

# Strategic Equity Funding



National  
Operational  
Guidance  
2022

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# What is Strategic Equity Funding?

Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) is £43 million to be shared by all 32 local authorities to invest in approaches to achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC).

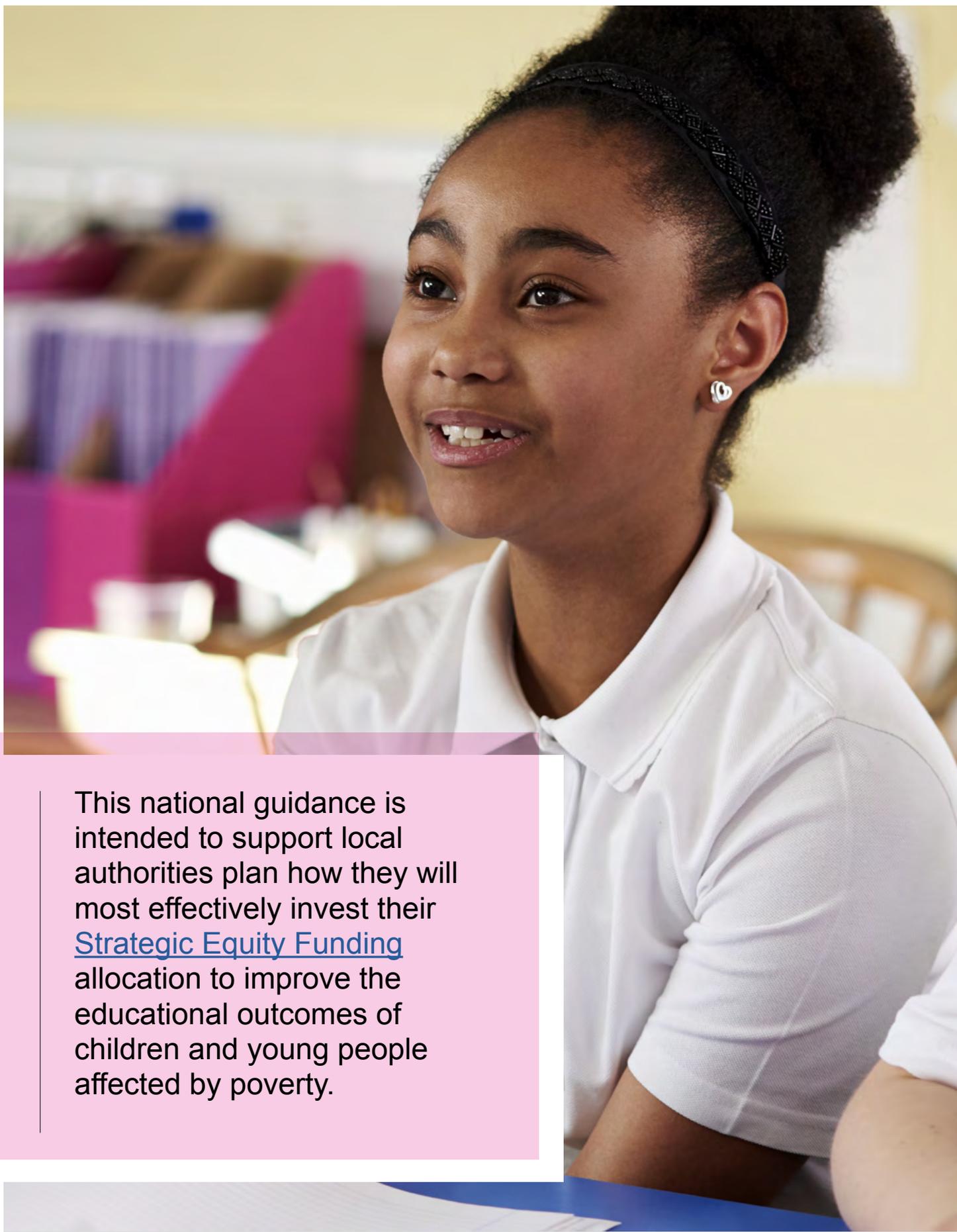
The Scottish Government has committed to this funding as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) programme.

