

# The Scottish Attainment Challenge



## Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress

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## Overview

**Over the course of 2015 – 2021, the Scottish Attainment Challenge saw much progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap but at a limited pace. The pandemic disrupted the learning of our children and young people and had a disproportionate impact on children affected by poverty. Over the course of 2021/22 – 2025/26, the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme, backed by a commitment of £1 billion from the Scottish Government through the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF), aims to address these challenges and ensure that equity lies at the heart of the education experience for all. This investment builds upon the £750 million invested in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap from the programme’s launch to 2021.**

This Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress (the Framework) has been developed to support the Scottish Attainment Challenge. It aims to do the following:

- Reinforce our collective commitment to equity in education, to mitigate the impact of poverty on children's outcomes and tackle the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Set high expectations, including ambitious locally identified stretch aims for achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. By setting these stretch aims for 2025/26, we will see clear, ambitious trajectories for progress in each locality by the end of that three-year period (see template in Annex A). Supported by this information, nationally we can tailor further support for improvement, and focus on the immediate impact it can have on improving leadership, learning and teaching, and our work with families and communities, for the benefit of children and young people now.
- Take advantage of multi-year funding allocations for schools and local authorities to plan, supported by the SAC logic model, and set aims for long-term progress in the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. This will build on the sizeable investment in the Scottish Attainment Challenge to date, to make a greater difference, more quickly, for children and young people.
- Use existing improvement processes, as far as possible, in order to minimise additional bureaucracy. Specific requirements within this Framework ensure there are clear local ambitions for progress that inform the national picture of those ambitions.
- Through local plans and their accompanying stretch aims, drive improved outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty in the local authority.
- In setting these stretch aims, a “core plus” model is expected:

- The "core" sets a minimum requirement for aims measurable by a subset of the National Improvement Framework key measures based on national data and Insight data, and local data for health and wellbeing.
- The "plus" should reflect additional local priorities, such as attendance, initial leaver destinations, literacy and numeracy in the senior phase, aims for Gaelic Medium Education, and aims for improved outcomes for children and young people who have experienced care and / or identified with additional support needs who experience poverty related barriers to learning.
- Build on the continued commitment to empowerment for local planning and decision making, while ensuring strategic direction, support and challenge is provided by local authorities and national agencies. This will help achieve the best possible outcomes for our children and young people.

Having first published this Framework in April 2022, we now have a first suite of ambitious local stretch aims for progress in 2022/23 which are available on [gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot).

# Summary

<b>Scope</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge: to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.</li><li>• Support education recovery and increase pace of, and reduce variation in, progress.</li></ul>
<b>Planning</b>
<b>Schools:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Within existing mechanisms, include plans for Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) in School Improvement Planning, including clear aims for progress in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.</li><li>• Collaborate with children and young people, families, local authorities and other partners meaningfully when planning and throughout the process.</li></ul> <b>Local authorities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local authorities should include plans and stretch aims for the Scottish Attainment Challenge within the existing local authority education service improvement planning process.</li><li>• Stretch aims should be set for 2025/26 and include an outline trajectory for progress; and should be informed by, and inform, school plans for progress.</li><li>• Planning should read across into other services' plans and identify opportunities to collaborate with other services and partners.</li><li>• Stretch aims should be agreed as a result of robust evidence-informed self-evaluation, supported and challenged through professional dialogue with Education Scotland.</li><li>• A short financial plan for Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) is to be submitted to the Scottish Government by September each year.</li></ul>
<b>Monitoring and Reporting</b>
<b>Schools:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Report on the impact of PEF through school Standards and Quality Reports and use these to report to their Parent Council and Forum and through other channels.</li><li>• Implement robust monitoring of children's and young people's progress with appropriate support and challenge from the local authority, peers, Education Scotland and engagement with parents and carers to ensure continual ambitious progress in improving health and wellbeing and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.</li></ul> <b>Local authorities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Through existing reporting mechanisms and channels, report on progress against the agreed stretch aims in September each year through Standards and Quality Reports/NIF reports (or local equivalents).</li></ul>

- Ensure robust monitoring of progress, with support and challenge from Education Scotland and collaboration with peers, to ensure continual ambitious progress in improving health and wellbeing and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.

**National:**

- Scottish Government and Education Scotland will discuss local progress in improving health and wellbeing and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap, informed by local and national data, evidence, intelligence and attainment advisor reporting.
- Education Scotland will use data and evidence to tailor support and challenge.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

- Reflect existing statutory duties and those in the 2018 Joint Agreement.
- Expectation of collaboration, transparency, support and challenge in a mature system focused on the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Scottish Government is clear in its continued commitment to closing the poverty-related attainment gap, clearly reiterating that in the 2023 [Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership - A fresh start](#). This includes a clear commitment to use “our investment in the Scottish Attainment Challenge to further empower headteachers and Local Government to achieve their ambitions to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty”.

