

FINAL ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT REPORT – SESSION 2023-2024

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on final attainment across all Argyll and Bute Secondary Schools.
- 1.2 This update follows the release on 26th February of data on the Scottish Government's Insight tool. The Insight tool is designed to allow fair comparison of a group of pupils in Argyll and Bute with larger groups of pupils taken from all the other 31 local authorities with similar backgrounds (sex, additional support needs, stage, and SIMD band). This is known as the Virtual Comparator (VC) and is a key feature of Insight. It should be noted that the current Virtual Comparator methodology does not incorporate any measure of rurality. Insight also allows comparison of attainment in Argyll and Bute with average attainment nationally
- 1.3 This report focusses on attainment data made available by the Scottish Government in February 2025. Members will recall that data on pupil attainment and wider achievement was shared in the December 2024 paper *Education Performance Data Analysis 2023-24*.
- [Education Performance Data Analysis 2023-24](#)
- 1.4 The report offers analysis of attainment levels across Argyll and Bute secondary schools post-SQA appeals, and of the overall success of appeals in the authority.
- 1.5 The report goes on to present updated attainment information from Insight. Presented data incorporates the results of appeals. It also refers to the Insight tariff points allocated to candidates' wider achievement attainment described in December's report. Tariff points are applied by Insight to levels of attainment – for example a Higher A award gains more tariff points than a Higher B award, and both gain more than a National 5 A award. Tariff points allow a score to be calculated for each candidate that summarises a wide range of achievement and awards from a range of providers. Tariff points also allow comparisons to

be made between pupil cohorts, schools, local authorities and their virtual comparators.

- 1.6 Analysis of attainment includes that of school leavers, the specific attainment of whom is a feature of the February Insight update.

Specifically, the areas analysed in this report are:

- Leavers cohort trends (stage of leaving)
- Literacy and Numeracy
- Average attainment for all candidates,
- Attainment in the context of levels of deprivation
- Young people's initial destinations on leaving school in summer 2024 and at Christmas 2023.

- 1.7 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- a) Consider the information in this report, particularly as it relates to the attainment performance of school leavers;
- b) Note the increase in attainment brought about by successful appeals, at authority level and school-by-school;
- c) Note that the information contained in this report constitutes all attainment across both National Qualifications and Wider Achievement courses, the latter of which was described in the December report without the associated tariff points having been included in statistics.
- d) Note the difficulty in making meaningful comparisons with leavers cohorts over the last few sessions due to alterations in assessment methods and also shifting patterns of school leaving, which are not unique to Argyll and Bute and have occurred nationally.

FINAL ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT REPORT – SESSION 2024-2025

2.0 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In August 2024, the Council received notification from the SQA of awards for all pupils in Argyll and Bute entered for National Qualifications in session 2023/24.
- 2.2 In December 2024, the Council received updated attainment data from the SQA, incorporating the results of appeals submitted by or on behalf of candidates.
- 2.3 The 2024 diet saw a return to established awarding procedures for most courses. As a result of these modifications, the SQA has advised that comparison to 2019, the last pre-pandemic diet, is most appropriate for comparative purposes. The SQA has advised that extreme caution should be applied in comparing 2024 attainment data to data from results produced between 2020 and 2023.
- 2.5 This report is the third report focusing on the attainment of young people to have been brought to Committee in school session 2024-2025. The August 2024 report summarised the initial attainment pattern immediately following the release of attainment results by the SQA. In December 2024, a report gave an overview of attainment across all ten authority secondary schools, incorporating both authority post-appeal data and data from The Scottish Government's Insight tool.
- 2.6 The data in this report reiterates and further analyses the impact of appeals on attainment. It also presents and evaluates the newly-released data on the attainment of young people who left school in 2024.
- 2.7 Comparison of leavers cohort data is limited for two reasons. As mentioned in 2.3 above, alternative assessment methods applied over the last 5 years mean that attainment and achievement have been accumulated under differing circumstances. Furthermore, changes to the constitution of leavers cohorts and specifically the proportion of leavers who leave after S4, means that cohort to cohort comparison is limited in some measures. For example, an increase in S4 leavers would mean that the available time to accumulate tariff points is

diminished, and also the proportion of pupils who around to sit Level 6 awards (most often completed in S5 and S6) would be lower than in previous cohorts.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Community Services Committee:

- a) Consider the information in this report, particularly as it relates to the attainment performance of school leavers;
- b) Note the increase in attainment brought about by successful appeals, at authority level and school-by-school;
- c) Note that the information contained in this report constitutes all attainment across both National Qualifications and Wider Achievement courses, the latter of which was described in the December report without the associated tariff points having been included in statistics.
- d) Note the difficulty in making meaningful comparisons with leavers cohorts over the last few sessions due to alterations in assessment methods and also shifting patterns of school leaving, which are not unique to Argyll and Bute and have occurred nationally.

4.0 DETAIL

4.1 SQA Appeals

For the 2022-2023 exam diet, SQA revised the appeals process. Unlike in 2021-22, when evidence of candidate attainment could be submitted and such information was considered in terms of any change in grade, in 2022-23, the appeal process was limited to an administrative check relating to the accuracy of the final grade entered, and a check on addition of marking. This same process was applied in 2023-24. As a result, there has been an overall reduction in the number of appeals submitted and the number of amended grades, both nationally and in Argyll and Bute.

4.2 A-C Pass Rates

The table below details pre- and post-appeals attainment at grades **A-C** for Argyll and Bute in comparison to the national figures.

2024 National Qualifications	Argyll & Bute			National		
	SQA Results August	Post Appeal	Change (% points)	SQA Results August	Post Appeal	Change (% points)
		December			December	
Adv. Higher	76.43%	76.43%	0.00%	75.25%	75.53%	0.28%
Higher	72.06%	72.29%	0.23%	74.87%	75.11%	0.24%
Nat 5	75.58%	75.60%	0.02%	77.24%	77.33%	0.09%

Post-appeals, at Advanced Higher the post-appeal A-C pass rate has remained unchanged and remains ahead of the national post-appeal figure.

Argyll and Bute	0.02%	0.23%	0.00%	0.05%	0.00%	0.00%
-----------------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

4.5 Appeal Success by Subject

The table below shows the subjects and levels at which appeals were successful in increasing the mark awarded to the pupil:

Subject	National 5	Higher	Advanced Higher	Number of Awards Changed
Applications of Mathematics		1		1
Biology	2	1		3
English	2	7		9
Geography	2			2
Graphic Communication	1			1
History	1	3	1	5
Mathematics	1	3		4
Modern Studies	1	2		3
Physical Education		1		1
Practical Cookery	1			1
Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies	1	1	1	3
Grand Total	12	19	2	33

Although two awards at Advanced Higher level were raised post appeal, both were already within the A-C pass range and therefore did not impact the authority's A-C pass rate.

Of 33 appeals which led to a revised award, 30 saw the award increase by a single award level (7 to 6 for example). Two pupils, both in Higher English, saw increased of +2 and +3 respectively, whilst a Practical Cookery pupil saw an increase of 6 (9 to 3) – signifying a move from No Award to B.

Insight Analysis

4.6 The Scottish Government's Insight tool allows analysis of attainment from a variety of perspectives. Below, attainment analysis is provided from three such perspectives: attainment in Literacy and Numeracy – a key element of the Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework; average attainment of young people in the context of the top 20% of attainers, the middle 60% of attainers and the lowest 20% of attainers; and attainment in the context of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). For each attainment focus, data is supplied for all pupils in S4-S6, and for those who left school in 2024 – data which was unavailable in the October insight update.

4.7 Analysis of leavers cohorts is useful as a snapshot to understand

attainment and achievement of those who leave school in any given year. However, leavers cohort attainment statistics are also impacted by the constitution of the cohorts – that is, who makes up the cohort and specifically when they have left school. For example, if a leavers cohort has an increased proportion of S4 leavers compared to the previous year, then the percentage of pupils who will have achieved a Level 6 award will likely reduce because the majority of S4 pupils do not present for a Higher award. This does not mean that Level 6 attainment has declined, but a higher percentage of the possibly population would not present for it compared to the previous year. As such, the constitution of leavers cohorts should be considered alongside any attainment analysis. The table below shows the constitution of Argyll and Bute leavers cohorts over the last 5 years:

Leavers Cohort	S4 Numbers	S5 Numbers	S6 Numbers	Total Cohort Size	S4 % of Cohort	S5 % of Cohort	S6% of Cohort
2020	53	190	459	702	7.5%	27.1%	65.4%
2021	62	227	513	802	7.7%	32.3%	73.1%
2022	94	213	531	838	11.2%	30.3%	75.6%
2023	93	225	463	781	11.9%	32.1%	66.0%
2024	105	203	488	796	13.2%	25.5%	61.3%

As the table above shows, the percentage of S4 leavers as a proportion of all leavers increased from 7.5% in 2020 to 13.2% in 2024. The S5 leaving percentage also increased from lows in 2020. This was perhaps the result of limited employment opportunities during the pandemic and in 2020 specifically. For example, nationally, only 16% of leavers entered employment in 2020, whilst 24% did so after leaving school in 2023. However, S5 leavers as a proportion of all leavers dropped to 25.5% in 2024 – likely as a result of increased S4 leavers in the previous cohort.

Only 61% of the 23/24 leavers cohort were pupils who had left after S6 – 14% points down on the proportion of S6 leavers in 2022. This has a direct impact on how much time this leavers cohort had collectively to accrue tariff points and attainment in literacy and numeracy.

