy and 95.9 per cent attained numeracy. At SCQF Level 4 or better, 94.4 per cent of school leavers attained literacy and 91.3 per cent attained numeracy. At SCQF Level 5 or better, 82.0 per cent of school leavers attained literacy and 70.7 per cent attained this level in numeracy.

Table 7: Leaver attainment in literacy and numeracy by SCQF Level, percentage of leavers, 2017/18 to 2021/22 [note 28]

SCQF Level	Literacy				Numeracy			
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
3 or better	96.1	96.2	96.5	96.3	95.8	96.1	96.1	95.9
4 or better	93.9	93.9	94.6	94.4	91.4	91.6	91.6	91.3
5 or better	81.7	81.7	83.4	82.0	68.7	71.0	72.4	70.7

Note 28: As described in section 4.1 caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time because of the different approaches to certification used for some qualifications in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Chapter 5: School Leaver Attainment and Destinations

- School leavers with **higher attainment levels** are **more likely** to go on to a **positive destination**.
- **71.0 per cent** of school leavers who **did not achieve a pass at SCQF Level 3 or better** entered a positive destination
- **99.2 per cent** of leavers who achieved **one pass or more at SCQF Level 7** entered a positive destination.

Table 8 shows that for 2021/22, the majority of school leavers with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or Level 7 entered Higher Education (54.6 per cent and 87.8 per cent respectively). For all other leavers, the most common destination was Further Education. For example, 47.6 per cent of leavers whose highest qualification was at SCQF Level 5 entered Further Education. This compares to 45.7 per cent of those whose highest qualification was at SCQF Level 4 and 32.3 per cent of those whose highest qualification was at SCQF Level 3. Amongst those with no passes at SCQF Level 3, 27.8 per cent entered Further Education.

Leavers with no passes at SCQF Level 3 or better were the most likely to be in Other Destinations (29.0 per cent), and leavers with one pass or more at SCQF Level 7 were the least likely to be in Other Destinations (0.8 per cent).

Table 8: Percentage of school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved and initial destinations category, 2021/22 [note 29]

Initial Destination	No passes at SCQF 3 or better	SCQF Level 3	SCQF Level 4	SCQF Level 5	SCQF Level 6	SCQF Level 7	Total
Higher Education	1.1	0.6	0.4	2.3	54.6	87.8	41.2
Further Education	27.8	32.3	45.7	47.6	18.0	3.3	25.5
Training	14.0	20.2	11.1	3.6	0.7	0.2	2.9
Employment	20.8	20.8	28.2	40.4	24.6	7.4	25.1
Voluntary Work	1.6	[c]	0.9	0.4	0.3	[c]	0.5
Personal Skills Development	5.7	[c]	1.5	0.5	0.1	[c]	0.5
Positive Destinations	71.0	79.8	87.8	95.0	98.2	99.2	95.7
Unemployed Seeking	10.6	10.2	7.1	2.9	1.0	0.4	2.3
Unemployed Not Seeking	15.3	8.3	4.2	1.6	0.6	0.3	1.5
Unknown	3.1	1.8	0.9	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.4
Other Destinations	29.0	20.2	12.2	5.0	1.8	0.8	4.3
Number of Leavers	1,139	845	5,521	13,887	21,963	11,882	55,237

Note 29: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Chapter 6: Additional qualifications

Attainment data in previous sections relate to National Qualifications (including Skills for Work), as detailed in section 1.3. This chapter covers a range of other qualifications that may be undertaken by school pupils.

6.1 Developing Scotland's Young Workforce

The Scottish Government established the independent Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, led by Sir Ian Wood, in January 2013. Its remit was to explore the development of a modern, responsive and valued system for vocational training and to emulate the labour markets of the best performing European countries. More information on the [Developing Scotland's Young Workforce strategy](#).

Tables A1.3a and A1.3b in the [supplementary tables](#) show attainment in vocational qualifications at SCQF Levels 2 to 7, by local authority. These vocational qualifications include National Certificates, Higher National Qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, National Progression Awards and Skills for Work. Note that attainment in most of these qualifications is not included in the attainment statistics presented in previous sections, which cover National Qualifications only. The exception is the Skills for Work courses, which contribute to both measures.

Unlike the National Qualifications – National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher – the qualifications which make up the Developing the Young Workforce measure are typically assessed internally. This approach to assessment was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to the same extent as for National Qualifications therefore it is not necessary to have a break in the data series between 2018/19 and 2019/20 for this measure.

Table A1.3b in the [supplementary tables](#) shows that 27.2 per cent of 2021/22 mainstream and special school leavers achieved one or more vocational qualifications at SCQF Level 5 or better. This compares to 26.1 per cent in 2020/21, and to 7.3 per cent in 2013/14.

6.2 Foundation Apprenticeships (Experimental Statistics)

[Foundation Apprenticeships](#) have been designed and developed with Skills Development Scotland, industry and SQA, and are aligned to key sectors of the economy with current skills shortages and projected future jobs growth. They provide work-based learning opportunities with industry-recognised qualifications in the senior phase.

Supplementary table A1.5 covers the number of school leavers in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 who have achieved a Foundation Apprenticeship by subject. The statistics in this table have been labelled as Experimental Statistics reflecting the fact that work to ensure and improve their accuracy is ongoing. Note that attainment in Foundation Apprenticeships is not included in attainment statistics presented in Chapters 4 and 5, which cover National Qualifications only. The National Certificate and National Progression Award components of Foundation Apprenticeships do however contribute to the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce measure outlined in section 6.1 above, and to the 'All SQA qualifications' measure outlined in section 6.3 below.