The pandemic has – as set out in the Scottish Government and Education Scotland [Equity Audit](#) of January 2021 and a range of other research – had a disproportionate impact on children and young people affected by poverty. Alongside that, the challenging economic conditions present an additional challenge for children, families and public services. That is why close alignment with the Scottish Government’s national mission to tackle child poverty, with all in society working together to drive change is so important. [The Best Start, Bright Futures: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2022 to 2026](#) sets out the Government’s strategy for that.

Education has a clear role to play in this and we are clear that a good education is of the most effective means we have to give every child and young person the best chance to succeed in life. Further, the right to and goals of education are enshrined in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC). The pandemic and the cost of living crisis have not changed that.

These issues and ambitions reinforce our moral imperative to do everything we can to support the best possible outcomes for our future generations. We can do this by focusing resources on recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap – with education making its contribution to mitigating the impact of poverty on the educational experiences and life chances of children and young people experiencing poverty. This is an imperative borne of our commitment to a human rights-based approach to children and young people's care, support and education.

The mission of the Challenge is therefore:

*“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 mission recognises the need to reflect the breadth of achievements and experiences and the importance of health and wellbeing to contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people including through improved post-school participation in positive destinations. This represents strengthened alignment with

the Curriculum for Excellence and the findings of the [OECD](#) and [Audit Scotland](#) reports of 2021, which indicate the need for stronger national and local data on the wider benefits of Scottish education; and acknowledges articles 29 and 31 of the UNCRC.

With a continued focus on evidence of impact and learning to date, some key considerations have been drawn from [Scottish Government and Education Scotland's analysis of the Scottish Attainment Challenge](#) (published March 2021), Audit Scotland's [report: Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#) (also of March 2021), and the [Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation: fifth interim report - year 6](#) (June 2022), to shape our continued work to close the poverty-related attainment gap. These include:

- Progress in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap was made before the pandemic. This provides solid foundations on which we can seek to accelerate both recovery and progress.
- The findings of the 2021 Audit Scotland report highlighted a need to make quicker progress even in relation to pre-pandemic gains, and to tackle variation in outcomes between and within local authority areas.
- There is a need for continued and accelerated progress to address the negative impact of Covid-19 on children's health and wellbeing and learning.
- Improving leadership, learning and teaching and the quality of support for families and communities and targeted support for those impacted by poverty remain the key levers to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Further, we know that good progress in recovery from the pandemic is evident in 2021/22 primary school attainment, with the biggest single year decreases in the literacy and numeracy poverty-related attainment gap since records began in 2016/17, bringing levels closer to those seen before the Covid-19 pandemic and making good progress towards 2022/23 local stretch aims. There has been good progress in the senior phase, with the gap in exam results in 2022 narrowing compared to the pre-pandemic levels of 2019. All of this underpins improved outcomes for children and young people, with record high numbers of students from deprived areas entering university and the poverty-related attainment gap for school leavers in positive destinations three months after the end of the school year at a record low.

However, there is more to do and at greater pace to ensure all children and young people have the same opportunities to succeed.



## 2. Planning

This section focuses on planning arrangements related to the Scottish Attainment Challenge for schools and local authorities. It is designed to include minimal bureaucracy; to ensure transparency and shared levels of ambition for progress; and, taking into account key learning from the Scottish Attainment Challenge to date, to support swift and lasting education recovery, increase the pace of progress and reduce variation in progress.

A key element of the Framework is the requirement for locally identified stretch aims to be set out in local authority education service improvement plans.

All 32 local authorities receive both Strategic Equity Funding (SEF) and Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) funding, and almost all (97%) schools in all 32 local authorities receive Pupil Equity Funding (PEF). Detailed planning and reporting requirements for each of these funding streams is set out in the respective guidance documents for each. However, there are some overarching requirements related to all three funding streams set out below.

- Attainment Scotland Funding (whether SEF, PEF or CECYP) should not be the only resource directed to approaches to achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge or the locally identified stretch aims for doing so. This is additional resource to enhance or up-scale existing, or support new or additional, targeted approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap and improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty.
- Headteachers are empowered to identify and implement approaches to using PEF in their local settings.
- Headteachers should expect dialogue with the local authority on how plans for the use of Attainment Scotland Funding at school and local authority level can be strategically aligned to shared strategic aims – collaboration at the planning stage is vital.
- Local authorities remain accountable for the use of Attainment Scotland Funding, including PEF. Therefore, local authorities should support headteachers and have processes in place to ensure plans are targeted and evidence based to support full and effective local spend.
- Local authorities and headteachers should work together closely to consider how to maximise the utility or reach of PEF to undertake shared approaches – with the explicit agreement of headteachers – to achieve shared aims. There are many examples of this working well. Such examples can be found in the Education Scotland [Pupil Equity Funding](#):

[Looking inwards, outwards, forwards – sharing effective practice to maximise support for learner and practitioners](#) publication.