SEF is part of the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF).



In November 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills [set out plans](#) for a refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge from April 2022. The mission of this refreshed Challenge is:

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



This national guidance is intended to support local authorities plan how they will most effectively invest their [Strategic Equity Funding](#) allocation to improve the educational outcomes of children and young people affected by poverty.

# Key Principles



- This guidance should be considered alongside the Scottish Attainment Challenge [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#).
- Strategic Equity Funding must be used to deliver targeted activities, approaches or resources which are clearly additional to universal local improvement plans.
- Headteachers, teachers, parents and carers, children and young people and other key stakeholders should be meaningfully involved throughout the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating approaches.
- Strategic Equity Funding must provide targeted support for children and young people (and their families if appropriate) affected by poverty to achieve their full potential, focusing on targeted improvement activity in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.
- The operation of the Strategic Equity Funding should be included within existing planning procedures, such as local authority Education Service Improvement Plans, which should be easily accessed by stakeholders. This must provide clarity to stakeholders on how Strategic Equity Funding is being used and its expected impact.
- Local authorities must develop a clear rationale for use of the funding, based on a robust contextual analysis, including relevant data which identifies the poverty-related attainment gap in their schools and learning communities, and plans must be grounded in evidence of what is known to be effective at raising attainment for children and young people impacted by poverty.
- Local plans must include ambitious and achievable stretch aims for progress in *improving outcomes for all while closing the poverty-related attainment gap*, as set out in the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#).
- Plans should consider the totality of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding – working collaboratively with headteachers, senior leaders and stakeholders to inform planning – coming into the local authority and how this is best utilised to enhance local plans to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and contribute to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

- The contributions of wider services supporting children and young people and their families are vital to supporting pupils' readiness to learn. Collaboration across services is crucial in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Plans should read across to related local authority service improvement plans, such as Community Learning and Development, social work, housing etc., which may also contribute to efforts to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. They should also have clear links to the local authority tackling child poverty and children's service plans.
- Progress against plans should be monitored on an ongoing basis. If plans are not achieving the results intended, these plans should be amended locally. Plans for sustainability must be considered as part of this.
- Progress should be reported annually through local authority Standards and Quality Reports (or equivalents).



# Strategic Equity Funding Allocations

## How much is it?

Strategic Equity Funding is provided through the £1 billion Attainment Scotland Fund – to be invested over the course of this parliamentary term to support education recovery and tackle the poverty-related attainment gap.

All local authority areas will have a clear role to play and will share £43 million annually.

Strategic Equity Funding allocations have been confirmed over the next four financial years, providing clarity to support strategic planning over that period.

Allocations can be found [here](#).

## How is it allocated?

£43 million in Strategic Equity Funding will be distributed equitably based on [Children in Low Income Families data](#) for the 2019/20 financial year.

By directly measuring household income, Children in Low Income Families data provides a precise count of children impacted by poverty

and therefore effectively reflects the needs of individuals in each local authority.

The approaches and enhanced resources supported by this funding must be targeted towards children and young people impacted by poverty, informed by local understanding of local need.



# Use of Strategic Equity Funding

## How can it be used?

This funding should be used by local authorities to undertake strategic approaches to achieve the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, with a clear focus on delivering equity through improving outcomes for learners impacted by poverty.

Funding should not be used in ways that stigmatise children and young people or their parents or carers. Approaches that impact on transitions between school stages – for example between nursery and primary or between broad general education and senior phase – can also be considered.

The funding should be focused on resources, activities and approaches focussed on learners impacted by poverty, which will lead to improvements in literacy, numeracy and support health and wellbeing.

Local authorities should work strategically across their school communities, which includes children and young people and their families, and collaboratively with their school leaders and with Regional Improvement Collaboratives to develop approaches to improving the health and wellbeing and educational attainment and achievement of children and young people impacted by poverty.