SQA provide two extracts of data to the Scottish Government (SG); one in August (pre-review data) and one in December (post-review data). The data in table A1.5 includes Foundation Apprenticeship attainment:

- (i) that had been certified by the date which the data was taken for the first extract (10 August 2022) and had a result date between 01 August 2021 and 31 July 2022,
- (ii) where a Foundation Apprenticeship was recorded on the first data extract with a result of E (this means that the FA was evaluated but did not have the required components to obtain a result) and then obtained the required components by the time of the second extract (15 December) or,
- (iii) for which a Letter of Recognition (LoR) was issued. Note: in 2020 a LoR was issued to some students who were on track to receive the full award but were unable to complete the full FA due to Covid-19 restrictions. Similarly, in 2021 a LoR was issued to some Accountancy FA students due to continued disruption to the exam process for professional accountancy units.

Foundation Apprenticeships have been available since 2016. They generally last for two years and so the first set of school leavers to attain Foundation Apprenticeships would have left school in 2018. However, table A1.5 presents data for 2019/2020, 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leavers only.

Skills Development Scotland have been working with SQA, the Scottish Government and others to improve the data recording of Foundation Apprenticeships in school attainment data. The data in this table, designated as **Experimental Statistics**, provides a valid indication of the number of school leavers who attained a Foundation Apprenticeship. Despite this, there will be some completed Foundation Apprenticeships that have not been included.

Work to capture all Foundation Apprenticeship results continued throughout 2022 and additional, updated information will be included in SDS' annual FA progress report, due for publication in spring 2023. The latest version of this report (2021) is available from the [SDS website](#). Please note that data published in SDS reports relates to individual Foundation Apprenticeship cohorts, rather than school leavers as presented in these experimental statistics.

These statistics are being published as **Experimental Statistics** to provide useful information for users, while reflecting that they are undergoing testing to ensure they meet quality standards of Official Statistics in future. The statistics are undergoing ongoing development work with stakeholders including Skills Development Scotland (SDS), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). They will remain with the 'Experimental' label for the duration of this work as more knowledge and quality improvements are built into the data to improve coverage in future outputs. Outputs will be compared on an ongoing basis with other sources to ensure that statistics presented are of sufficient quality.

[Supplementary tables](#) are available as supporting files to this publication.

6.3 All SQA Qualifications Attainment Measure (Experimental Statistics)

As described below, this measure was introduced in 2019/20 to reflect a wider range of attainment than the attainment statistics in chapters 4 and 5, which relate to National Qualifications (including Skills for Work) only. Section 7.3.1 outlines work which has now started to introduce a new measure of school leaver attainment that would cover a wider range of qualifications and awards, including those recognised on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework which are offered by other data providers (i.e. not only SQA). When this change is made it is likely that the measures in this section – covering all SQA Qualifications – will be discontinued. In the meantime we have continued to publish the data in this section as a measure of attainment covering more than just National Qualifications.

6.3.1 Background

As set out in section 1.3, the attainment statistics in Chapters 4 and 5 of this publication focus on Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications (including Skills for Work). These qualifications are a subset of the full range of SQA awards and qualifications¹ that pupils can achieve. A wide variety of other SQA qualifications, not included in the headline statistics in this report, are also increasingly being taken by school pupils.

In response to feedback from users, and to improve the evidence base on the attainment of broader achievements and skills as part of the Curriculum for Excellence, we have been exploring how a wider range of qualifications could be reflected in this publication to account for other attainment achieved by school pupils. Some, but not all, of these are already reflected in the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce [supplementary table](#) (A1.3b), which shows that the percentage of pupils leaving school with vocational qualifications continues to rise (see section 6.1).

In our 2019/20 publication we therefore introduced four [supplementary tables](#) (W1-W4) covering an experimental 'All SQA qualifications' measure, including National Qualifications and other SQA qualifications such as National Certificates, National Progression Awards and Awards (full list given in section 6.3.2). These tables have also been produced for this report for 2021/22 school leavers.

These statistics have been designated as **Experimental Statistics**, reflecting that they are undergoing development and are subject to revision based on informed feedback from users.

Further information on the range of SQA qualifications can be found on the [SQA](#) website.

6.3.2 Methodology

The 'All SQA qualifications' measure includes attainment in qualifications at SCQF levels 3-7.

¹ A number of SCQF accredited courses and qualifications are provided by other bodies. These are not included in this measure. The Scottish Government does not receive data on a consistent basis for the full range of these qualifications/courses delivered by other providers.

Similarly to the National Qualifications-based attainment measure used in previous sections (for which details on methodology can be found in section 7.2.2), only the best result within a subject is counted and Grades A to C (or ungraded pass) are considered a pass. If a pupil attains a D at a certain level, this is counted as equivalent to a pass at the level below.

Where a pupil has attainment in a given subject at multiple Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) levels, potentially across different qualification types (e.g. National Qualifications, National Progression Awards) only the attainment at the highest level is counted.

This ensures that the number of passes achieved at a given SCQF level or better (see Table W2 in the [supplementary tables](#)) counts the total number of subjects where a pass was achieved, allowing us to measure the 'breadth' of attainment (for how many subjects a pupil attains a given level) as well as the 'depth' (to what level a pupil attains).

An important point to note is that for National Qualifications, all qualifications at a given SCQF level carry the same number of SCQF credit points, meaning that they are all associated with the same notional number of hours of learning. This means that it makes sense to treat all National Qualifications at a given SCQF level equally – each is treated as a single pass at a given SCQF level.

However across the full range of SQA qualifications included in the 'All SQA qualifications' measure, there can be variation in the number of credit points carried by different qualifications at the same SCQF Level. Some qualifications at a given SCQF level are worth, for example, 6 SCQF credit points; whilst others are worth, for example, 24. **In this experimental 'All SQA qualifications' measure, both of these qualifications are treated as being equal – each is treated as a single pass at the relevant SCQF Level.** This means that qualifications with varying magnitudes of notional learning hours are treated equally, although time and knowledge requirements of different qualifications at the same level may vary substantially. This should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

The 'All SQA qualifications' measure includes the National Certificate and National Progression Award components of Foundation Apprenticeships. For school leavers who have completed a Foundation Apprenticeship since their establishment in 2016, the attainment achieved in these components is included in this measure, rather than the Foundation Apprenticeship qualification itself. This avoids double-counting attainment in these circumstances.