Furthermore, the National table below shows that S4 leaving trends in Argyll and Bute have followed the National trend whilst also remaining lower in each of the last 5 cohorts:

Leavers Cohort	S4 Leavers Nationally	All Leavers Nationally	Percentage of S4 Leavers
2020	5397	47430	11.4%
2021	5659	50719	11.2%

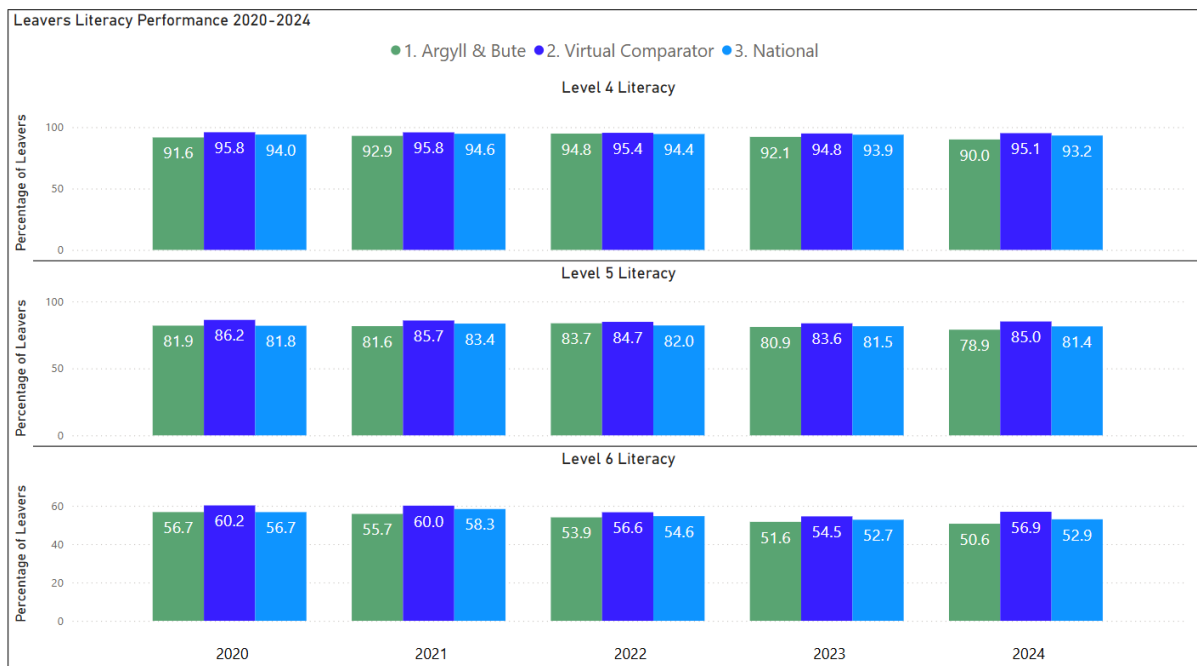
2022	6863	55211	12.4%
2023	7890	54719	14.4%
2024	8084	55961	14.4%

It should be noted that the proportion of S4 leavers remained the same nationally, whilst Argyll and Bute saw an increase of 1.3% points against the 2023 cohort.

4.8 Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy

SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) levels 4, 5 and 6 Literacy and Numeracy are achieved primarily via the passing of National 4, National 5 or Higher English or Maths. The subject Applications of Maths is also an increasingly accessed means of attaining the above SCQF levels in Numeracy. Additionally, the above SCQF levels can be achieved via the completion of separate Literacy and Numeracy units at levels 4, 5 or 6, which do not require an examination.

Literacy SCQF levels 4, 5, 6 – all Leavers (including post appeal results and wider achievement accreditation)



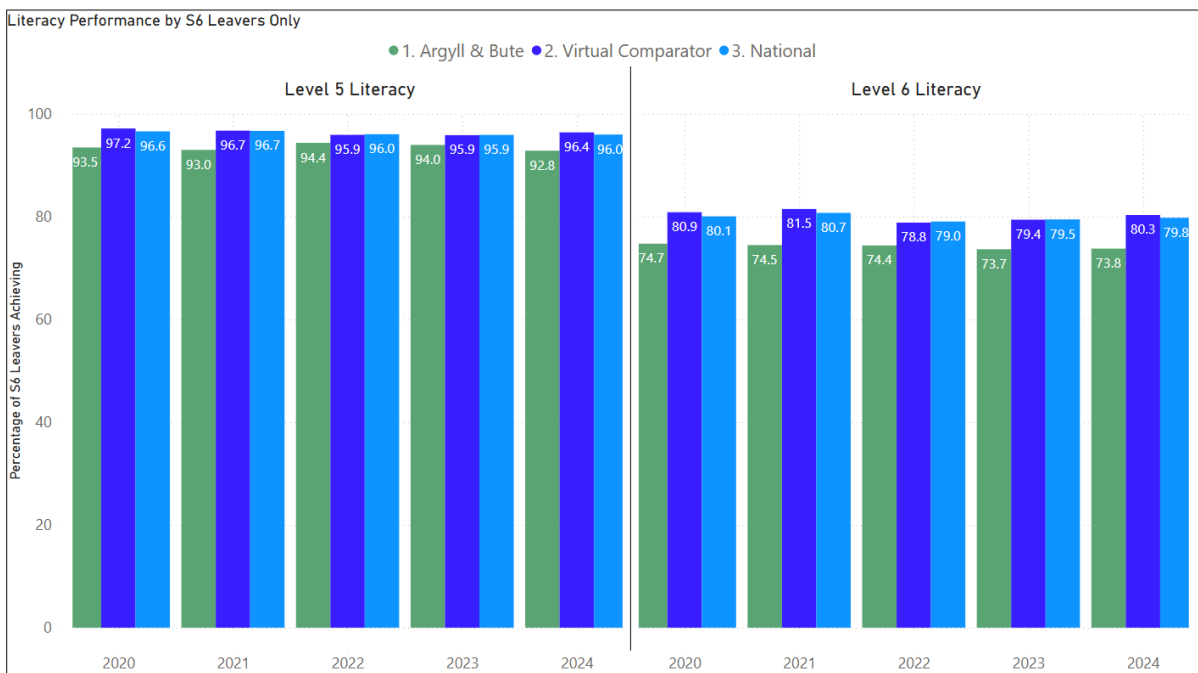
- Attainment of Level 4 Literacy stands at 90.0%, a decrease of 2.1% points against 2023. A fall of 0.7% points in this measure was also experienced at a national level. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 2.7% points in 2023 to 5.1% points in 2024.
- Attainment of Level 5 Literacy stands at 78.9%, a decrease of 2.0% points against 2023. Performance in this measure at a national level remained in line with the previous year. The gap between Argyll and

Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 2.7% points in 2023 to 6.1% points in 2024.

- Attainment of Level 6 Literacy stands at 50.6%, a decrease of 1.0% points against 2023. Performance in this measure at a national level remained in line with the previous year. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 2.9% points in 2023 to 6.3% points in 2024.
- Caution should be used in comparison to previous years' performance. This is because the constitution of leavers cohorts has changed, with an increase of S4 leavers. Furthermore, assessment method changes over the last few years also limit comparison of data.

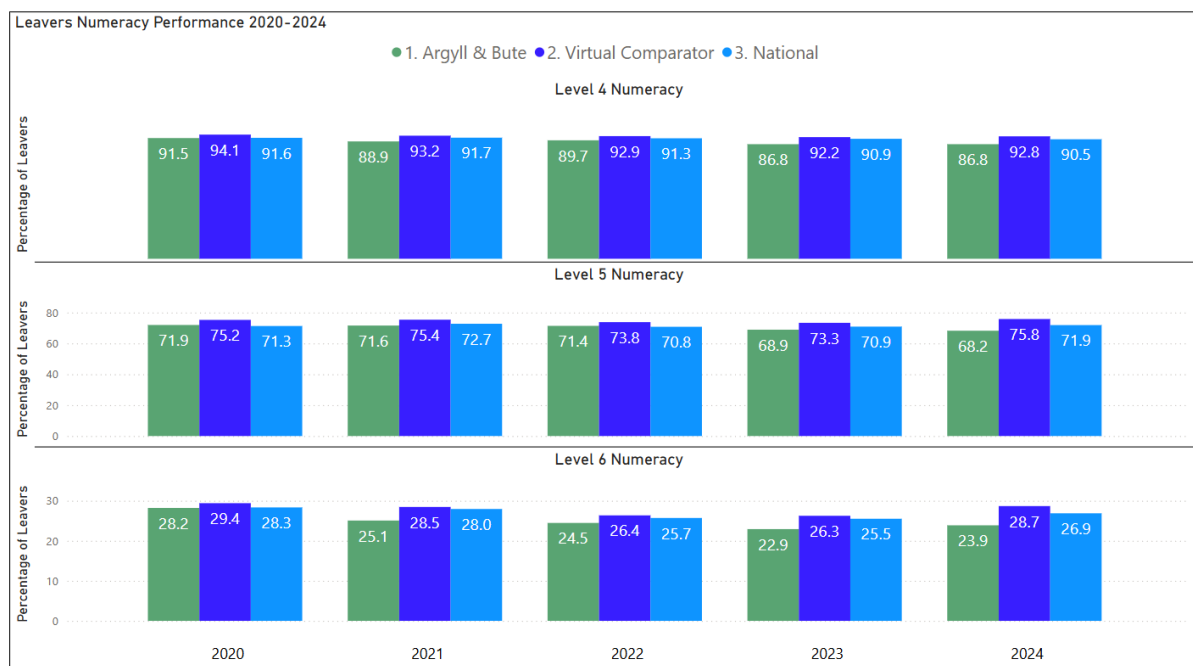
Literacy Performance – S6 Leavers Only

The visual below provides an overview of S6 leavers only. This limits the impact of differing leavers cohort make ups, allowing for a more like for like comparison over the last 5 years. However, differences in assessment method cannot be avoided, and comparison is still limited because of this.



- Attainment of Level 5 Literacy stands at 92.8%, a decrease of 1.2% points against 2023. Performance in this measure at a national level remained in line with the previous year. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 1.9% points in 2023 to 3.6% points in 2024.
- Attainment of Level 6 Literacy stands at 73.8%, an increase of 0.1% points against 2023. Performance in this measure at a national level increased by 0.3% points against the previous year. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 5.7% points in 2023 to 6.5% points in 2024.