Consideration should be given to how the local authority can work with wider local services, such as Community Learning and Development, Social Work or Family Services, and with community or third sector partners to support the health and wellbeing, attainment and outcomes of children and young people impacted by poverty.

The three organisers of learning and teaching; leadership; and, families and communities should shape local approaches.

Within those, the following five key indicators may be helpful to take into consideration when deciding which approaches would have the most impact for children and young people impacted by poverty.

- Attainment
- Attendance
- Inclusion
- Engagement
- Participation



# Considerations for using Strategic Equity Funding

**When planning for the use of Strategic Equity Funding consideration should be given to the totality of Attainment Scotland Funding in local authorities and how the plans read across to wider local service plans to support children and young people impacted by poverty.**

**Local authorities should also consider how the plans for the use of Strategic Equity Funding will support the six priority family types [identified by the Scottish Government](#) as being at highest risk of experiencing child poverty:**

- Lone parent families
- Minority ethnic families
- Families with a disabled adult or child
- Families with a young mother (under 25)
- Families with a child under one
- Larger families (3+ children)

## Mitigate the Impact of Poverty

Mitigating the impact of poverty is an imperative in line with the refreshed mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, and supports the [Scottish Government's Tackling Child Poverty](#) plans.

At the planning stage, consideration should be given to the alignment of Strategic Equity Funding plans and local child poverty action plans, ensuring they complement each other and lead to improvement across shared aims.

Tackling the cost of the school day can help to remove financial barriers to learning and participation for children on low incomes. It can also reduce pressure on family budgets. Focusing on the cost of the school day improves equity through better understanding of barriers faced by pupils and families affected by poverty and the development of poverty aware policies and practices.

The Cost of the School Day project at Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland offers resources and support for schools and local authorities on developing cost of the school day approaches, involving school communities and good practice in reducing costs, maximising incomes and supporting children and families on low incomes.

All Cost of the School Day (CoSD) information and resources can be found:

- on the CPAG website  
<https://cpag.org.uk/cost-of-the-school-day>
- CoSD Toolkit  
<https://cpag.org.uk/scotland/CoSD/toolkit>
- Talking about Costs at School  
<https://cpag.org.uk/talking-costs>
- Contact the team at  
[costoftheschoolday@cpagscotland.org.uk](mailto:costoftheschoolday@cpagscotland.org.uk).

National Parent Forum of Scotland also have a cost of the school day toolkit for parent councils – Cost of the School Day Parent Council Toolkit – National Parent Forum of Scotland ([npfs.org.uk](http://npfs.org.uk)).





## Equalities

Evidence shows that some children and young people from marginalised groups can be disproportionately affected by deprivation and can therefore face significant additional barriers to learning. Local authorities have responsibilities to actively address inequality and the promotion of equity is a shared responsibility held by all staff, partners and other relevant stakeholders. Local authorities should consider how the interests, knowledge, identities and resources of marginalised young people and communities (e.g. those from minority ethnic backgrounds or lone parent households) are being recognised and valued. The influence of unconscious bias should also be considered especially in relation to whose ideas are valued and how they influence SEF planning.

In this context, local authorities should consider additional steps that might be required to close the poverty-related attainment gap for pupils affected by poverty who may also experience disadvantage for other reasons. For example, disadvantage related to: a protected characteristic (disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation); a need for which they require additional support; being looked after; or having caring responsibilities.

There is a need to consider equalities when identifying root causes of attainment gaps – data about poverty and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation should be looked at in conjunction with other key characteristics including, but not limited to, gender, race, disability, care experience, gypsy roma/traveller. This will require disaggregating data educational settings will already be collecting by these characteristics.

## Staffing

Any staff recruited through Strategic Equity Funding should be additional to normal requirements. Where local authorities identify the need to recruit additional staff to support their strategic plans they should ensure that the job remits and specifications are clearly tied to the aims of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

## Procurement

Purchase of resources, equipment or services must comply with existing local authority procurement procedures. This will be particularly important when buying Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources (see below) or, for example, services from third sector partners. Local authorities should ensure compliance with local procurement policies and legislation.