A summary of the differences between the existing National Qualification attainment measure and the experimental 'All SQA qualifications' measure:

Qualifications included:

- For the existing **National Qualifications** attainment measure: National Qualifications **only** (National Courses, Skills for Work).
- For the experimental **All SQA qualifications** attainment measure: National Qualifications (National Courses, Skills for Work), Awards, Customised Awards, Higher National, National – Workplace, National Certificates, National Progression Awards, Professional Development Awards, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, Ungraded National Courses.

SCQF Credit points:

- For the existing **National Qualifications** attainment measure: **the same** for each qualification within a given SCQF level.
- For the experimental **All SQA** qualifications attainment measure: **differs** between qualifications within a given SCQF level.

Highest SCQF Level achieved:

- For the existing **National Qualifications** attainment measure: highest SCQF level achieved across **any subject in National Qualifications** (SCQF levels 3-7).
- For the experimental **All SQA** qualifications attainment measure: Highest SCQF level achieved across **any subject in any SQA qualification** (SCQF levels 3-7).

Number of passes achieved by SCQF level or better:

- For the existing **National Qualifications** attainment measure: Total number of subjects where a pass was achieved in **National Qualifications**.
- For the experimental **All SQA** qualifications attainment measure: Total number of subjects where a pass was achieved in **any SQA Qualification**. Note that only the best result within a subject is counted. In cases where a National Qualification has been attained within a given subject this will not be counted towards total passes in the 'All SQA qualifications' attainment measure if another qualification has been achieved at a higher SCQF level within the same subject.

6.3.3 Results

[Supplementary tables](#) W1-W4 cover the 'All SQA qualifications' measure. Across all SQA qualifications, data for 2021/22 shows that 63.2 per cent of school leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better, while 1.9 per cent of school leavers achieved no passes at SCQF Level 3 or better. These patterns are similar to those presented for the National Qualifications-based attainment measure in Chapter 4 but show slightly higher overall levels of attainment because a pass in the 'All SQA qualifications' measure can be in a National Qualification, or in one of the other SQA qualifications (listed in section 6.3.2).

Note that, as in the measures in sections 4 and 5, we have included a dashed line break between 2018/19 (and earlier years) and 2019/20 (and subsequent years) for this measure, as it includes National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications (for more information see sections 1.3.1 and 7.6).

Chapter 7: Background Notes

7.1 National Statistics Publication

This is a National Statistics Publication. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

These statistics undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. This publication has been assessed by the [UK Statistics Authority](#).

7.2 Sources and Methodology

7.2.1 Destinations

Source and Quality Assurance

School leaver destination data is sourced from the Opportunities for All shared dataset which is managed and hosted by [Skills Development Scotland](#) (SDS) on behalf of partners. The data is held on the SDS operational Customer Support System (CSS). This data set contains information shared by local authorities, colleges, Scottish Funding Council, Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) via a secure online portal known as the 16+ Data Hub.

Data that has been shared by partners is combined with information gathered directly from young people, their parents/carers or their representatives by SDS staff delivering services to individuals, including transitional support to school leavers. SDS has at least one named adviser for each school in Scotland who works directly with pupils and school staff to support the transition of young people from school. As this combined data is primarily used for operational purposes the quality is continually monitored to ensure SDS, local authorities and colleges can monitor and plan for a young person's involvement in education, training or employment and identify those young people who require advice or support.

SDS has developed guidance documents for their staff which set out the specific activities and processes involved in identifying, engaging with and confirming the status of SDS customers.

Prior to destination data being shared with the Scottish Government, final quality checks are carried out centrally by the Corporate Planning and Performance Reporting team within SDS. These include a review of statuses to ensure the reported destination reflects the available detail. In addition, final checks of shared data are made to ensure destinations are consistent with data sources e.g. matching information about modern or graduate apprentices.

Methodology

A pupil is counted as a school leaver if they have a leaver record on the Opportunities for All shared data set, a [Scottish Government pupil census](#) record for the same academic year, and no Scottish Government pupil census record in the following academic year.

The initial destinations data in this publication provide information on the outcomes for young people approximately three months after the end of the academic year (the 1st Monday in October). The follow-up publication provides information on the outcomes of young people approximately nine months after the end of the academic year (the 1st Monday in April). These should be seen as complementary to one another, but it should be noted that various factors may affect the results at different time periods.

Throughout this publication the initial destination statistics exclude special school leavers from the calculations. Initial destination statistics which include special school leavers can be found in table L3.1 of the [supplementary tables](#).

Recording of ‘unemployed seeking’ statuses

The rollout of Universal Credit (UC) commenced in March 2016 and has replaced out of work benefits, such as Jobseekers’ Allowance, which were previously used to update the status of individuals to ‘unemployed seeking’. For releases of these statistics up to and including 2019/20, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) did not receive data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on Universal Credit claimants.

SDS now receives UC data from DWP, which they used to validate the initial destinations of school leavers for 2020/21 and again in 2021/22.

It is likely that this UC data has had a limited impact on the initial destination figures presented at a national level. SDS maintains an accurate record of the circumstances of the school-leaver-aged young people in unemployment that it engages with, through the delivery of post-school services. The availability of UC data from DWP will, in most cases, have confirmed the statuses of school leavers which had already been determined through this engagement.

7.2.2 Attainment

Source and Quality Assurance

Data on National Qualifications are provided by the [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#) (SQA) using data from the live SQA Awards Processing System (APS).

SQA provide two extracts of data to the Scottish Government (SG): one in August (pre-appeals data) and one in December (post-appeals data). The December extract is used in this publication.