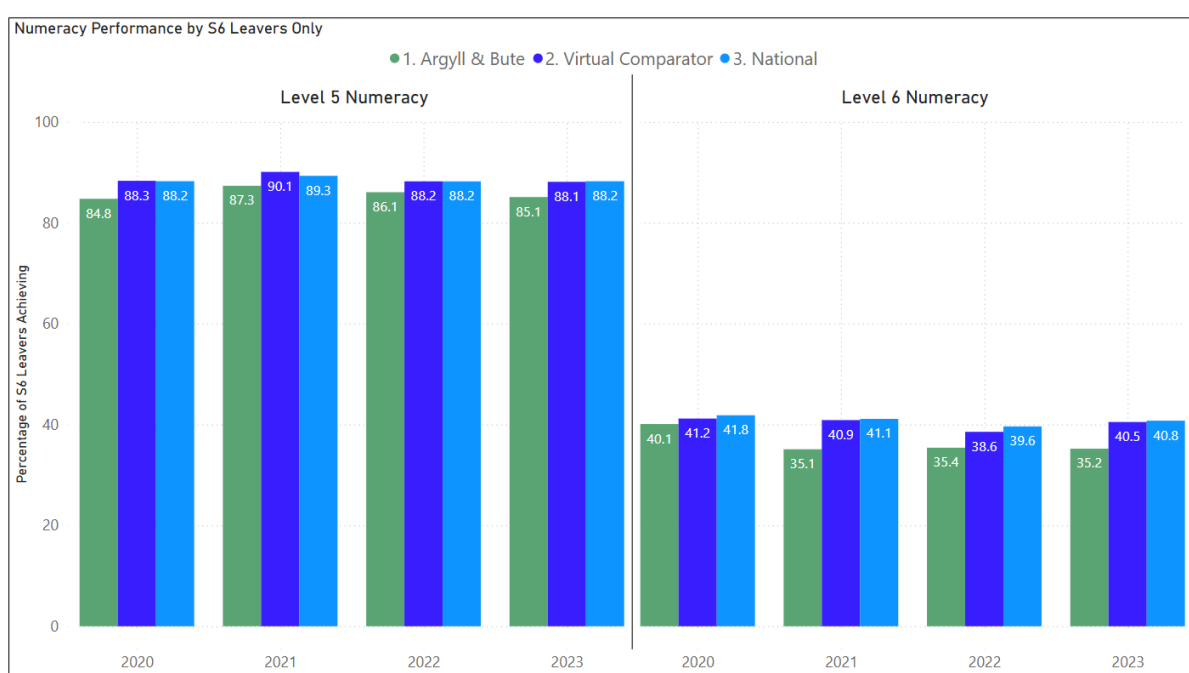
Numeracy SCQF levels 4, 5, 6 – all Leavers (including post appeal results and wider achievement accreditation)



- Attainment of Level 4 Numeracy stands at 86.8%, the same as in 2023. A fall of 0.4% points in this measure was experienced at a national level. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 5.4% points in 2023 to 6.0% points in 2024.
- Attainment of Level 5 Numeracy stands at 68.2%, a decrease of 0.7% points against 2023. Performance in this measure at a national level increased by 1.0% points against the previous year. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 4.4% points in 2023 to 7.6% points in 2024.
- Attainment of Level 6 Numeracy stands at 23.9%, an increase of 1.0% point against 2023. Performance in this measure at a national level increased by 1.4% points against the previous year. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 3.4% points in 2023 to 4.8% points in 2024.
- Caution should be used in comparison to previous years' performance. This is because the constitution of leavers cohorts has changed, with an increase of S4 leavers. Furthermore, assessment method changes over the last few years also limit comparison of data.

Numeracy Performance – S6 Leavers Only

The visual below provides an overview of S6 leavers only. This limits the impact of differing leavers cohort make ups, allowing for a more like for like comparison over the last 5 years. However, differences in assessment method cannot be avoided, and comparison is still limited because of this.



- Attainment of Level 5 Numeracy stands at 85.1%, a decrease of 1.0% points against 2023. Performance in this measure at a national level remained in line with the previous year. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has essentially stayed the same, going from 1.9% points in 2023 to 2.0% points in 2024.
- Attainment of Level 6 Numeracy stands at 35.2%, a decrease of 0.2% points against 2023 and matching performance from 2022. Performance in this measure at a national level remained increased by 1.2% points against the previous year. The gap between Argyll and Bute and its virtual comparator has grown from 3.2% points in 2023 to 5.3% points in 2024.

Raising Literacy and Numeracy attainment in schools

As part of individual Attainment Meetings with secondary Head Teachers, key actions have been discussed to raise literacy and numeracy attainment in all secondary schools.

Effective, high-quality leadership is a research-proven catalyst for raising attainment, and across all our secondary schools, the Principal Teachers/Faculty Heads, who lead learning in subject areas across our schools are being challenged and supported to develop their skills and capacities to raise attainment, and to develop the capabilities of the teachers they lead and manage.

In this context, Principal Teachers are developing in their teams four key drivers in raising attainment:

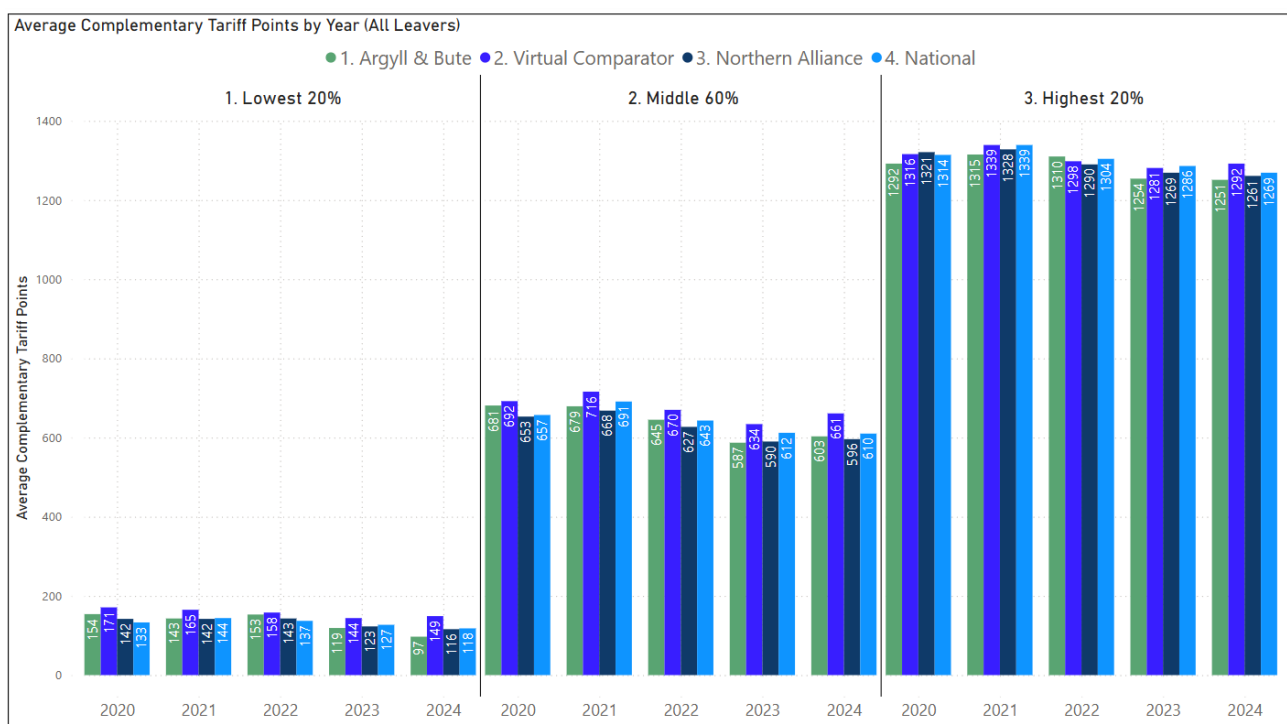
- A culture of high expectations underpinning aspirational presentation policies within schools.
 - Subject Principal Teachers are being challenged and supported in relation to their data, ensuring that, as well as monitoring pupils' progress towards success in courses, they are also ensuring that as high a proportion of the relevant pupil cohorts are given the chance to achieve as possible. *Percentage of cohort presented* and presentation rates per pupil is now a key element of data analysis, and target setting with young people is an important element of the focus on maximised attainment.
- Rigorous tracking and monitoring of pupils attainment in literacy and numeracy at frequent, regular intervals;
 - In both the Senior Phase (S4-S6) and in the Broad General Education (S1-S3), secondary teachers are working to ensure that the ongoing progress of every young person in literacy and numeracy throughout their time in school is understood, and is the central factor in planning next steps in learning for each young person.
- Frameworks of supportive intervention for pupils achieving or at risk of achieving below their potential in literacy and numeracy;
 - As a natural consequence of rigorous tracking and monitoring of attainment, teachers are expanding the number and scope of interventions with young people to address underperformance, and are developing their skills in ensuring interventions are personalised and focused on assessed need.
- High-quality, learner-centred learning and assessment experiences in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum continuing into the Senior Phase.
 - Through the newly introduced programme of focused learning, teaching and assessment support for secondary schools and, in some establishments, through the Guided Approaches to Pedagogical Enquiry (GAPE) programme, an increasing number of teachers across secondary schools are developing their practice in planning and delivering high quality learning

experiences which ensure that young people know what they are learning, why they are learning it, how they will know they are learning successfully, and how their learning links to the development of their wider skills.

4.9 Improving attainment for all

This measure details the average attainment of pupils in three attainment cohorts – the highest 20% of attainers, the middle 60% of attainers and the lowest 20% of attainers – using the tariff points gained for the passing of courses at different levels.

Average cumulative attainment of all leavers (after appeals and Wider Achievement Accreditation)



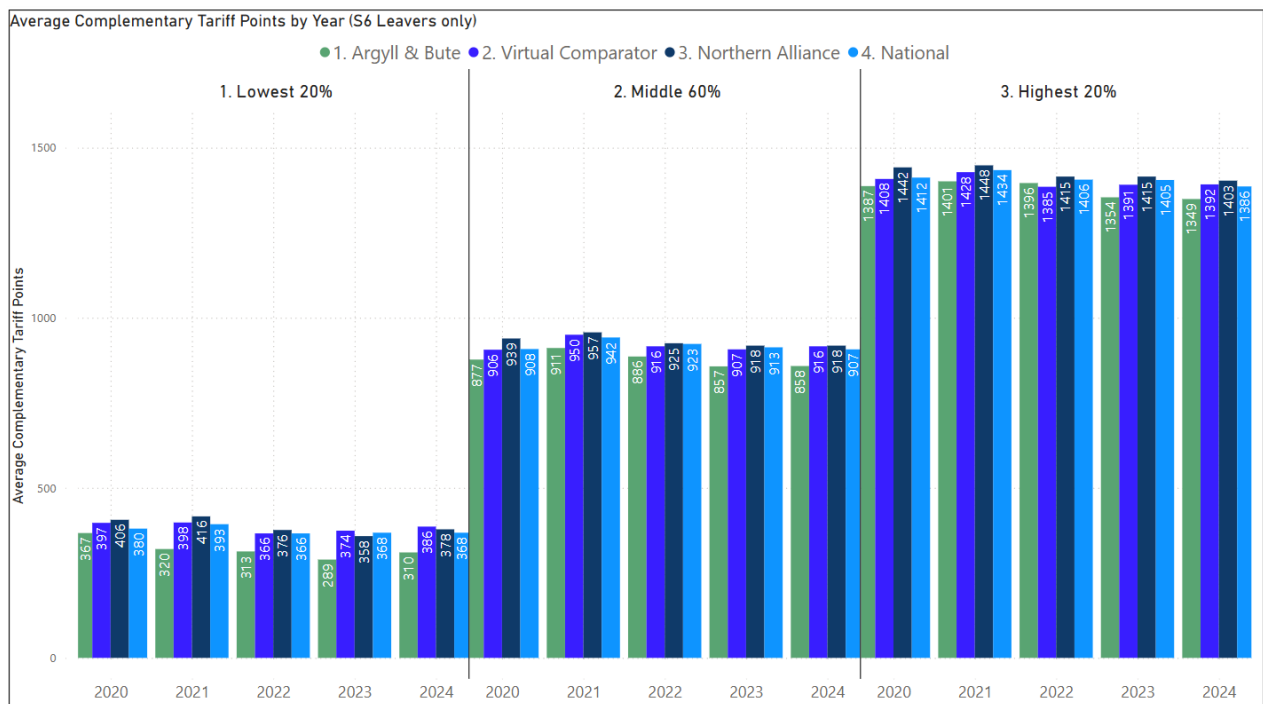
- Performance in the Lowest 20% of the leaver's cohort fell from an average of 119 tariff points to 97. A fall was also experienced by the Northern Alliance and nationally. The virtual comparator grew from 144 to 149, meaning the gap between Argyll and Bute and its VC has grown from 25 to 52.
- Performance in the Middle 60% of the leaver's cohort increased from an average of 587 tariff points to 603 – an increase of 16 tariff points. A small increase of 6 tariff points occurred within the Northern Alliance, whilst nationally the average figure dropped by 2 tariff points (612 to 610). As such, Argyll and Bute now exceeds the Northern Alliance and has

closed the gap to the national figure (25 points in 2023 to 7 points in 2024). The gap to the VC has grown from 47 to 58.