## ICT

Strategic Equity Funding can be used to procure digital technologies, including hardware and software, where its allocation and use is particularly focused on supporting children and young people affected by poverty to achieve their full potential.

The Scottish Government is currently in the planning stages of the commitment to provide a device for every school aged child and intend to provide a deeper investment in the technology in 2023/24 onwards. You may wish to consider whether SEF could be used towards digital devices in 2022/23 or other whether other funding avenues would be more suitable at this stage.

The Scottish Government provides access to a range of national procurement frameworks for the purchase of digital technology products and devices, including a range of desktops, laptops and tablets. The frameworks offer a direct route to market and significant savings against Recommended Retail Price (RRP).

We know that simply providing more technology does not result in improved outcomes for learners. Therefore, any deployment of technology in an educational setting should be undertaken in line with the objectives of the national [Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy](#) and any local digital planning where necessary with clear plans in place at the outset to evaluate the impact on closing the poverty-related attainment gap from the funding.



# Planning

**Strategic Equity Funding allocations have been confirmed until March 2026. Opportunities to implement longer term strategic aims can be planned for with the support of these confirmed allocations. Consideration should be given to longer term plans which support the mission to *improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.***

Local authorities should **consider the totality of Attainment Scotland Funding (Strategic Equity Funding (SEF), Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) & Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) funding)**, working collaboratively with headteachers, senior leaders and other partners to identify how the funding is best utilised to enhance local plans to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and contribute to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. As set out in the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#), there should be alignment between aims set by schools to improve the outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty and the stretch aims of the local authority.

Utilising a longer term approach by planning the use of Strategic Equity Funding over multiple years provides opportunities for more effective planning of spending, recruitment and development.

Planning can be supported by the logic model (which can be found as a supporting document to the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#)), which shows how a programme produces change. The SAC logic model can help bring detail to programme goals, aid planning, evaluation, implementation and communication. It incorporates outcomes reflecting the mission, which encompasses child poverty, broader achievement and an increased focus on health and wellbeing and family and community support.

As set out in the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#) local authority plans and stretch aims for the Scottish Attainment Challenge should be embedded within existing local authority education service improvement plans. Local authorities should ensure there is collaboration with stakeholders, e.g. children, young people, families and third sector partners in the planning process.

Plans should read across to related local authority service improvement plans, such as Community Learning and Development, social work, housing etc., which may also contribute to efforts to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. They should also have clear links to the local authority tackling child poverty action plans and children's services plans.

In line with the agreement on multiyear funding, it would be beneficial to prepare a 4 year strategic plan. A year 1 plan should be established with outcomes and stretch aims identified. The plan should be evaluated and adapted on an annual basis.

The planning cycle will follow the academic year, aligning with the annual Education Service Improvement Planning cycle. Therefore, stretch aims as described and exemplified in the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#) should be agreed annually by the end of September at the latest, if not before.

## General principles for planning for Strategic Equity Funding within the Scottish Attainment Challenge



### Collaborative:

Actively engage children, young people, families, communities, staff and partners in planning process.



### Evidence informed:

Plans are based on data and a clear understanding of the context of communities they will be implemented.

This data should include: local & national data and reference to research including SAC Theory of Change and Logic Model.



### Setting ambitious and SMART aims:

Aims should be smart, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed. They also need to be ambitious enough to achieve long term goals of closing poverty-related attainment gaps.



### Measuring progress:

SMART measures and baseline data are needed to be able to show progress towards aims. Regular tracking and monitoring will support staff respond timeously to interventions which are not having the desired impact and make adaptations.



### Evaluative:

All plans should have aims and measures which allow leaders to clearly state whether aims have been achieved.



### Quality assurance processes embedded

to support the development and implementation of SAC plans. This can be both internal or external, involve peers or senior leaders.

An '[Interventions for Equity](#)' resource has been developed to support the planning and implementing of approaches to meet the needs of children and young people affected by poverty in order to close the attainment gap. The examples cited act as a stimulus for wider reflection of what would suit your local context and are by no means the only approaches that should be considered.