For 2022, the August data extract includes records with a result date between 01 August 2021 and 31 July 2022 (where a candidate has been entered, has a final result or has been certificated), Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) credit information, SCQF points, SCQF levels and qualification types (where available) and excludes records on qualification types that are out of scope.

The SQA data extract is merged with school roll data provided by the Scottish Government (Scottish Candidate Number (SCN), centre number and stage information) from the SG pupil census. Data are retained and provided to the Scottish Government only where there is a match by SCN on the SQA data extract and the school roll data. This ensures SQA only provide records for which Scottish Government have legitimate interest to process.

The December data extract is formed of the August data extract, updated with information from the results of appeals. The December extract contains records provided in the August attainment data transfer which match with the SQA APS on SCN and product code. Any records that were present in the August extract, but are no longer present in SQA APS, will not feature in the December extract; such changes will typically be due to course withdrawals/changes.

Methodology

Most of the data presented in this publication concentrates on National Qualifications (e.g. National 5, Highers, etc. – see section 1.3 for further information).

The attainment data presented in this publication (and [supplementary tables](#)) include qualifications achieved throughout all stages of a pupil's schooling.

The attainment data are based on the result date of learners' qualifications. In some cases, this may lead to attainment being reported in a different academic year to that reported by SQA. There is also the possibility of a small number of awards being excluded if an appeal is successful after a pupil has left. Only attainment data for candidates with a Scottish Candidate Number in the pupil census that year are included.

This publication uses the 'latest and best' approach for attainment data. This means that only the best result within a subject is counted, with a grade A to C (or ungraded pass) considered a pass. For example, if a pupil passes Higher Mathematics one year and Advanced Higher Mathematics the following year, only the Advanced Higher qualification will be counted when looking at how many qualifications at any level that leaver has achieved by the time they left school.

If a pupil attains a D at a certain level this is not counted as achieving that level. Instead, it is counted as being equivalent to attainment at the level below. (This is the case even when there is not a qualification offered at the level below). For example, if a pupil attains a D at SCQF Level 5 in a certain subject this would be counted as attaining at SCQF Level 4 or better for that subject, and not at SCQF Level 5 or better.

Attainment statistics exclude special school pupils unless otherwise stated.

The methodology used for these statistics is distinct from other sources of attainment data (for a list of several of these other sources see section 7.11). The text below outlines the main differences between this publication and [the SQA statistics](#) published annually in August and December.

A summary of the differences between the attainment measures in this publication and [SQA Attainment Statistics](#):

Main measure:

- This publication: numbers of passes achieved by **individual school leavers** at a given SCQF level (**pupil level**).
- SQA attainment statistics: Grades and number of passes achieved **in total** in a given qualification or course (**qualification level**).

Focuses on:

- This publication: **highest level attained** by individual school leavers.
- SQA attainment statistics: **grades and pass rates** in different qualifications broken down by subject.

Cohort covered:

- This publication: **school leavers** only.
- SQA attainment statistics: **all candidates**, including school pupils who entered SQA qualifications as well as candidates in non-school settings such as Further Education establishments.

Qualifications covered:

- This publication: main measures based on **National Qualifications** only, and latest **6 years** of attainment data.
- SQA attainment statistics: **All SQA qualifications** entered in a **single year**.

Curriculum

School leavers from 2021/22 will have experienced the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) throughout the senior phase (S4-S6) of their school education. School leavers from 2013/14 and 2014/15 will have taken a range of awards and qualifications, including both current qualifications and older qualifications that have now been phased out (such as Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2).

For most young people S4 is the last compulsory year of school, but the majority choose to stay on and complete S5 and S6 (see Charts 1a & 1b). Highers (SCQF Level 6) are generally taken in S5 or S6 and Advanced Highers (SCQF 7) are generally taken in S6. Highers, sometimes along with Advanced Highers, are the Scottish qualifications required for entry into Higher Education.

Under CfE, schools and their partners are able to offer greater personalisation and choice in the Senior Phase (S4 to S6) in a range of ways, for example by: designing the Senior Phase as a three-year experience, rather than planning each year separately; and delivering qualifications over a variable timeframe in response to young people's needs and prior achievements. Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (see section 6.1) has built upon this and has strengthened partnerships between schools, colleges, employers and other providers to increase the range of options and pathways on offer to young people.

With more choices available in the senior phase, young people are also taking a range of vocational qualifications, including National Certificates, Higher National Qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, National Progression Awards and Skills for Work qualifications, alongside their National Qualifications. These provide a valuable route into Further Education, Higher Education, training or employment. This publication mainly concentrates on National Qualifications (e.g. National 5, Highers, etc.) and Skills for Work qualifications. Statistics on school leavers achieving vocational qualifications can be found in section 6.1, and in table A1.3 of the [supplementary tables](#). Statistics on Foundation Apprenticeships can be found in section 6.2, and in table A1.5 of the [supplementary tables](#). Section 6.3, and tables W1-W4 in the [supplementary tables](#), provide information on the new, experimental 'All SQA qualifications' measure.

A list of all the tables available in the [supplementary tables](#) can be found in section 7.9.

Literacy and numeracy attainment

When the publication refers to Literacy or Numeracy attainment, a pupil is counted towards having literacy or numeracy attainment if they have passed courses or units from the list below.