- Additional support for learning legislation advises that one of the factors which gives rise to additional support needs is family circumstances. Poverty is part of this. Research shows the interconnections between poverty and additional support needs. If a child is affected by poverty, they are more likely to be identified as requiring additional support. ASF funding should be inclusive of all children who are impacted by poverty, including those identified with additional support needs.

## **2.1 School planning: Pupil Equity Funding**

### **2.1.1 General principles**

Schools must continue to use their school improvement plans and processes to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and to use PEF to provide additional activities or resources to contribute to those plans.

Headteachers must have access to their school's full PEF allocation. This funding must provide targeted support for children and young people (and their families if appropriate) affected by poverty to help support them achieve their full potential.

Headteachers should endeavour to work in partnership with their local community partners, such as youth work and community learning and development, to develop approaches to utilising the funding to best effect. Schools must take account of the statutory responsibilities of the local authority to deliver educational improvement, secure best value, and fulfil the authority's role as employer. Collaboration with local authorities, other schools or school clusters, or community partners, may provide opportunities to increase the reach and impact of PEF, including through agreeing opportunities to pool resources. Local guidance will set out more detail on how this will operate in local settings.

The use of Pupil Equity Funding should align with the strategic local authority plans and stretch aims for tackling the poverty-related attainment gap – essentially freedom within a framework. Equally, school plans should inform local authority strategic plans as part of a two-way collaborative planning process between local authorities and schools.

Parents and carers, children and young people and other key stakeholders should be meaningfully involved throughout the process of planning, evaluation and any future developments. This should be inclusive of all children affected by poverty, including those where alternative communication approaches need to be considered and children and young people in any ASN provisions in schools. The PEF guidance

includes further advice on potential approaches to doing this and signposts evidence of effective approaches to utilising PEF.

Further, specific guidance on the use of Pupil Equity Funding is available here [Pupil Equity Funding Guidance](#).

### 2.1.2 Practicalities

Schools must have plans, grounded in evidence of what is known to be effective at raising attainment for children affected by poverty, in place before the beginning of each academic year. These plans should be developed with teachers and school communities. They should include clear outcomes to be achieved and how progress towards these, and the impact on closing the poverty-related attainment gap, will be measured. If, as a result of ongoing local monitoring, the plans are not achieving the impact intended, these plans should be adjusted.

Scottish Government and Education Scotland will sample these plans annually, with a focus on PEF, to continue to inform our understanding of the approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap undertaken in specific settings and potentially inform the annual evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund.

Local authorities will provide to Scottish Government two reports on school level PEF spend:

- **The first report**, to be completed by the end of May, will capture PEF spend as of 31 March 2023, along with committed PEF spend up to 30 September 2023. This will help provide a more accurate reflection of PEF spend, given significant amounts of PEF supports staffing costs, which typically cover the academic year.
- **The second report**, to be completed at the end of October, will indicate how much of the committed spend up until 30 September 2023 has been invested.

Whilst there is provision for PEF allocations to be carried forward into the subsequent financial year (and, in specific exceptional circumstances into the new academic year), schools should liaise closely with their authority to agree the arrangements for this. Schools should also be able to access ongoing advice and guidance from the Attainment Advisor team in order to maximise improved outcomes for children and young people as a result of a full and effective investment of their Pupil Equity Funding.

Further detail can be found in the specific PEF National Operational [guidance for PEF](#).

## 2.2 Local authority planning: Strategic Equity Funding

### 2.2.1 General principles

All 32 local authorities are in receipt of SEF. This funding is provided to support local authorities to develop and implement strategic approaches to achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, working with schools, wider local authority services and national and community partners, such as youth work.

In planning strategic local approaches to achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, local authorities should consider the totality of Attainment Scotland Funding coming into the local authority. This can include working with headteachers, recognising their decision-making role in the use of PEF, to consider how this is best utilised to enhance local plans to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. Local authorities should co-create plans with stakeholders, including those with lived experience of poverty.

All local authorities are required to use their strategic plans to set out **local stretch aims for progress**.

SEF [allocations through to March 2026](#) are available on gov.scot. In line with that funding commitment, local authorities are required to consider outcomes to be achieved by the end of this parliamentary term – and funding cycle rather than setting shorter term, annual aims. Stretch aims are therefore required to set out ambitious aims for progress by the end of the three-year period of 2023/24 – 2025/26, accompanied by an outline trajectory for progress (see template in Annex A).

The mission *to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap* should feature in all local authority education service improvement plans. These plans should indicate how Scottish Attainment Challenge funding will be used to address this mission as well as how these plans align to other local authority plans, such as Community Learning and Development plans, Children's Services plans and Child Poverty Action Plans, which have related aims.

These overarching plans, supported by SEF, are also an opportunity to identify and articulate how the pandemic and the cost of living crisis has impacted the educational experiences and health and wellbeing of children most impacted by poverty and how local strategies are being used to support and improve outcomes for those children and young people.