- Performance in the Top 20% is in line with 2023 (1254 in 2023 and 1251 in 2024). A small decrease was experienced in the Northern Alliance (1269 to 1261) and also nationally (1286 to 1269). As such, Argyll and Bute has closed the gap to both the Northern Alliance (10 points down from 15) and the national figure (18 points down from 32). The gap to the VC has grown from 27 to 41.

Average cumulative attainment of S6 leavers only (after appeals and Wider Achievement Accreditation)

The visual below provides an overview of S6 leavers only. This limits the impact of differing leavers cohort make ups, allowing for a more like for like comparison over the last 5 years. However, differences in assessment method cannot be avoided, and comparison is still limited because of this.



- Performance in the Lowest 20% of the leaver's cohort increased from 289 to 310 – an increase of 21 tariff points. The virtual comparator average increased by 12 tariff points, meaning the gap between Argyll and Bute and its VC closed from 85 points in 2023 to 76 points in 2024. The Northern Alliance increased by a similar amount of points as Argyll and Bute meaning the gap remains the same. The national figure remained the same meaning the gap between Argyll and Bute and national performance closed from 79 in 2023 to 58 in 2024.
- Performance in the Middle 60% of the leaver's cohort increased by a single point meaning that performance is in line with 2023. The virtual comparator average increased by 9 points, meaning the gap between Argyll and Bute and the VC grew from 50 in 2023 to 58 in 2024. The

Northern Alliance figure was unchanged meaning the gap between Argyll and Bute and the Northern Alliance closed by a single point. National performance declined by 6 tariff points, meaning the gap between Argyll and Bute and the National figure closed from 56 points in 2023 to 49 points in 2024.

- Performance in the Top 20% declined against 2023 (1354 in 2023 and 1349 in 2024). A decrease was also experienced in the Northern Alliance (1415 to 1403) and nationally (1405 to 1386). As such, because Argyll and Bute's decline was smaller than that of the Northern Alliance and of national performance, gaps to both have closed. The gap to the Northern Alliance has closed from 61 to 54 whilst the gap to the national figure fell to 37 from 51. The VC increased by a single point, meaning the gap has grown to 43 points from 37 in 2023.

Raising Attainment for all in schools

Head Teachers in all secondary schools are being challenged and supported to continually examine and where appropriate, refresh their curriculum structures and options frameworks to ensure that they allow all young people to attain and achieve to their maximum potential. This includes planning future learning and attainment pathways with pupils and their families at the earliest opportunity, to ensure that, as well as the required breadth of the S1-S3 Broad General Education, there is also the focus on depth of learning, specialisation and coherent progression in S1-S3 which reflects each young person's aspirations and interests and prepares them for high levels of Senior Phase attainment.

Secondary Head Teachers are also being challenged and supported to ensure their Senior Phase curricula are wide and dynamic. This will ensure that there are meaningful attainment and achievement opportunities for all young people – not only in the traditional academic context, but also in terms of vocational and skills-focused courses and certification. In line with clear national thinking, schools are also working to develop the culture where there is parity of esteem between academic and vocational pathways and attainment, where all young people have access to relevant, stimulating courses which take them towards their preferred post-school positive destination.

By ensuring these types of wide, accessible and equitable senior-phase curricula are in place in our schools, the attainment and achievement of all young people will increase, regardless of their academic ability or to which percentage of attainers they belong.

4.10 Attainment in Context of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

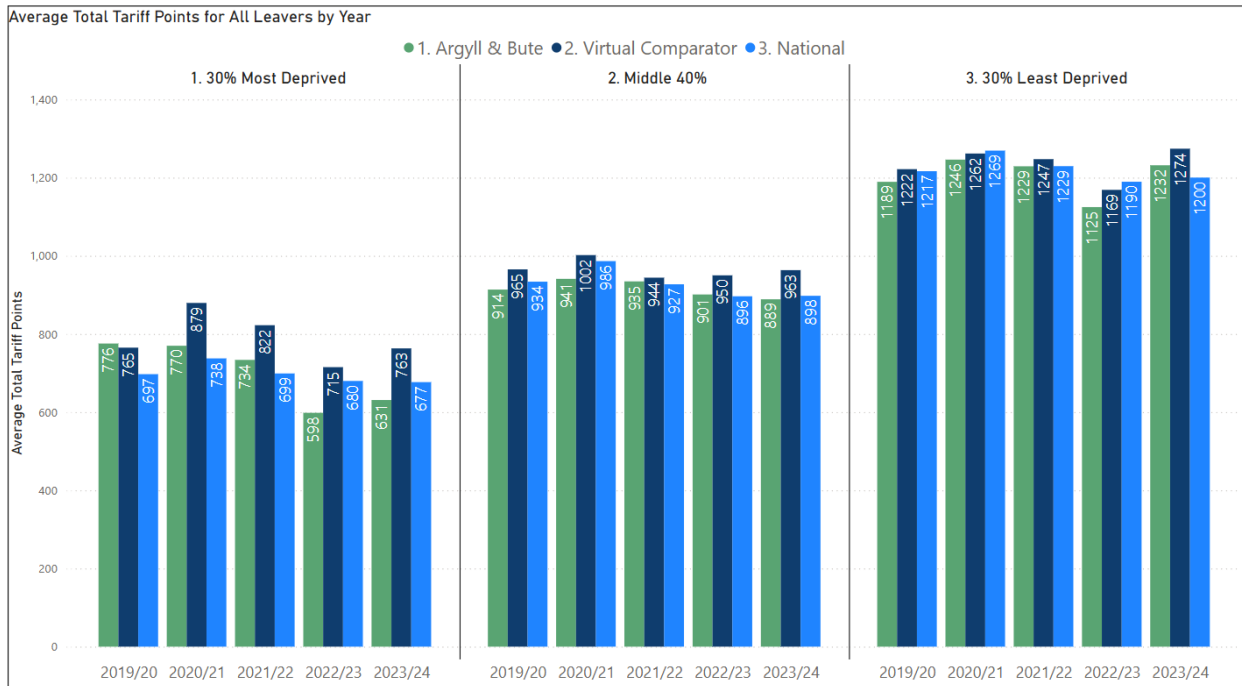
In interpreting the graphs below, it is helpful for members to acknowledge that the mechanism nationally for defining the SIMD status of young people from decile 1 (the most disadvantaged) to decile 10 (the least disadvantaged),

based as it is on post codes, is not always helpful in categorising families in this way. In a predominantly rural area region such as Argyll and Bute, such a mechanism may not be effective in defining the actual level of poverty experienced by a young person, as the rural environment and large areas covered by a single data zone can lead to many different levels of advantage and disadvantage existing side by side. Schools in Argyll and Bute ensure they know every young person's situation individually, regardless of SIMD level ascribed by post code, and work to meet their individual needs on that basis.

One limitation of exploring attainment via SIMD data is that the SIMD profile of Argyll and Bute is skewed to the middle deciles. For example, last year's S6 cohort had 8% of its pupils from Deciles 1 and 2 (20% most deprived), and a further 8% from Deciles 9 and 10 (20% least deprived). Therefore, 84% of all pupils came from the 6 deciles between 3 and 8. At a national level, the use of SIMD to report attainment gap statistics frequently uses Quintile 1 (20% most deprived) versus Quintile 5 (20% least deprived). Whilst this undoubtedly has statistical value at a national level, for Argyll and Bute this essentially compares the performance of two very small groups. Small sample sizes are open to natural variation as the under/overperformance of a small number of pupils can skew significantly the performance of the entire group.

To overcome this limitation, the visuals below looks at Argyll and Bute performance using an alternate SIMD grouping split. To better capture the relationship between SIMD and attainment, the data has been split into three groups; 1) 30% most deprived, 2) 40% middle and 3) 30% least deprived. Whereas quintile 1 and 5 covered only 16% of last year's S6 cohort, comparing the least and most deprived 30% covers 34% of all pupils. This limits the impact of year-on-year natural variation through increasing the size of each sample group.