SCQF Level 3 Literacy:

- National 3 English
- National 3 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- National 3 Gàidhlig
- National 3 Literacy unit
- SCQF Level 3 Communication unit
- National 3 Gàidhlig Literacy unit
- National 3 ESOL unit group

SCQF Level 4 Literacy:

- National 4 English
- National 4 ESOL
- National 4 Gàidhlig
- National 4 Skills for Work (SfW) Travel and Tourism
- National 4 Literacy unit
- SCQF Level 4 Communication unit
- National 4 Gàidhlig Literacy unit
- National 4 ESOL unit group

SCQF Level 5 Literacy:

- National 5 English
- National 5 ESOL
- National 5 Gàidhlig
- National 5 SfW Travel and Tourism
- National 5 Literacy unit
- SCQF Level 5 Communication unit
- National 5
- National 5 English unit group
- National 5 ESOL unit group
- National 5 Gàidhlig unit group

SCQF Level 3 Numeracy:

- National 3 Applications of Mathematics
- National 3 Gníomhachas Matamataigs (Applications of Mathematics)
- National 3 Numeracy unit
- National 3 Aireamhachd (Numeracy) unit
- SCQF Level 3 Numeracy unit

SCQF Level 4 Numeracy:

- National 4 Applications of Mathematics
- National 4 Mathematics
- National 4 Gníomhachas Matamataigs (Applications of Mathematics)
- National 4 Matamataig (Mathematics)
- National 4 Numeracy unit
- National 4 Aireamhachd (Numeracy) unit
- SCQF Level 4 Numeracy unit

SCQF Level 5 Numeracy:

- National 5 Applications of Mathematics
- National 5 Mathematics
- National 5 Gníomhachas Matamataigs (Applications of Mathematics)
- National 5 Matamataig (Mathematics)
- National 5 Numeracy unit
- National 5 Aireamhachd (Numeracy) unit
- SCQF Level 5 Numeracy unit
- National 5 Applications of Mathematics unit group
- National 5 Mathematics unit group
- National 5 Gníomhachas Matamataigs (Applications of Mathematics) unit group

7.2.3 Attainment and destinations data matching

The school leaver destinations data from SDS is matched to the SG pupil census and to SQA data, so that pupil characteristics and attainment data can be linked to the destinations. Only leavers from the SDS data with a match to the pupil census are included in the analysis within this publication. This means that some leavers are excluded from the analysis.

All matching is done within certain constraints:

- Pupil census record must be in S3 or above, or categorised as SP (Special School), or AD (Adult Learner) in order to be included.
- School attended must be the main school attended by the pupil.

After being matched to the pupil census the destination data are then matched to the SQA attainment data using the Scottish Candidate Number (SCN).

7.2.4 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

The [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) (SIMD) identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Scotland. The SIMD ranks small geographical areas – called data zones - from most deprived (ranked 1) to least deprived (ranked 6,976). The data

zones can then be grouped into five quintiles, covering the 20% most deprived areas to the 20% least deprived areas.

In this publication, the SIMD is used to assess how the destinations and attainment of school leavers differ based on the level of deprivation in their home (or school) area. Pupils are assigned to a SIMD quintile based on the data zone recorded for their home address in the Scottish Government's pupil census. If the pupil does not have a data zone recorded in the pupil census data, the data zone of the pupil's school is used.

The SIMD is updated periodically (typically every three or four years) and therefore the SIMD used in these statistics is also updated in line with this to ensure that the most appropriate version is used. SIMD 2020 was used for the first time for the 2020/21 leaver cohort.

7.3 Future Developments

National Statistics develop over time to reflect changes in user needs and the circumstances they report on. In this section we explain some of the changes we are currently considering for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations.

If you have any feedback on the proposals, please contact us at: school.stats@gov.scot.

7.3.1 Proposed changes to the measure of school leaver attainment

We are planning to introduce a new measure of school leaver attainment in future versions of this publication.

At present the main measures of school leaver attainment in this publication are based on SQA National Qualifications only (including Skills for Work). These measures are used extensively by the Scottish Government including, for example, as three of the key measures in the [National Improvement Framework](#) (NIF).

The Scottish Government also produces other school leaver attainment statistics which are available on Insight. Insight is a professional benchmarking tool used by local authorities and schools. While Insight is not publicly available and is used primarily by secondary schools and local authorities, some of the measures it contains are published, for example in the [School Information Dashboard](#).

The measures of school leaver attainment available from Insight are not consistent with those in this publication. Insight measures include:

- A measure of school leaver attainment based on SQA National Qualifications only. This is similar to the main measures in this publication, but the methodology used is slightly different. For example, Insight covers only senior phase school leavers (S4 - S6) whilst this publication covers all school leavers. The treatment of attainment at grade D is also different between the two sources.
- A measure based on a wider range of qualifications and awards recognised on the SCQF. This contains all SQA qualifications and awards but also many available from other providers. The other methodological differences outlined above also apply here.

The focus on National Qualifications in this publication means that some of the attainment which young people leave school with is not being captured. This does not reflect how the curriculum has developed in many schools during the last decade. Students now have a greater variety of choice in the qualifications they undertake as part of their learner pathway. In addition, the different methodologies used to determine school leaver attainment in this publication and Insight can be a source of confusion. Recent feedback has provided further evidence of the need for change.

Reports by the [OECD](#) and [Audit Scotland](#) in 2021 led to the Scottish Government consulting with users in 2022. This covered how to ensure that the National Improvement Framework (NIF) key measures reflect the wider ambitions of the curriculum and the value of wider data for improvement purposes.

Feedback included the view that the key NIF measures should reflect as broad a range of achievement as possible. There was also a clear view that there should be a consistent set of measures used for improvement and monitoring purposes going forward.

Based on this we have started work on aligning the school leaver attainment statistics in this report and those in Insight. This will likely lead to measures in future versions of this publication being based on a wider range of providers and qualifications and awards. It is likely to also involve other methodological changes and may also result in changes to the measures used in Insight. There are a number of factors to consider including key questions on the most appropriate methodology. We will be working on this over the course of 2023 and will consult with stakeholders later this year.

Our intention is that the new measures will be included in the future releases of this publication either in addition to, or instead of, the existing measures.

7.3.2 Proposed changes to which activities are recorded as Training versus Personal Skills Development in School Leaver Destinations.

The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland are considering changing the way in which some school leavers, currently identified as being in Training or Personal Skills Development (PSD), are recorded. The proposed change is intended to better reflect the activities undertaken by young people in Scotland.