## 2.2.2 Stretch aims

Local authority plans and stretch aims for the Scottish Attainment Challenge should be embedded within existing local authority education service improvement plans (or equivalents), which are shared annually with Scottish Government as part of statutory plans and reports. Stretch aims are, of course, just one part of the range of responsibilities local authorities have for education services.

### Setting local stretch aims

- Set specific local authority stretch aims for improving outcomes for all while closing the poverty-related attainment gap between SIMD quintile 1 and SIMD quintile 5<sup>1</sup> for 2025/26.
- These stretch aims should be ambitious within local contexts and take into account previous years' attainment data and local authorities' 2022/23 stretch aims (see Annex A for key considerations for setting aims).
- Stretch aims for 2025/26, accompanied by an outline trajectory for progress, should be submitted to the Scottish Government by the end of September 2023. Local authorities should evaluate their plans and progress towards their stretch aims annually and report on progress through their NIF reports/Standards and Quality Reports in September each year.
- They should focus on the specific aims which local evidence and data suggest are the priority areas for improvement in line with the 'core plus' model set out below.
- At a minimum these must include **core stretch aims** for both overall progress and for reducing the poverty-related gaps in:

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<sup>1</sup> Where local authorities do not have cohorts of pupils in these quintiles, local measures or indicators of socio-economic deprivation can be utilised. We recognise that some local authorities are working collaboratively to explore what indicators might be most appropriate to their contexts.

a) Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (**literacy** at primary 1, 4 and 7 combined; and **numeracy** at primary 1, 4 and 7 combined);

b) the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more award at SCQF level 5 based on Insight (All SCQF Awards) information;

c) the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more award at SCQF level 6 based on Insight (All SCQF Awards) information;

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. NB: whilst a national dataset for health and wellbeing gathered consistently across all local authorities does not yet exist, amongst the core aims – with absolute parity of esteem – must be an ambitious locally identified and measured aim for improvement and closing of the poverty-related gap in progress in health and wellbeing.

There are plans for the data for the health and wellbeing survey to be included in the National Improvement Framework, when there should be a greater degree of confidence and consistency in the data.

In summary:

- Each stretch aim should clearly articulate ambitions for progress for all pupils and progress in narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap by 2025/26, with a clearly articulated trajectory for progress over the course of 2023/24 and 2024/25. Nationally, aims a), b), c) and d) will be aggregated so that a national picture for progress by 2025/26 for all pupils and for the poverty-related attainment gap can be identified. Consistency in the articulation of the NIF key measures identified above will be vital to developing that national picture. **Therefore, the template included at Annex A must be used by local authorities in their returns to Scottish Government by the end of September 2023.**
- The core aims set out above have been updated in response to feedback from local authorities and to align with the work underway to update the NIF measures for the 2024 NIF publication.

The **plus stretch aims**: Recognising the importance of readiness to learn and a broad and varied curriculum, plans are required to also include additional (plus) stretch aims which are specific to the local authority's own context and datasets.

These aims are of equal importance to those that form the "core" and could include, for example:

- aims for 1 or more award at A – C for level 5 and level 6 national qualifications, based on Insight (SQA National) information;
- aims for literacy and numeracy in S3 and/or the senior phase;
- aims for attendance;
- aims for initial leaver destinations;
- aims specifically for care experienced children and young people;
- aims specifically for children and young people impacted by poverty and identified with additional support needs;
- aims for attainment in Gaelic Medium Education (in particular that which is not picked up through ACEL collections for English Medium Education);
- aims for parental engagement in learning;
- aims for pupils' broader curricular achievements (for example, Duke of Edinburgh or John Muir awards; or Heartstart etc);
- aims regarding readiness to learn; or
- regarding the cost of the school day.

Articulation of the suite of core plus additional stretch aims should detail:

- what change do you want to see for learners over the next three years?
- how much change over the next three years? who are the target groups?
- how will progress be measured and tracked – indicators of progress?
- a clear trajectory of progress.

Considerations for setting stretch aims and the required templates for completion and presentation in plans are included at Annex A.

### **Agreeing local stretch aims**

- In line with the agreement on multiyear funding and building on the year 1 plans established for 2022/23, local authorities are required to prepare a three-year strategic plan with accompanying stretch aims for 2025/26. Within that plan and underpinning the 2025/26 stretch aims should be an outline trajectory for progress.
- Setting of local stretch aims should be an iterative and collaborative process between local authorities and schools, including special schools and ASN provisions. There should be a two-way process which sees school plans

inform the local authority stretch aims and local authority aims and strategic plans reflected in school plans.

- The setting and ambition of these aims should be achieved by local authorities as a result of robust evidence-informed self-evaluation.
- Local authorities should work closely with Education Scotland as they develop their stretch aims.