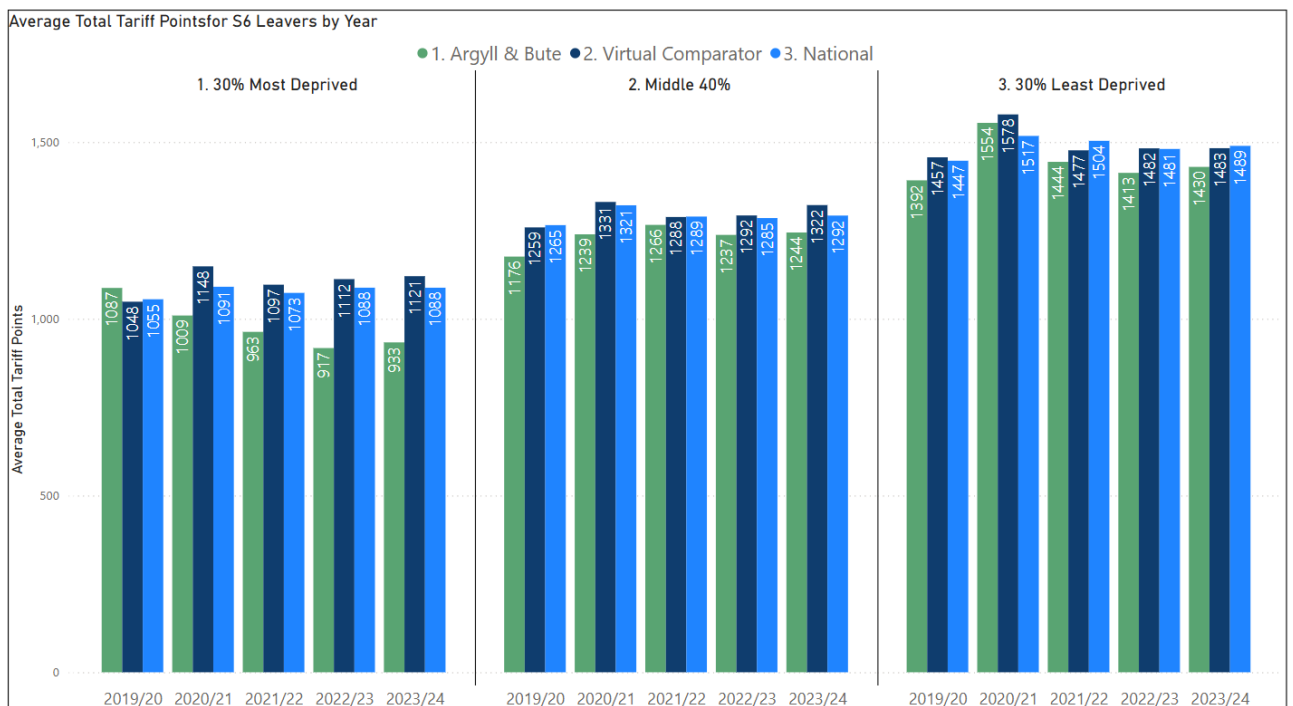
Average Total Tariff Points by All Leavers (after appeals and including Wider Achievement)



- Performance amongst leavers from the 30% Most Deprived SIMD areas improved against the previous year, with the average total tariff points of these leavers rising to 631 from 598 in 2023. Nationally, performance was in line with the previous year meaning that gap between Argyll and Bute SIMD 1-3 pupils and National SIMD 1-3 pupils fell from 82 points in 2023 to 46 points in 2024. The gap to the virtual comparator increased from 117 points in 2023 to 132 points in 2024.
- Performance amongst leavers from the 40% middle SIMD areas (deciles 4-7) decreased slightly against the previous year, with the average total tariff points of these leavers falling to 889 from 901 in 2023. Nationally, performance was in line with the previous year meaning that Argyll and Bute performance is now behind national performance by 9 tariff points, a reversal from last year when Argyll and Bute exceeded the national figure by 5 points. The gap to the virtual comparator increased from 49 points in 2023 to 74 points in 2024.
- Performance amongst leavers from the 30% least deprived SIMD areas (deciles 8-10) increased against the previous year, with the average total tariff points of these leavers increasing to 1232 up from 1125 the previous year. Performance in this group is slightly behind the best result in the last 5 years (1246 in 2021), which was achieved under an alternative assessment model. Argyll and Bute performance now exceeds the national figure by 32 points, a reversal on 2023 performance when Argyll and Bute was 65 points behind the national figure in this measure.
- Although performance in both the 30% most and least deprived groups improved, because the increase was greater in the 30% least deprived, the Argyll and Bute attainment gap measured by tariff points has increased to 601 from 527 in 2023.

Average Total Tariff Points by S6 Leavers only (after appeals and including Wider Achievement)

The visual below provides an overview of S6 leavers only. This limits the impact of differing leavers cohort make ups, allowing for a more like for like comparison over the last 5 years. However, differences in assessment method cannot be avoided, and comparison is still limited because of this.



- Performance amongst S6 leavers from the 30% Most Deprived SIMD areas improved against the previous year, with the average total tariff points of these leavers rising to 933 from 917 in 2023. Nationally, performance was in line with the previous year meaning that gap between Argyll and Bute SIMD 1-3 pupils and National SIMD 1-3 pupils fell from 171 points in 2023 to 115 points in 2024. The gap to the virtual comparator decreased very slightly from 195 points in 2023 to 188 points in 2024.
- Performance amongst S6 leavers from the 40% middle SIMD areas (deciles 4-7) increased slightly against the previous year, with the average total tariff points of these leavers increasing to 1244 from 1237 in 2023. Nationally, performance increased at the same rate, meaning the gap between Argyll and Bute and national performance remains 48 points. The gap to the virtual comparator increased from 55 points in 2023 to 78 points in 2024.
- Performance amongst S6 leavers from the 30% least deprived SIMD areas (deciles 8-10) increased against the previous year, with the average total tariff points of these leavers increasing to 1430 up from 1413 the previous year. Argyll and Bute performance remains behind the virtual comparator and national figure for the third consecutive year.
- Although performance in both the 30% most and least deprived groups improved, because the increase was greater in the 30% least deprived by a single point, the Argyll and Bute attainment gap measured by tariff points increased to 497 from 496 in 2023.

Raising attainment and achievement for our most disadvantaged young people

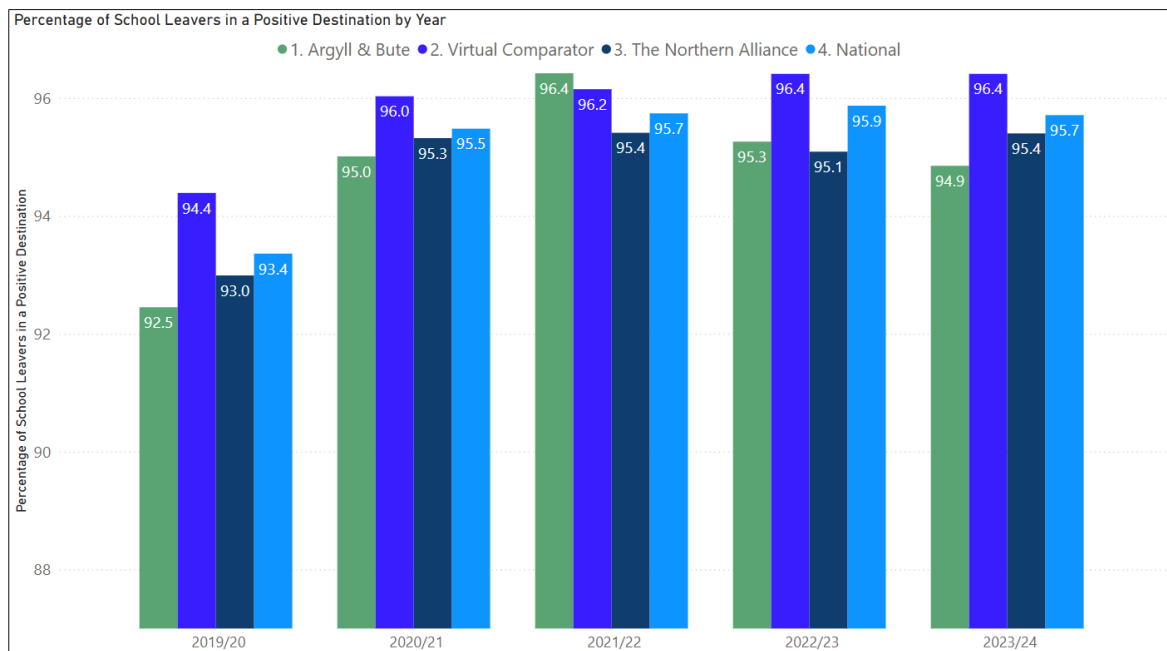
As part of the annual school improvement planning and reporting cycle, all secondary schools complete detailed analysis within their Standards and Quality report to illustrate the impact that the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) allocation has had on identified groups of the least advantaged young people. In their School Improvement Plans, Head Teachers present detailed planning of how their PEF allocation will be spent in the coming year to reduce inequality and support the wellbeing and progress of pupils from the most deprived backgrounds. Additionally, Head Teachers must account for the attainment and achievement of the most disadvantaged pupils in their schools as part of the annual Attainment Meeting with the Executive Director, Heads of Service, Education Manager and Education Data Lead.

The Mentoring Programme established in four of our secondary schools in partnership with MCR Pathways is targeting our care experienced and most disadvantaged young people in Argyll and Bute. The programme seeks to empower the young people, develop their confidence and broaden their horizons through being paired with a volunteer mentor from their community. The programme has already had a positive impact in Argyll and Bute, and we are exploring opportunities to extend this to additional secondary schools next session.

Our Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) for Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) ensures a sharp, increased the focus on the wellbeing, achievement and attainment of this cohort of young people. As part of her role, she undertakes detailed tracking of both progress and wellbeing, with targeted interventions which are central to ensuring they attain their potential

4.11 Initial Destinations of young people in Argyll and Bute

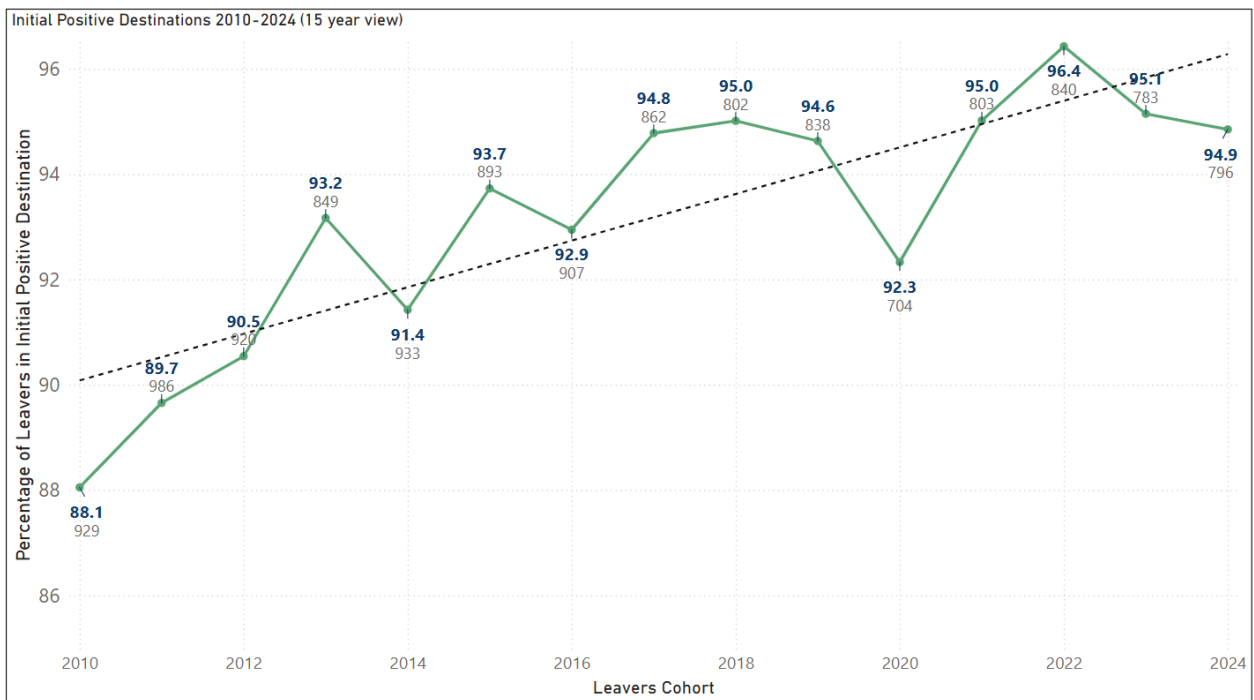
The visual below provides an overview of performance in initial destinations for all school leavers in the last 5 leaving cohorts.