If adopted, this would affect the Training and PSD categories in future editions of these National Statistics on school leaver destinations. **Note that the proposed change would not affect the overall statistics on Positive Destinations.**

The proposed change would involve some of those currently recorded as being in PSD, specifically those in PSD – Employability (see section 7.4.1) being moved into an expanded Training category. At the same time the PSD category would be reduced to cover only those in PSD – Social & Health (see section 7.4.1).

Introducing these new definitions to the National Statistics on leaver destinations would mean that the Training and PSD categories would no longer be directly comparable to historic data. If the proposed change is made we will consider whether to revise previous years of data to match the new definitions.

If you are a user of these statistics, we would like to hear your feedback on: a) the proposed changes to the Training and PSD categories; and b) whether we should revise our historic destinations data to match the new definitions.

7.4 Definitions & Symbols

7.4.1 Destinations

Leaver destinations are categorised by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) based on shared administrative data wherever possible. Alternatively, they have been captured by staff in data sharing organisations or through direct data input by SDS staff, as a result of contact with individuals, their parents/carers or organisations an individual is engaging with. The following categories for leaver destinations are included in this statistical bulletin:

Positive destination: includes higher education, further education, training, employment, voluntary work, Personal Skills Development and (between 2010/11 and 2017/18) Activity Agreements.

Higher Education: includes leavers following Higher National Diploma (HND) or Higher National Certificate (HNC) courses, degree courses, courses for the education and training of teachers and higher level courses for professional qualifications. It includes programmes at a level higher than the standard of the National Qualifications, i.e. above SCQF Level 7. Leavers with a deferred, unconditional place in higher education have also been included in this category.

Further Education: includes leavers undertaking full-time education which is not higher education and who are no longer on a school roll. This may include National Qualifications.

Training: includes leavers who are on a training course and in receipt of an allowance or grant, such as the Employability Fund national training programme. It also includes leavers who are on local authority or third sector funded training programmes that are in receipt of a training allowance or those participating in Community Jobs Scotland.

From 2018/19 this category includes school leavers receiving support that would previously have been recorded as 'Activity Agreements'. This means that the proportions of school leavers with a destination category of Training in years 2018/19 to 2021/22 cannot be directly compared to the proportion recorded for previous years. Further information can be found in the Activity Agreements definition below.

Employment: includes those who consider themselves to be employed and in receipt of payment from their employers. It includes young people undertaking training in employment through national training programmes such as Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships.

Voluntary Work: includes those undertaking voluntary work/volunteering which will involve a young person giving of their time and energy through a third party with or without financial allowance.

Personal Skills Development: Young people who have a destination as Personal Skills Development (PSD) on the Opportunities for All shared dataset fall into one of two different categories:

PSD (Employability): including individuals who participate in activities with the aim of employment. For example, programmes run by community learning and development or third sector organisations.

PSD (Social & Health): includes individuals who may not be ready to enter the labour market and require access to support from support services to make transitions into learning/work or adulthood. An example of this is where an individual undertakes structured opportunities appropriate to their long term needs or to address their barriers to engaging in education, employment or training.

The way in which school leavers undertaking Personal Skills Development are counted in these statistics changed in 2018/19 and data for previous years was revised to allow consistent comparisons over time. Further information can be found in [the 2020 release of this publication](#) (section 6.1)

Activity Agreements: prior to 2018/19 this included those for whom there was an agreement between a young person and an advisor that the young person would take part in a programme of learning and activity which helped them become ready for formal learning or employment.

The integration of funding streams as part of the ongoing implementation of No One Left Behind² means that although local authorities will provide the same type of support and opportunities for young people, this activity is no longer funded under the banner of 'Activity Agreements'. This means it is no longer appropriate to record school leavers receiving this support using this category. Instead they are recorded in the Training category for 2018/19 onwards. Note that data for earlier years continues to include the Activity Agreements category reflecting the support that was available at the time.

Unemployed seeking: includes those known by Skills Development Scotland or their partners to be seeking employment or training. This includes those receiving support from SDS, Department for Work and Pensions and other partners. It is based on regular contact between the supporting organisation and the individual. This does not refer to the definition of 'unemployed' used by the Department for Work and Pensions to calculate published unemployment rates.

Unemployed not seeking: includes all those individuals who are not yet ready or are unavailable to enter the labour market for a range of reasons. The reasons may involve ill health/sickness, prison, pregnancy, caring for children or other dependents or taking time out.

Unknown: includes all leavers whose destination is not known either to Skills Development Scotland, the school attended, other partners or were not able to be contacted at the survey point.

² No One Left Behind: review of employability services sets out the next steps that will be taken to deliver more effective and joined-up employability support across Scotland. As part of this the funding streams associated with Activity Agreements and other programmes are being integrated into a new local employability delivery model managed collaboratively between Scottish Government and Local Government from April 2019.

7.4.2 Symbols

The following symbols are used:

[z] = not applicable

[c] = value suppressed to protect against the risk of disclosure of personal information

[low] = value less than 0.05% but greater than zero.

7.5 Additional Support Needs

An Additional Support Need (ASN) is recorded where a pupil is receiving any form of additional support for learning. This could be for a wide variety of reasons, of different durations and of any type. The different types of support provided include Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSP) and Individualised Educational Programmes (IEP) as well as being assessed or declared disabled, having a Child's Plans and other plans. Under previous legislation a pupil may have been categorised as having a Record of Need (RoN).

7.6 Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on these statistics

7.6.1 School Leaver Destinations

The greatest effect of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on school leaver destinations is likely to have been seen in 2019/20 although it is likely that there has been some ongoing impact on the destinations of some 2020/21 and 2021/22 school leavers.

2019/20

The availability of particular opportunities (employment opportunities, for example) to some 2019/20 school leavers was directly affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. For example, the start dates of some opportunities were delayed, leading to a direct impact on the destinations recorded for some pupils. The pandemic may also have affected local partnerships' ability to track some school leavers through home visits.