## Stretch Aims

Specific requirements for setting local stretch aims are set out in the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#).

In summary, local stretch aims should be both ambitious and achievable within local contexts. The process of setting local stretch aims should be done in collaboration with stakeholders, taking account of their school and service plans to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. There should be two-way engagement between local authorities and schools when planning for and setting stretch aims.

In order to ensure some national consistency a "core plus" model has been developed. The "core" is for aims measurable by a sub-set of the National Improvement Framework (NIF) key measures and an aim for improvement in pupils' health and wellbeing. These form a minimum expectation for all local authorities to set out aims for raising attainment for all and for improving health and wellbeing and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.

At a minimum these should include (core) stretch aims for both overall progress and for reducing the poverty-related gaps in:

- a) achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (literacy combined and numeracy combined);

- b) the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more pass at SCQF level 5 based on the "Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations" publication;
- c) the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more pass at SCQF level 6 based on the "Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations" publication;
- d) the proportion of 16-19 olds participating in education, employment or training based on the Annual Participation Measure produced by Skills Development Scotland; and
- e) a locally identified aim for health and wellbeing, to be measured using local datasets.

The "plus" enables local authorities to identify further aims, measurable by either local or national data, in particular considering wider achievement, readiness to learn, or the cost of the school day. Underpinning these should be locally identified indicators of progress.

Each identified stretch aim should clearly articulate overall aims for raising attainment and improving health and wellbeing, and for tackling the poverty-related attainment gap in 2022/23. [The Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#) includes exemplification of such local stretch aims.

The setting and ambition of these aims should be achieved by local authorities as a result of robust evidence-informed self-evaluation, supported and challenged through professional dialogue with Education Scotland.

These plans and stretch aims should be developed in line with the existing academic planning cycle and be agreed by the end of September each year, if not before.



## Financial Planning

Local authorities should submit a high level financial planning template for SEF which sets out how funding will be invested over the course of the financial year. This should be submitted to Scottish Government by the end of September, alongside the confirmation of the agreement of local stretch aims each year.

In recognition that plans may change in-year, a notification of change process will be in place, to allow for any changes to funding to be highlighted and agreed. Scottish Government should be notified of any changes to plans by the end of February each year.

Funds will be drawn down twice in each financial year, once at the midpoint of the financial year (September) and once at the end of the financial year (March).

# Accountability

In the context of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, local authorities are responsible for:

- Preparing Strategic Equity Fund plans, including stretch aims, to contribute to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- Supporting school improvement through providing assistance to schools and partners by:
  - supporting schools to identify poverty-related gaps through coaching, professional learning and supporting access to tracking and monitoring and data analysis tools;
  - providing professional learning around planning (data, outcomes & measures), interventions & approaches;
  - offering practical support to schools, where required, in terms of financial management and HR; and
  - supporting and challenging schools in their use of PEF to make progress in improving the health and wellbeing and educational outcomes of children and young people impacted by poverty.
- Ongoing, active monitoring of plans for recovery and to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and improve health and wellbeing, supporting and challenging key stakeholders and/or partners; and adjusting plans where necessary to ensure progress.
- Reporting on progress towards their locally identified stretch aims.
- Reporting on the effective investment of Attainment Scotland Funding.
- Collaborating with a range of services across the local authority and in local communities to secure additional contributions to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

## Partnerships

Parents and local communities are a valuable source of support, expertise and experience in working with young people experiencing poverty-related barriers to learning. In many contexts local authorities may be able to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people by working with a range of bodies – as well as schools – such as:

- parent groups;
- parent councils; and,
- other local authority and public sector services such as:
  - community learning and development;
  - third sector organisations (including youth work, family learning organisations);
  - other educational sectors; and/or
  - centres of expertise such as universities.



## Engaging Children and Young People and their Families

Children and young people should be involved at the planning and evaluation of the effectiveness of interventions stages of local approaches and have the opportunity to have their views heard and influence local decision making.

Support can be accessed via this [resource on how to enable children and young people to have that input to planning and evaluation of approaches](#).