### **Plans underpinning these aims**

- Stretch aims will form part of local authorities overall education service plans and specific SAC related plans – these plans are what will be key to making progress towards the stretch aims and improving outcomes for children and young people.
- Stretch aims should be ambitious, setting aims to make better progress than in the previous years of the SAC (though taking into account the impact of Covid-19 and the current cost-of-living crisis) and provide a tool that acts as a catalyst for local consideration of what can be done differently to maximise progress towards them.
- The [SAC logic model](#) should inform approaches to closing the poverty- related attainment gap and planning should be shaped around the Scottish Attainment Challenge organisers of: learning and teaching; leadership; and families and communities.
- Both qualitative and quantitative measures should be identified to demonstrate the progress and impact of supports and interventions.
- There should be a clear articulation of how Scottish Attainment Challenge funding will contribute to the aims of the plans – whether directly, by augmenting/enhancing existing approaches, or by leveraging input from other services/partners.
- The contributions of wider services supporting children and young people and their families are vital to supporting readiness to learn. Plans should read across to related local authority service improvement plans and tackling child poverty plans.

### **Timing**

- The planning cycle will use the academic year, aligning with existing annual Education Service Improvement Planning cycles.
- Stretch aims for 2025/26 and anticipated broad trajectories for progress towards them over the course of 2023/24 and 2024/25 should be agreed and



submitted to Scottish Government by the **end of September 2023** as part of the local authority's Education Service Improvement Plan.

- Submission of 2025/26 stretch aims in September 2023 should also be accompanied by local authorities' NIF reports/Standards and Quality reports which should provide an update on progress towards 2022/23 stretch aims.

There is a requirement for a high-level **financial planning** template for SEF to be submitted which sets out how funding will be invested. This will provide Scottish Government with an audit trail of funding use in each local authority.

There will be two draw-down points for funding, one at the mid-point of the financial year and one at the end of the financial year. Draw down of funds should be based on actual spend aligned to the planning template.

Recognising the plans may change in-year, a notification of change process will be in place.

Further guidance and specific practical arrangements for the use of SEF can be found in the [SEF guidance](#).

## **2.3 Local authority planning – Care Experienced Children and Young People**

### **2.3.1 General Principles**

Current planning (and reporting) arrangements for CECYP funding will continue and are set out fully in the refreshed CECYP funding guidance. This will continue to require the Chief Social Work Officer and Director of Education (or equivalent) to work together to ensure there are strategic plans in place with processes for reporting on impact. This should take place in collaboration with Attainment Advisors and, where appropriate, [virtual school headteachers](#).

This funding is issued to local authorities, as corporate parents. The Chief Social Work Officer and the Director of Education (or equivalent), assisted by Education Scotland, working in collaboration with planning partners, and other professionals, carers and children and young people, will assess how the funding can be utilised to have the most impact on attainment and achievement.

Plans to utilise the funding should have a clear focus on delivering equity and improving educational outcomes and supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people who are care experienced, for those aged between 0-26. These plans should be reflected in local authority improvement plans for education and any other relevant existing planning processes for children. Examples of this include Child Poverty Action Plans, additional support plans, Child's Plans, Looked After Children reviews, or children's services partnership plans.

### **2.3.2 Practicalities**

CECYP funding is issued over the academic year and will continue to be drawn down at two points in the financial year.

Outcomes, measures of success and evaluation of impact should be built into any programme or initiative at the outset and clearly set out in the relevant plans.

Identified measures set out in plans should reflect the strategic decisions taken around the approaches taken and local authorities should agree the mechanisms which best illustrate the impact on attainment/wellbeing. These can be quantitative or qualitative measures, for example capturing the experiences and feedback from care experienced children and young people, or through the Chief Social Work Officer Reports.

Further guidance on the use of CECYP funding can be found here [CECYP guidance](#).

## 3. Reporting and monitoring

### 3.1 In-year monitoring of progress

It is important that in-year monitoring of progress occurs in local settings to ensure an ongoing understanding of progress. This enables early support and intervention where required. This already happens in most schools and authorities and should be a key part of local approaches.

Having clearly articulated outline trajectories for progress towards 2025/26 stretch aims is designed to support that ongoing monitoring of progress in local systems. Local authorities review and update their education service plans annually alongside their annual reporting on progress through SQRs/NIF reports (more on reporting below).

Monitoring of progress will be part of the on-going and regular dialogue between local authorities and Education Scotland, through the Senior Regional Advisors and Attainment Advisors in particular.

Through the Scottish Attainment Challenge joint programme, the Scottish Government and Education Scotland will discuss local progress in improving health and wellbeing and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap quarterly. This will be informed by national and local data, local reporting, evidence and intelligence, and the suite of Education Scotland tri-annual reports (which will include commentary on local progress towards stretch aims) to ensure appropriate levels of support are provided and that the best possible progress and outcomes are being achieved.

These quarterly progress discussions will be an opportunity to reflect on successes, wider barriers to progress and the types of support, collaboration and challenge required to help ensure future progress across all local authorities.