In addition to this, the approach taken to the certification of SQA qualifications in 2020 will have affected the attainment of many 2019/20 school leavers. The pandemic may also have influenced pupils' decisions on when to leave school (for example, delaying leaving from 2019/20 to 2020/21). Together these factors could have affected the attainment of some 2019/20 school leavers, which may in turn have further affected the destination choices and opportunities available to them.

2020/21

For 2020/21 school leavers, it is likely that the pandemic continued to affect the choices made by, and opportunities available to, some school leavers.

As for 2019/20 school leavers, there may have been some ongoing direct impacts on the availability of some opportunities. In addition, the approaches taken to the certification of SQA qualifications in 2020 and 2021 will have affected the attainment of some school leavers; and the pandemic may have influenced some pupils' decisions on when to leave school, which may in some cases have affected their overall attainment. These factors may together have affect the choices made by, and opportunities available to, some of these leavers.

2021/22

For 2021/22 school leavers there may again be some ongoing impact on school leavers destinations, resulting from the effect of alternative approaches to certification of SQA qualifications since 2020.

The impacts of COVID-19 should therefore be kept in mind when considering changes over time in school leavers' destinations.

7.6.2 School Leaver Attainment

The attainment data presented in **Chapters 4 and 5 of this report covers Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications at SCQF levels 3-7** achieved throughout **all stages** of pupils' education at school.

The attainment data is calculated by considering school leavers' attainment over the previous 6 years. For 2021/22 school leavers' total attainment is based on attainment from 2017 to 2022. Results focus on the highest level achieved and so it is likely that attainment in earlier years will have a limited impact on the final figures.

In both 2020 and 2021 the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of National 5 (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) exams. Therefore alternative approaches were taken to determining grades.

In 2020 exams were cancelled and the decision was taken that the SQA could not collect coursework or mark coursework that had already been collected. Grades in the qualifications listed above were instead based on teacher estimates.

In 2021 the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was employed. This differed from the approach taken in 2020 and required teachers and lecturers to use 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. In addition a more generous approach to grading was adopted to help ensure fairness for learners.

Pass rates for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher were higher in 2020 and 2021 than in 2019 (the last pre-pandemic year of exams). In 2022 pass rates reduced compared to 2020 and 2021, but remained above 2019 levels. The post-appeal pass rates for candidates entered for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications for years 2018 to 2022 can be found in the [SQA's attainment statistics for 2022 \(December release\)](#).

As the attainment data in this report considers all of the attainment which a school leaver gains over their time at school, the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 may be based on a combination of approaches to certification. This is demonstrated in Table A which shows that, for example:

- The attainment of 2021/22 school leavers was based on results determined through a combination of examinations and coursework in 2019 (and before), teacher estimates in 2020, demonstrated attainment in 2021 and exams, coursework and support measures in 2022.
- The attainment of 2020/21 school leavers was based on results determined through a combination of the examination and coursework approach in 2019 (and before), teacher estimates in 2020 and demonstrated attainment in 2021.
- The attainment of those who left school in 2019/20 was based on results determined through a combination of the examination and coursework approach and the teacher estimate based approach of 2020.
- The attainment of those who left school in 2018/19 and before will have been determined based entirely on the usual approach of examinations and coursework.

Table A: School leaver cohorts and the combination of approaches taken to determining grades in National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher

Attainment year	School leaver cohort			
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
2019 (exam & coursework)	✓	✓	✓	✓
2020 (teacher estimates)	X	✓	✓	✓
2021 (demonstrated attainment)	X	X	✓	✓
2022 (exam, coursework, support measures)	X	X	X	✓

The measures in this report focus on the highest SCQF level achieved. Typically this is gained in the final year before a pupil leaves school. For example, amongst 2021/22 school leavers, 61 per cent achieved their highest level in 2022 and 35 per cent achieved their highest level in 2021. So, for the majority of 2021/22 school leavers the combination of exams, coursework and support measures used in 2022 will have had the biggest impact on the attainment measures in this report. While for just over a third the demonstrated attainment approach used in 2021 will be the most relevant.

The impacts of these different approaches to certification upon school leaver attainment means that care should be taken when making comparisons over time. The attainment data in this report provides an accurate reflection of the attainment with which school leavers in Scotland left school. For this reason attainment data for 2021/22, 2020/21, 2019/20 and previous years are presented together. However, a **dashed line break** in the series has been placed between 2018/19 (and before) and 2019/20 (and after). This indicates that the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 has been determined differently to that for 2018/19 school leavers and before.

7.7 Rounding

Figures used in the commentary of this report are based on the unrounded data which can be found in the [supplementary tables](#). This means that they may not always match with figures that derived using the rounded data displayed in tables and charts.

7.8 UK Comparisons

7.8.1 Attainment

Scotland has a different set of qualifications to the rest of the United Kingdom (UK) and comparisons cannot be made directly. Scotland, and the other UK countries, participate in the [Programme for International Assessment \(PISA\)](#) survey on education performance.

7.8.2 Destinations

The information presented here is for young people who have left school, while in England and Wales information is collected on 16-19 year-olds who are not in education, employment or training. As a result, direct comparisons cannot be made.

7.9 List of Supplementary Tables

[Supplementary tables](#) on attainment and leaver destinations are available.

These tables on attainment and school leaver initial destinations include breakdowns by: characteristics of leavers; local authority; additional support needs; stage of leaving; and subject. There will be information on attainment and leaver destinations of those from special schools.