One particular approach that local authorities can consider is participatory budgeting.

**Participatory budgeting (PB)** is an innovative and effective mechanism to engage with parents, carers, children and young people, in particular those who face barriers to participation within their learning community. PB directly involves people in budgeting decisions that has a direct impact on improving their lives. It can strengthen pupil voice and provide real experience of democracy in action, resulting in more confident and active young people as citizens. PB offers positive engagement experiences, strengthening the school culture (or beyond) by building positive relationships. PB is a meaningful, practical and tangible way to realise children's rights to participate in decision making, whilst building an awareness of wider community needs.

More information about PB can be found on the PB Scotland website at: <https://pbscotland.scot/pb-in-schools/resources>.

For any queries contact: [info@pbscotland.scot](mailto:info@pbscotland.scot)



# Monitoring & Reporting

**Monitoring** should be undertaken locally on an ongoing basis, with support and challenge provided across local systems to drive education recovery and tackle the poverty-related attainment gap.

A key element of this should be on-going and regular professional dialogue between local authorities and Education Scotland, through Senior Regional Advisors and Attainment Advisors in particular.

In-year monitoring of progress within local settings is important to ensure early support and intervention where required, and should be a key aspect of local approaches to achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

**Reporting** on the impact of plans *to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on reducing the poverty-related attainment gap* will be through existing mechanisms within the education system, as outlined in the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#).

Existing local authority Education Standards and Quality reports (or local equivalent reports) should be used by the local authority to report on the progress being made with the support of Attainment Scotland Funding and provide specific details on:

- the original stretch aims set out in the local authority education service improvement plan and the extent to which they have been achieved;
- the measures described in the local authority education service improvement plan and any additional data to report on the impact on children and young people affected by poverty. Both qualitative and quantitative evidence of progress should be used to detail whether the expected impact was achieved – with clear quantitative progress against the relevant NIF measures included; and
- examples of interventions, approaches and use of resources which have been effective.

Within these reports local authorities should ensure that there is a clear narrative on the extent to which the ASF (SEF, PEF and CECYP funding) has influenced and supported local approaches in meeting locally identified stretch aims, and that there is evidence of strategic coherence and alignment in the use of these funding streams.

Local authorities should share reporting on progress with Scottish Government and Education Scotland by the end of December annually. This can be via their annually published improvement reports (for which education authorities have an existing duty to provide Scottish Ministers a copy once published).

## Financial Reporting

There will be two draw-down points annually for funding, one at the mid-point of the financial year (September) and one at the end of the financial year (March). Draw down of funds should be based on actual spend aligned to the planning template. Templates for completion of financial reports will be provided to the local authority by Scottish Government in advance of the draw-down dates.

Where local authorities are unable to spend their full allocation during the financial year, any unspent funds can be carried forward to the new financial year for investment by the end of the academic year (end of June) in support of existing plans for that year. Funding to be carried forward should be identified and set out alongside the end of financial year grant claim submitted in March.



# Resources

**There is a package of national and local support available to assist local authorities in planning how to use their Strategic Equity Funding.**

[Scottish Attainment Challenge – Self-evaluation resource](#) designed to assist schools and others bring about further improvement at this time of recovery.

[An Intervention for Equity framework](#) of evidenced and proven educational interventions and strategies to help tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. The framework can be used by all stakeholders and should help to inform the decisions local authorities and schools make. The structure and content is designed to be dynamic and continues to evolve as an integral part of the [National Improvement Hub](#), where a wide range of improvement, self-evaluation and research materials are available and where practice exemplars can be shared. Other research summaries and intervention examples will continue to be incorporated as these become available.

An Education Scotland Equity Toolkit is currently being developed and is expected to be available from the summer of 2022.

ILA Framework to evaluate how well local authorities are improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty related attainment gap.

A reflective tool for educators, Getting It Right For All Learners during COVID-19.