Education Scotland, in consultation with local authorities, continues to consider where further support is required both at school and local authority level based on levels of deprivation, performance data and contextual analysis, which will be informed by dialogue with ADES and individual local authorities. Cognisance will be taken of particular requirements in local authorities, including resources to support improvement and achievement of stretch aims, and self-evaluation processes. In partnership with ADES, Education Scotland has been undertaking a programme of Collaborative Improvement, which involves colleagues from ADES, Education Scotland and the host authority working together to tackle an area where performance can be improved. This methodology has been highly effective and plans are being developed to build on this approach in driving improvement.

In particular, Education Scotland resources will be prioritised and allocated where improvement can be accelerated.

Where additional resources are required to support agreed outcomes, Education Scotland determines how these priorities will be resourced. In doing this, Education Scotland will:

- provide universal support, available to all local authorities and schools;
- provide targeted support to local authorities and schools with particular requirements. This may be those with the highest levels of poverty or others depending on the data and contextual analysis; and
- intensively use its resources in collaboration with a small number of local authorities and schools where progress can be accelerated. Resources will also be utilised in certain circumstances where no, or very limited, progress is being made to improving outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty.

As is set out in the [2018 Joint Agreement](#), in rare cases where evidence suggests there is cause for concern, the following approaches will be deployed as appropriate:

- *professional dialogue between LA and ES will have explored concerns about limited progress and a variety of supports provided*
- *continued concerns will be shared with all partners*
- *the SNCT will collectively address concerns if there is evidence of non-compliance by local authorities with the Code of Practice on staff selection*
- *COSLA will facilitate challenge and support drawing in expertise from ADES/ES and others. This will include evidence review and challenge sessions leading to a clear action plan, offer of peer support and follow-up activity to monitor impact and improvement*
- *evaluation of progress*
- *clear line of escalation to audit and scrutiny inspection bodies if insufficient progress.*

### **3.2 Reporting**

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.

## **Schools**

In line with arrangements for Pupil Equity Funding since its roll-out in 2017/18, schools are expected to incorporate details of their Pupil Equity Funding plans and explicitly report on the impact on outcomes for learners impacted by poverty within existing reporting processes to their Parent Council and Forum, including in their annual Standards and Quality Reports. There will be some children and young people impacted by poverty where individual milestones will be most relevant to understanding the impact of supports funded through PEF. Schools should contact their local authority for further advice in the first instance if needed; and can draw on the support of their Attainment Advisor.

These reports should be made publicly available so that parents and carers can understand what is happening in schools.

Scottish Government and Education Scotland will sample these reports annually to continue to inform our understanding of the approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.

Key findings from this sampling will be made available to local authorities and schools.

## **Local authorities**

Reporting should be done through the existing requirement for local authority Education Standards and Quality Reports (or local equivalent reports). These reports, whilst covering the overall progress and impact of local authority service improvement plans and school improvement plans, should for the Scottish Attainment Challenge (considering the impact across all funding streams) have specific details on the below:

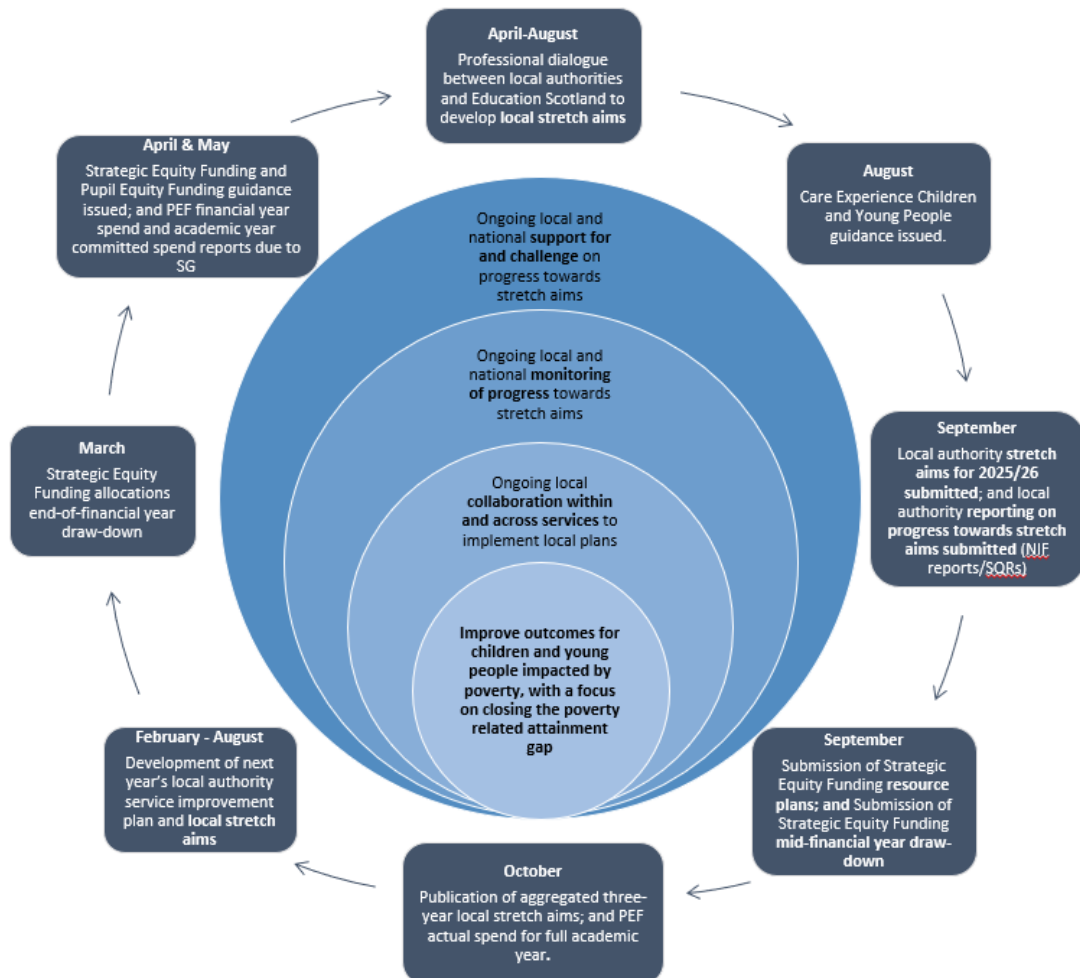
- The stretch aims set out in the local authority education service improvement plan and the extent to which progress towards them is being made.
- The measures described in the local authority education service improvement plan and any additional data to report on the impact on children and young people affected by poverty. Both qualitative and quantitative data should be used to detail whether the expected impact was achieved – and based on that data, include commentary on confidence of progress towards specific stretch aims.
- Examples of supports and interventions which have been effective.