- Of those young people who left school in 2024, 94.9% moved into a positive destination. Argyll and Bute performance continues to be behind the virtual comparator and the national figure. The Northern Alliance figure also increased on 2023 performance and is now 0.5% points ahead of

Argyll and Bute. The national figure decreased by 0.2%, but remains 0.8% points ahead of Argyll and Bute performance.

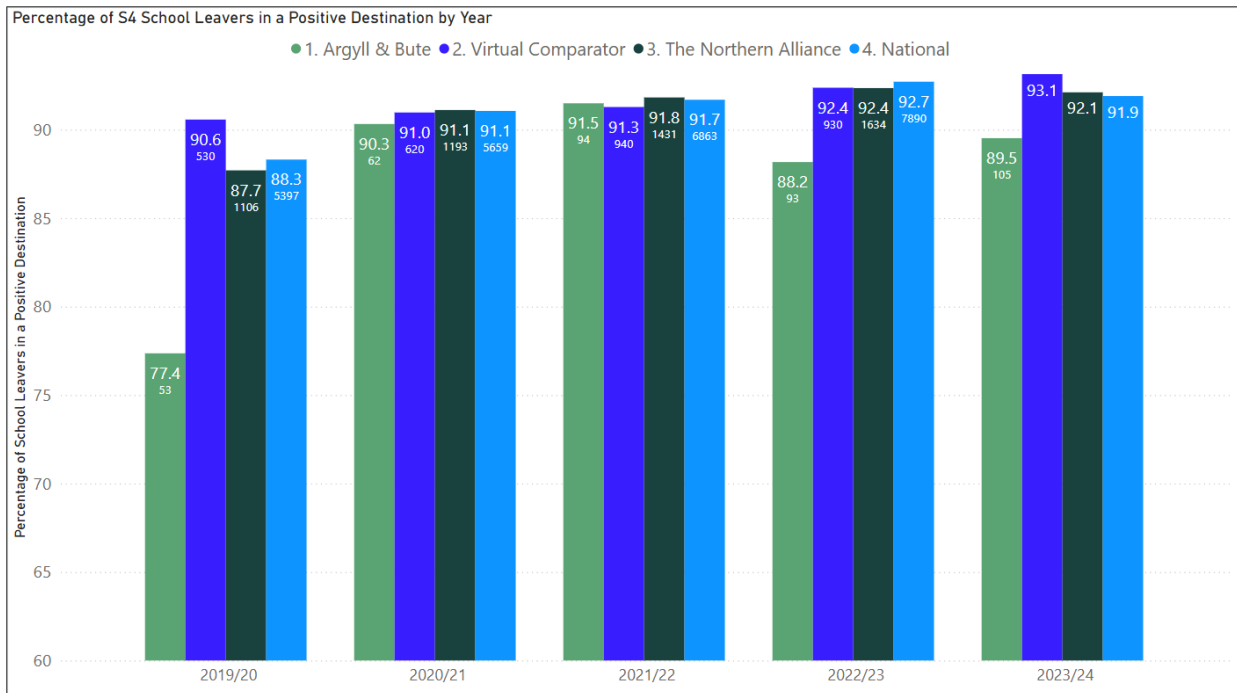
- Performance in 2024 was 2.4% points ahead of 2020, when 7.5% of the cohort had left at the end of S4. This compares to 13.2% of the cohort leaving in 2024. The shifting constitution of the leavers cohort has a direct impact on potential positive destinations, as in most cases, S4 leavers will not have had a chance to present for more advanced qualifications. Nationally, 91.9% of S4 leavers were in a positive initial destination, compared to 97.8% of those who had left after S6.
- The table below provides the long term wider context to initial destinations data:



- The figure of 94.9% in 2024 has only been exceeded four times in the last 15 years and remains well above the figures experienced prior to 2017. The 15-year trend line remains positive.

S4 Leavers Trends

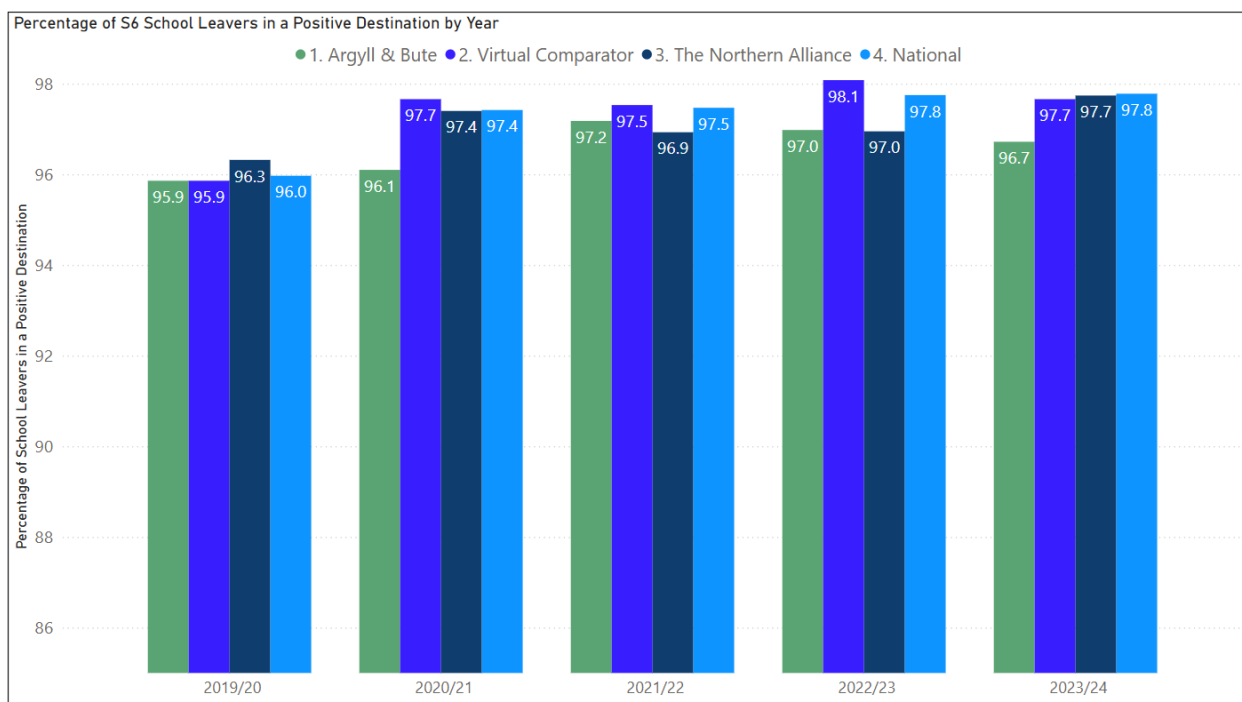
- As mentioned previously, the rates of S4 leaving have increased within Argyll and Bute and nationally over the last 5 years. The visual below provides an overview of initial destination data for those who have left school at the end of S4:



- The percentage of S4 leavers entering a positive destination has increased slightly against 2023 figures, but remains behind the virtual comparator, Northern Alliance and national figure.
- It should be noted that the figure of 2020 involved only 53 pupils, whilst the 2024 pupil involved 105 S4 leavers. As the numbers of S4 school leavers has almost doubled, rates of positive initial destinations have not been negatively impacted.

S6 Leavers Trends

- The visual below provides an overview of initial destination data for those who have left school at the end of S6:



- The percentage of S6 leavers entering a positive destination has decreased slightly against 2023 figures, and remains behind the virtual comparator, Northern Alliance and national figure.
- Performance in 2024 remains ahead of the figures from 2020 and 2021.

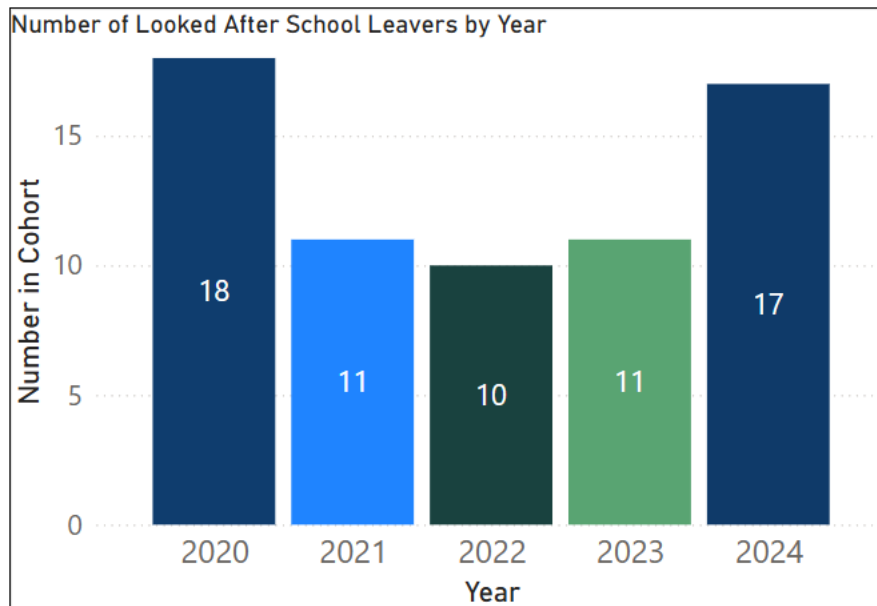
The Education and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) teams continue to extend their work with schools, establishing and developing school-employer partnerships to allow meaningful work-based vocational learning for young people. Bespoke and individualised curricula are in place for many pupils, contextualised by their own interests and professional aspirations. There is particular focus on this type of engagement with young people who are disengaged or disadvantaged, and who would otherwise be least likely to attain a positive destination post-school.