[The Education Endowment Foundation \(EEF\) Toolkit](#) provides an accessible summary of educational research designed to inform discussions on the most effective approaches to improving attainment, with a focus on 5-16 year olds and poverty disadvantage. It contains 35 teaching approaches and interventions, each summarised in terms of their average impact on attainment, the strength of the evidence supporting them and their cost. It is useful for education leaders and practitioners to inform decision making on the use of Strategic Equity Funding, raising attainment and improving equity. Many of the strands now include challenge questions to help support professional discussions. The toolkit is intended to be used in conjunction with the range of interventions and approaches provided through the framework above to encourage and enhance professional dialogue taking full account of the local context.

[Guidance](#) on working with the third sector is available to help support local authorities make the best use of funding with other partners. This resource sets out how schools can create purposeful partnerships with appropriate third sector organisations to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. The third sector is particularly well placed to support improvements to health and wellbeing and to improve employability skills and school leaver destinations.

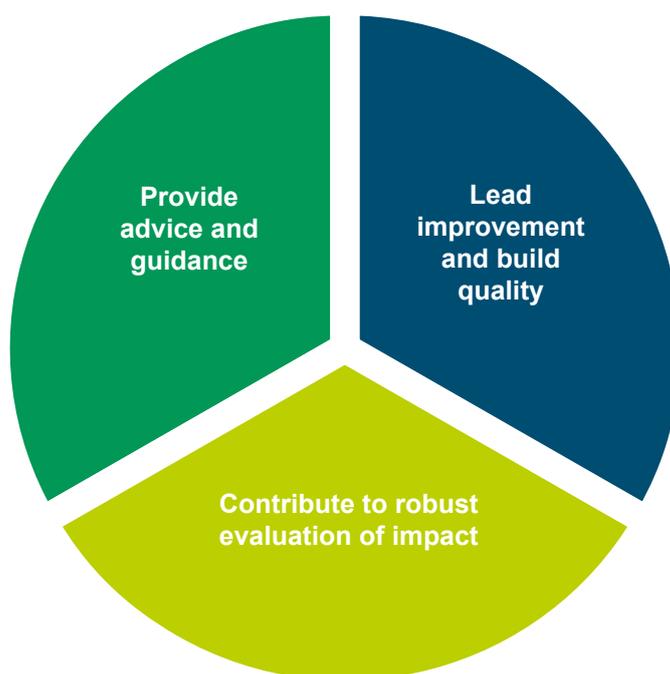
Alongside schools and education services, youth work improves the wellbeing, readiness to learn and educational outcomes of children and young people. [YouthLink Scotland](#) has a range of collaboration support and resources available as part of their national [Scottish Attainment Challenge programme](#). This includes information for schools, evidence and examples of impact and learning from the Youth Work Education Recovery Fund. They can also provide support to identify and work with youth work partners.

Attainment Advisors will provide advice on a local and regional basis. Attainment Advisors can be integral to facilitating good communication helping to share best practice and provide guidance on effective planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions in schools, local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives.

Examples of this include Attainment Advisors (and regional teams):

- working with local authorities, headteachers, senior leaders and practitioners to support effective planning for and development of collaborative approaches to the use of Strategic Equity Funding and the totality of Attainment Scotland Funding in local authority areas;
- playing a key role in working with local authority senior leaders to develop local stretch aims ensuring these are appropriately ambitious and focused on closing the poverty-related attainment gap and improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty;
- providing advice and support to local authorities, headteachers and senior leaders on planning and reporting on initiatives and the use of impact evaluation data and evidence to identify successful approaches and areas for improvement;
- working on an ongoing basis with local authorities and schools to develop and embed approaches monitoring the impact of local approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap;
- engaging in professional dialogue with local authority senior leaders to support local self-evaluation and improvement plans, including the stretch aims; and
- highlighting opportunities for collaboration and the use of communication tools on Glow including the Scottish Attainment Challenge community, Teams, Yammer, Sharepoint, and Blogs.

Attainment Advisors will have additional roles in supporting education leaders and practitioners with the above through their 3 key functions, all of which are informed by evidence gathered through local, regional and national data (fig 2).



Scottish Government, March 2022



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