There should be clear narrative on how Attainment Scotland Funding (PEF, SEF and CECYP funding) has contributed to local approaches to meeting locally identified stretch aims and the mission of the SAC. There should be evidence of strategic coherence and alignment to the use of these funding streams.

Local authorities are required to share reporting that covers the above with Scottish Government by the end of September annually – alongside the submission of their stretch aims for the 2025/26. This reporting can be provided via their annual NIF reports or Standards and Quality Reports (for which education authorities have an existing duty to provide Scottish Ministers a copy once published), or extracts of those reports if they are not otherwise complete by the end of September.

For CECYP funding, arrangements will continue as they have done since its roll-out in 2018/19 as part of existing relevant authority reporting requirements, with reports shared with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland at the end of the academic year, highlighting evidence of impact through both qualitative and quantitative information. Separate CECYP guidance sets this out in full.

Fig. 1. Scottish Attainment Challenge – planning and reporting cycle for 2023/24.



## 4. Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities

The roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the range of key stakeholders engaged in education/school improvement, including reducing the poverty-related attainment gap, are well established and are articulated in the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 and the [2018 Joint Agreement](#).

This Framework seeks to further articulate the responsibilities for monitoring, support and challenge in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge in particular, and focuses on local authorities, schools, Regional Improvement Collaboratives, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government.

### 4.1 Local authorities and their staff

**Local authorities** are responsible for:

- preparing annual education service plans, which include key actions to contribute to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the local authority's stretch aims for 2025/26;
- 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, aims/ outcomes and measures), interventions and approaches;
  - offering practical support to schools, where required, in terms of financial management and HR;
  - 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; and
  - ensuring that supports are inclusive and accessible for all children affected by poverty, including those who are identified with additional support needs.
- effectively using data, and the Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model, to explore a shared understanding of the local context with Education Scotland, supporting the setting of ambitious local authority stretch aims, monitoring performance and progressing towards achieving these stretch aims;
- 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;

- reviewing progress on their trajectories towards their 2025/26 stretch aims and adjusting their plans accordingly to maximise progress;
- reporting on progress toward their locally identified local authority 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; and
- engaging in professional dialogue with Education Scotland and Scottish Government to support maximum impact of the resources benefiting children and young people affected by poverty, including through professional dialogue to support local self-evaluation and improvement planning, such as the development of stretch aims.

**School leaders** are responsible for:

- the improvement of outcomes and attainment, including tackling the poverty-related attainment gap and improved health and wellbeing, in their schools;
- working as part of a collaborative learning community, the local authority and working with others, in order to make decisions that most benefit their children and young people's outcomes;
- ensuring that children and young people participate meaningfully in their own learning, in decision-making relating to the life and work of the school and in the wider community;
- the development and implementation of School Improvement Plans which include approaches to contributing to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge;
- the effective use of data, and the Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model, to explore a shared understanding of local context with local authority colleagues and/or Education Scotland, including to support the development of ambitious plans and monitoring of performance and progress towards achieving the aims within those plans;
- using Pupil Equity Funding to provide additionality to enhance, scale or introduce new approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap within the school, across the learning community or in partnership with local services; and
- reporting on progress towards stated aims and tackling the poverty-related attainment gap in their annual Standards and Quality Report.