Schools are also working closely with further and higher education establishments, to ensure all those who wish to pursue such a pathway are able to do so, regardless of situation or place. Additionally, Education has partnerships with a range of third sector agencies, and work closely with them to develop in young people the key skills for life and work required to attain and sustain positive destinations.

4.12 Attainment of Looked After Young People

The very small size of the Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) cohort, and the sometimes challenging situations they face, means that year-on-year tracking of attainment trends is difficult, and attainment can fluctuate from year to year. Furthermore, the Scottish Government's Insight tool uses

Census Data which captures only those pupils who are looked after at home or away. Previously care experienced young people are excluded from their analysis. As such, Insight data can provide analysis for looked after pupils but not for the wider encompassing care experienced group. Comparison with looked after pupils nationally is possible via the Insight tool, but we need to be cautious around the small numbers which limit the statistical meaningfulness of the data. For example, the visual below shows how many looked after pupils were included in leavers' cohorts over the last 5 years:



Literacy

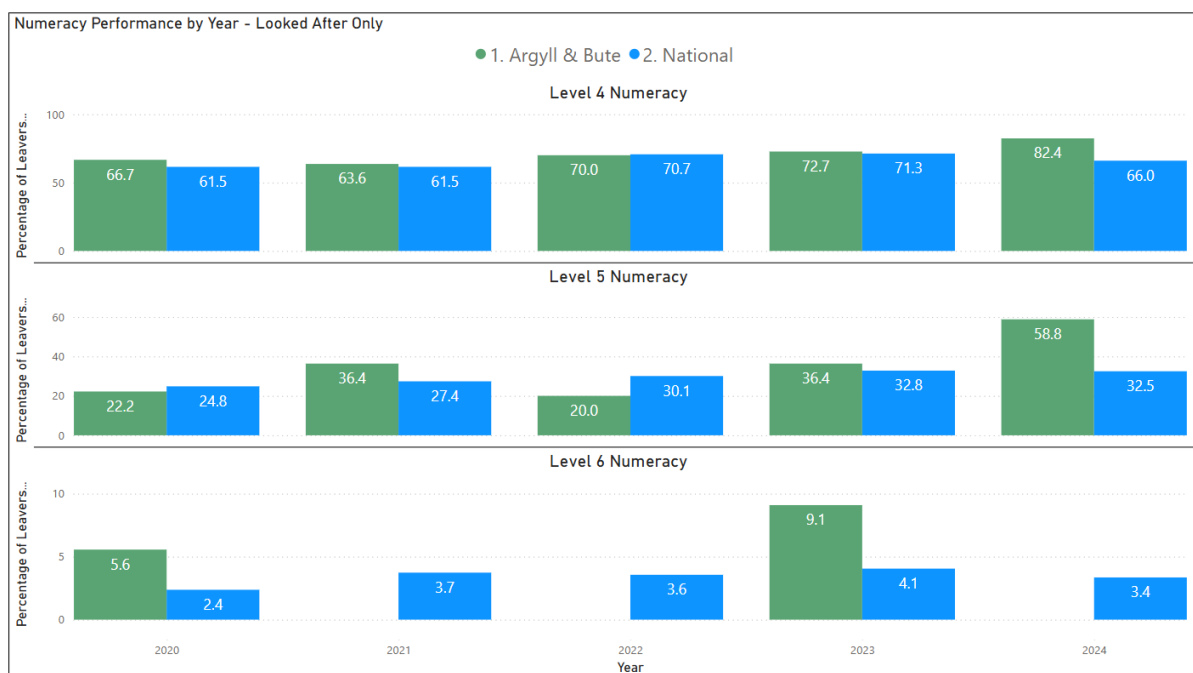
The visual below shows the literacy performance of looked after school leavers at both an authority and national level:



- Performance in Level 4 literacy increased against 2023 figures and is in line with national performance levels.
- Performance in Level 4 literacy is greater than in three of the last four years.
- Performance in Level 5 literacy is in line with the previous years figures and remains ahead of the national figure.
- Performance in Level 5 literacy is greater than in three of the last four years.
- Performance in Level 6 literacy is in line with the previous years figures and remains ahead of the national figure.
- Performance in Level 6 literacy is greater than in three of the last four years.

Numeracy

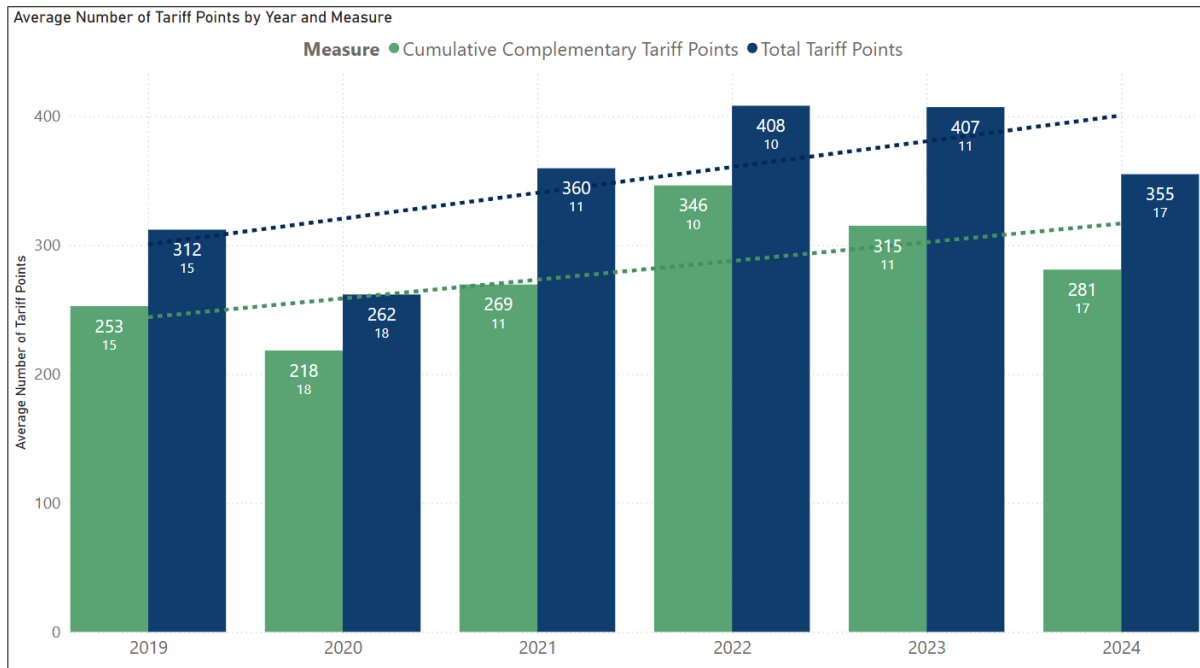
The visual below shows the numeracy performance of looked after school leavers at both an authority and national level:



- Performance in Level 4 numeracy increased against 2023 figures and is ahead of national performance levels.
- Performance in Level 4 numeracy is greater than in all of the last four years.
- Performance in Level 5 numeracy is ahead of the previous year's figures and remains ahead of the national figure.
- Performance in Level 5 numeracy is greater than in all of the last four years.
- No looked after pupil who left school in 2024 achieved a Level 6 qualification in numeracy. Only 3.4% of all looked after leavers in the country achieved this. This is the third time in four years that this has occurred.

Breadth and Depth of Learning – Accumulation of Tariff Points

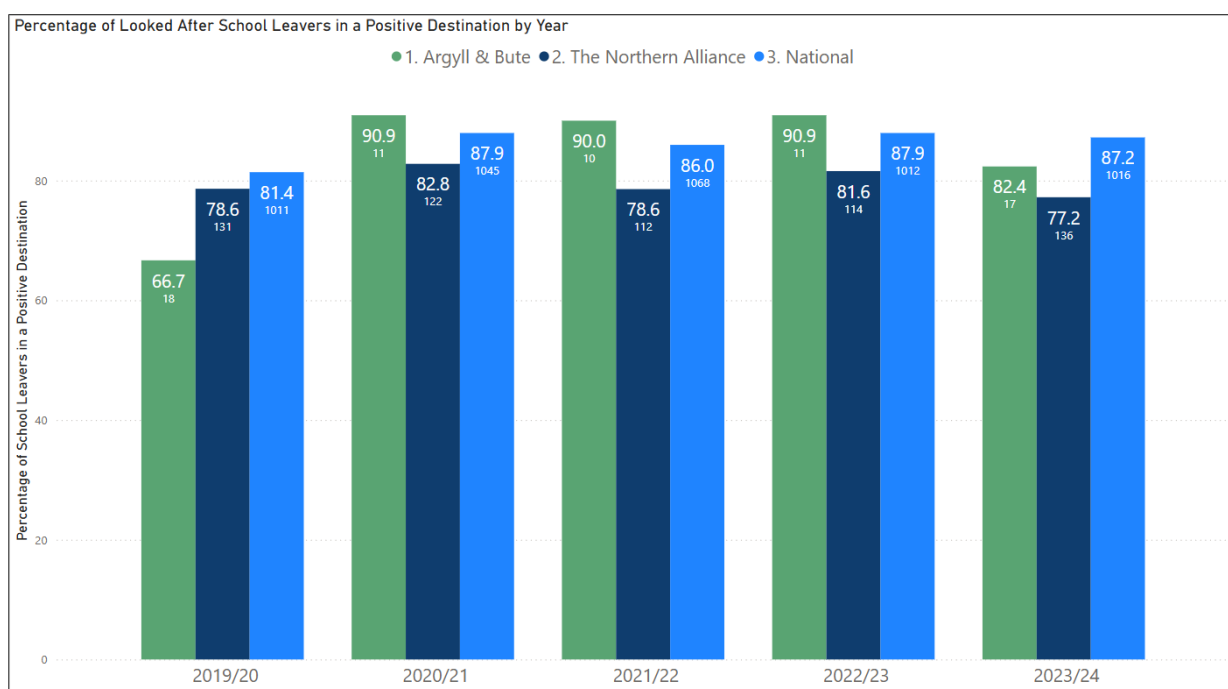
The visual below provides an overview of total and complementary tariff points accumulated by looked after leavers in the last five sessions. Total tariff points are accumulated from all attainment and achievement, whilst complementary tariff points are the tariff points attached to your best 120 SCQF credit points. The 120 credit points are often made up of only 5 qualifications and is thus more a measure of quality of achievement than quantity. As complementary tariff points are limited by the credit points, they are almost always lower than the total tariff points. For example, a pupil with 10 Nat 5 qualifications can only use 5 for their complementary tariff points, whereas all 10 qualifications would count within the total tariff points. The visual below shows averages for looked after leavers since 2019:



- The average number of complementary tariff points dropped against 2023 and 2022 figures but remains above the pre-pandemic figure of 253.
- The last cohort which had a comparable size was in 2020, when 18 school leavers had an average complementary tariff point score of 218. The 17 leavers of 2024 exceeded this figure by 63 points.
- The average number of total tariff points dropped against 2023 and 2022 figures but remains above the pre-pandemic figure of 312.
- The last comparable cohort (2020) had an average score of 262 whilst the 2024 cohort had a score of 355.
- Trend lines for both average complementary and total tariff points scores are moving in a positive direction.