School Leaver Destinations

- Tables C1.1a & C1.1b: Number and percentage of initial mainstream secondary school leavers by stage of leaving, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table L1.1. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by initial destination category, 1992/93 to 2021/22.
- Table L1.2. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by initial destination category and sex, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table L1.3. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by initial destination category and 6-fold Urban Rural classification, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table L1.4. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by initial destination category and ethnic background, 2021/22.
- Table L1.5. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by initial destination category and national identity, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table L1.6. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by initial destination category and whether declared or assessed disabled, 2009/10 and 2014/15 to 2021/22.
- Table L2.1. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by initial destination category and local authority, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table L2.2. Number of mainstream secondary school leavers by initial destination category and local authority, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table L3.1. Percentage of leavers from mainstream secondary and special schools by initial destination category and Additional Support Need, 2009/10 to 2021/22.

Attainment Statistics

- Tables A1.1a. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved, by SIMD quintile, 2009/10 to 2021/22.

- Table A1.1b. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by total qualifications achieved, by SIMD quintile, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Tables A1.2a and A1.2b. Attainment of mainstream secondary school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved in each subject, number and percentage, 2011/12 to 2021/22.
- Tables A1.3a and A1.3b. Number and percentage of secondary and special school leavers attaining vocational qualifications at SCQF Level 2 to 7, by local authority, 2013/14 to 2021/22.
- Tables A1.4a and A1.4b. Percentage and number of mainstream secondary school leavers with no passes in National Qualifications at SCQF Level 3 or better, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table A2.1. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved, by local authority, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table A2.2. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by total qualifications achieved, by local authority, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Tables A2.3a and A2.3b. Number and percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by total qualifications achieved, by local authority and SIMD, 2012/13 to 2021/22.
- Table A3.1. Percentage of leavers from mainstream secondary and special schools by highest SCQF Level achieved and Additional Support Need, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table A3.2. Percentage of leavers from mainstream secondary and special schools by total qualifications achieved and Additional Support Need, 2009/10 to 2021/22.

Experimental Statistics

- Table A1.5. Number of mainstream secondary school leavers attaining Foundation Apprenticeships, by subject, 2019/20 to 2021/22.
- Table W1. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes at SCQF Level 3-7 or better, All SQA Qualifications measure, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table W2. Mainstream secondary school leavers' attainment by SCQF Level or better and number of passes achieved, percentage of leavers, All SQA Qualifications measure, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table W3. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 4 to 6, by pupil characteristic, All SQA Qualifications measure, 2009/10 to 2021/22.
- Table W4. Percentage of mainstream secondary school leavers by total qualifications achieved, by SIMD quintile, All SQA Qualifications measure, 2009/10 to 2021/22.

7.10 Cost

7.10.1 Attainment

There is no additional cost to SQA to supply the attainment data.

7.10.2 Leavers

As part of the overall approach to delivering the Scottish Government's Opportunities for All commitment the follow-up of school leavers is a business-as-usual activity for Skills Development Scotland and costs are embedded within their daily operations.

7.11 Feedback and Further Information

7.11.1 Further Information

This publication is available on the [Scottish Government's website](#).

School level information is available through Insight (a professional benchmarking tool used by local authorities and schools) and will be published on the [School Information Dashboard](#).

The scope of these destination statistics is limited to school leavers, but other sources are available to assess patterns across the wider society. For example, information on employment trends more broadly is available from the [Scottish Government labour market statistics website](#), and the [Scottish Funding Council](#) publishes data on participation in Higher Education.

The Scottish Government and [Skills Development Scotland](#) (SDS) have developed the Annual Participation Measure (APM) which complements school leaver destination statistics. Published every August, the APM captures the activity of all 16-19 year-olds across a complete year, including those who choose to stay on at school as well as those who have left school. The APM has been adopted as the metric for measuring success in relation to the young people's participation national indicator within the [National Performance Framework](#). The indicator measures the percentage of young adults (16-19 year-olds) participating in education, training or employment. [Latest results](#) were published in August.

The [Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence \(CfE\) Levels](#) return is a census based data collection and gathers data on whether or not pupils have achieved the expected CfE Level for their stage based on the class teachers' professional judgement. The collection covers numeracy and the three elements of literacy (reading, writing, listening and talking) at four stages within Broad General Education: P1, P4, P7 and S3.

Scotland participates in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey. This assessment is undertaken by 15 year-olds in almost eighty countries, including all OECD countries, and as such is a key international benchmark of performance. [Results](#) are available on the Scottish Government website.

Skills Development Scotland publish Foundation Apprenticeship Progress Reports on an annual basis. These include data on the [number of young people undertaking Foundation Apprenticeships in Scotland](#).

The list below provides summary information for some of the key sources of data on attainment and the activity of young people in Scotland.

1. **Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations** (this publication).
 - Available from the [Scottish Government](#), February 2023.
 - Provides information on the **attainment of school leavers** and on the activities being undertaken by **school leavers 3 months after the end of the school year**.
 - Coverage: school leavers.

2. **Summary Statistics for Follow-up Leaver Destinations.**
 - Available from the [Scottish Government](#), June.
 - Provides information on the activities being undertaken by **school leavers 9 months after the end of the school year**.
 - Coverage: school leavers.
3. **Annual Participation Measure.**
 - Available from [Skills Development Scotland](#), August.
 - Reports on the economic and employment activity of the **wider 16-19 year-old cohort**, including those at school.
 - Coverage: all 16-19 year-olds.
4. **Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels.**
 - Available from the [Scottish Government](#), December.
 - Provides information on the national performance of **P1, P4, P7 and S3 school pupils**. Reports on the percentage of pupils who have achieved the expected Curriculum for Excellence level in reading, writing, listening and talking, and numeracy.
 - Coverage: all P1, P4, P7 and S3 school pupils. (Not collected in 2019/20. Collected for primary school pupils only in 2020/21).
5. **SQA Attainment Statistics.**
 - Available from [Scottish Qualifications Authority](#), August and December.
 - Attainment statistics for every course and qualification in a given year.
 - Coverage: all SQA attainment, not just that of school leavers; and includes those attaining SQA qualifications in non-school settings such as Further Education.

7.11.2 Feedback: Tell us what you think

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