Looked After School Leaver Initial Destinations

The visual below provides an overview and comparison of leaver destinations for looked after pupils spanning the last 5 sessions.



- Of 17 leavers, 14 entered a positive initial destination, accounting for 82% of all looked after leavers. This is above the 77% of comparable leavers from the Northern Alliance, but slightly below the 87% experienced nationally.
- Argyll and Bute performance has exceeded the Northern Alliance figure in each of the last four years.
- Argyll and Bute performance has exceeded the national figure in 3 of the last 5 years.
- As the Argyll and Bute cohort size is small (each pupil accounted for 6% in 2024 data), then only one pupil extra entering a positive initial destination would have meant the figure exceeded the national figure.

Narrowing the Attainment Gap and Ensuring best outcomes for Looked After and CECYP

The Virtual Head Teacher (VHT) for CECYP has created a framework to rigorously address the needs and fulfil the entitlements of all such young people. This demonstrates how the service has prioritised equity for all CECYP, and has an unrelenting focus on their wellbeing and attainment.

The VHT for CECYP tracks and monitors a range of data for this cohort, including attendance and attainment. Settings are both supported and challenged by the Virtual School to ensure their care experienced learners receive personalised interventions to maximise their success whilst in school and continue into a positive destination.

This enhanced scrutiny supports settings to identify those most at risk of not attaining in literacy and numeracy. Bespoke support approaches can then be identified to support the young person achieve success which is personal to them, whilst maintaining high aspirations. Supports can include utilising the authority Staged Intervention Framework, nurture spaces and personalised curriculums.

As a result, the attainment in Literacy and Numeracy of CECYP is maximised in terms of what they are able to achieve at this time in their lives and they are able to achieve success.

The VHT works alongside school colleagues and wider partners to support our CECYP to obtain a positive destination when they choose to leave school. This includes ensuring Skills Development Scotland are aware of who our care experienced learners are, allowing the maximum level of support to be offered. Working alongside the Corporate Parenting Board has been beneficial in opening up a range of opportunities and work experience placements for our young people, alongside reducing the stigma of care experience.

It is recognised and agreed that the attainment of young people is underpinned by their physical and emotional wellbeing. This is particularly true for CECYP, where challenges out with the young person's control, such as trauma and change of home, can be more prevalent and require additional support.

A skilled team of Health and Wellbeing Family Liaison Officers works across the authority to support the wellbeing of CECYP. They work alongside the young people, schools, families/carers and wider partners to offer a range of supports. Our young people voice how welcome this support is and how it positively impacts their attendance, self-esteem and resilience, further evidenced by data.

The Virtual School continues to raise awareness of our CECYP by delivering training to settings and partner agencies and ensuring as policy and guidance is reviewed, it reflects our CECYP and their needs. The voice of our CECYP remains paramount in shaping our improvement priorities.

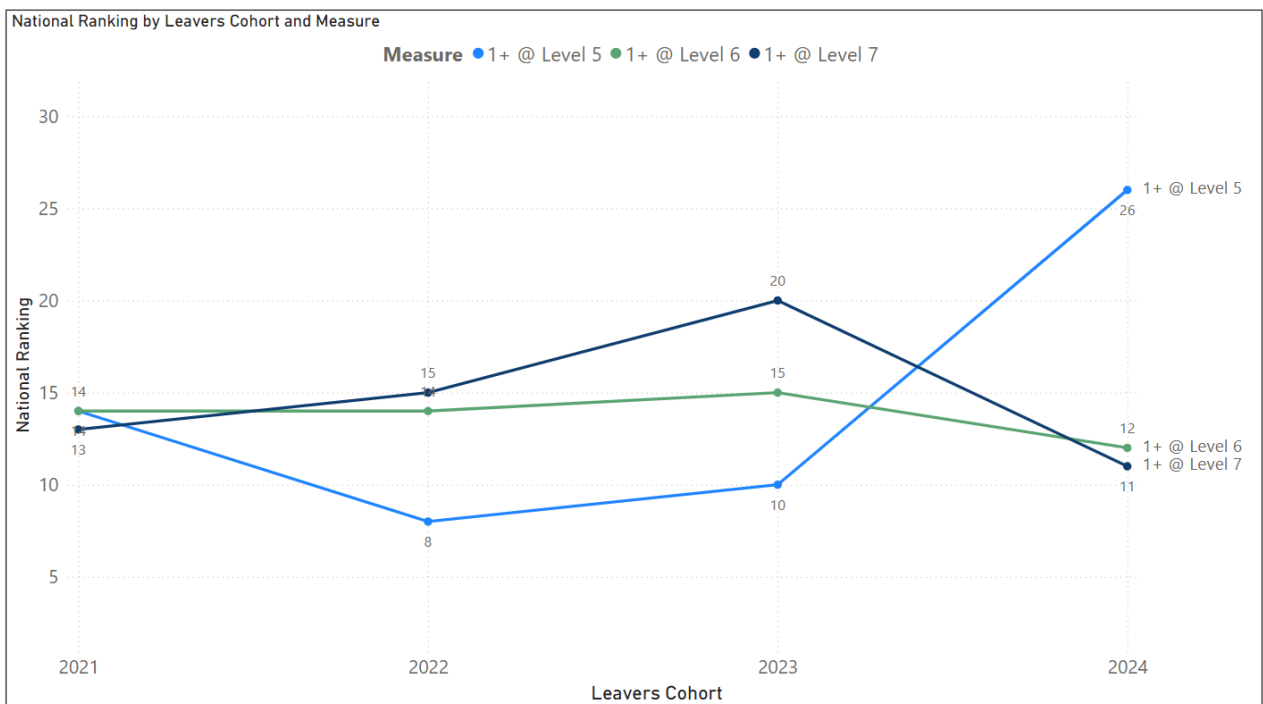
4.13 Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations

On 25th February 2025, the Scottish Government published the annual Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations. The document provides information on the attainment and initial destinations of school leavers in Scotland and reports on school leavers' attainment in National Qualifications. Among key information contained within the report relevant to this paper are the following:

- Of all 32 local authorities in Scotland, Argyll and Bute is placed 26th for school leavers having achieved at least one Level 5 National

Qualification (National 5, or National 5 Skills for Work), with 85.7% of our school leavers having done so. This is down from 89.1% in the 22/23 leavers cohort and 90.9% in the 21/22 cohort. The National Average is 87.4%, down from 87.9% in 2023 and 88.9% in 2022.

- Argyll and Bute is placed 12th for young people having achieved at least one Level 6 National Qualification (Higher or Higher Skills for Work), with 66.7% of our school leavers having done so. This is up from 62.6% in 2023 and 66.0% in 2022. The national average is 66.5%, up slightly from 65.6% in 2023 but below the 67.1% achieved in 2022.
- Argyll and Bute is placed 11th for young people having achieved at least one Level 7 National Qualification (Advanced Higher), with 26.1% of our school leavers having done so. This is up from 22.5% in 2023 and 25.5% in 2022. The national average is 25.4%, which is in line with 2023 performance and slightly below the 26.0% recorded in 2022.
- The visual below shows Argyll and Bute's national ranking over these three measures between 2020-21 and 2023-24 cohorts.



- Argyll and Bute's national ranking has improved in both the Level 6 and Level 7 measures. In both cases, 23/24 performance was the best it had been across the last 4 years. Performance for Level 5 pupils fell to the lowest it has been over this period.

5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 This report updates previous reports to committee on key attainment performance data. It incorporates data from the Scottish Government's Insight tool, which was most recently updated in late February 2025 to include all post-appeal attainment, accreditation for wider achievement qualifications and attainment data relating to all 2024 school leavers.
- 5.2 Central Officers continue to take forward the programme of support and challenge with schools across the authority, involving a range of actions and measures to support schools to secure further improvement in examination attainment and accredited wider achievement outcomes for young people. Increasing attainment and achievement, and ensuring that all young people achieve to their potential, regardless of location, circumstance or potential barriers, is at the heart of the work of the Education Service.
- 5.3 Heads of Service and Managers continue to meet regularly with Head Teachers to ensure appropriate levels of both scrutiny and collaboration are in place in relation to performance and securing positive outcomes for young people. This work is reinforced and enhanced by central staff through their involvement with national performance networks, such as the Northern Alliance group of local authorities and the Association of Directors which allows them to share best practice with wider Local Authority colleagues.
- 5.4 Additionally, the Education Service has reviewed and improved the process for analysis and evaluation of attainment data. Attainment Meetings with individual secondary Head Teachers take place in November/December, at which all aspects of attainment from S1-S6 are analysed and key improvement strategies to raise attainment are discussed and agreed.
- 5.5 Secondary school Head Teachers will present individual school performance analysis for session 2023-2024 at Local Area Committees in June 2025. Additionally, in May 2025 young people will speak personally to elected members about their own educational journeys and pathways, illustrating the many personalised pathways to attainment which are available to young people in Argyll and Bute's secondary schools. Invitations for members to visit schools to meet young people will be issued in coming weeks.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 **Policy:** This report links directly to Education in the Argyll and Bute Corporate Plan 2023-2027 (Attaining and achieving at all stages). NIF: Priorities 3 and 5
- 6.2 **Financial:** None
- 6.3 **Legal:** None

- 6.4 **HR:** None
- 6.5 **Fairer Scotland Duty:**
 - 6.5.1 Equalities – This report links directly to NIF Priority 3: Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.
 - 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – None
 - 6.5.3 Islands – None
- 6.6 **Risk:** The performance of Argyll and Bute schools in national examinations and wider achievement qualifications can significantly enhance or detract from the Council’s reputation and attractiveness as an area to work and live in.
- 6.7 **Customer Service:** This report provides elected Members with an overview of Service Performance.
- 6.8 **The Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** – This report links to Article 29 (goals of education)

Douglas Hendry - Executive Director with responsibility for Education

Councillor Audrey Forrest - Policy Lead for Education

Wendy Brownlie

Head of Education – Performance and Improvement

Jennifer Crocket

Chief Education Officer/ Head of Education – Wellbeing, Inclusion and Achievement

Brendan Docherty

Education Manager – Secondary Performance and Improvement

James Bowness

Education Lead – Benchmarking, Data and Performance

6 March 2025