### **Other services within local authorities:**

All services within a local authority play a valuable role in the contribution they make to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. It would be beneficial to reflect their contribution to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in local plans, for example, in Children's Services plans, Local Child Poverty Action Plans and Reports and Community Learning and Development plans. This will ensure there is alignment of the Scottish Attainment Challenge mission with other relevant local authority plans and there are references to relevant plans in education service improvement plans.

## **4.2 Regional Improvement Collaboratives**

Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) continue to bring local authorities together to secure excellence and equity in education – including contributing to the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge – by:

- providing educational improvement support to practitioners through dedicated teams of professionals, drawing on local authority and Education Scotland staff and others;
- providing focus across partners through a joint regional plan and work programme, aligned to the NIF and to regional and local priorities; and
- facilitating and creating the conditions for impactful collaborative working between practitioners, schools and system leaders, including professional learning, innovation and the sharing of best practice.

## **4.3 Education Scotland**

The Scottish Attainment Challenge mission is central to all of Education Scotland's work supporting Scottish educators. To support this all teams will review and enhance approaches to professional learning and leadership and provision of professional advice and support in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. They will lead improvement and build capacity, share practice and broker connections with partners. Working collaboratively with local authorities and stakeholders, staff will support the identification of any gaps in service provision and provide support, where required, to address these.

Through senior leaders, Senior Regional Advisors, Attainment Advisors and NIF Officers, Education Scotland will do the following:

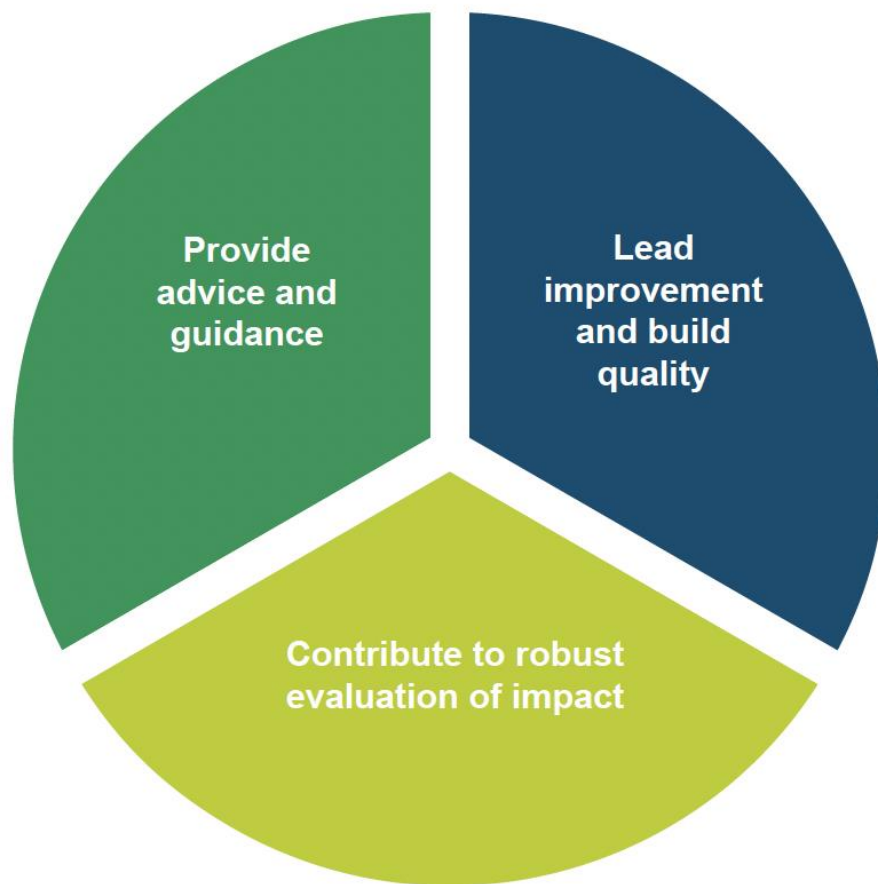
- Play a key role in working with local authority senior leaders to develop local stretch aims ensuring these are appropriately ambitious and focused on closing the poverty-related attainment gap and improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty.

- Effectively use available data and the Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model to explore a shared understanding of the local context, support setting of ambitious local authority stretch aims and monitoring performance and progress towards achieving these stretch aims.
- Engage in professional dialogue with local authority senior leaders to support local self-evaluation and improvement plans, including the stretch aims.
- Support local authorities to deliver a plan which provides universal, targeted and intensive support as required to ensure recovery and progress towards stretch aims.
- As part of the cycle for reporting on the implementation of the SAC, Attainment Advisors produce reports tri-annually. Summary reports are then produced to provide an overview of the analysis of progress across all 32 local authorities. Each tri-annual report will focus on a specific theme.
- Provide professional advice and support to local authority senior leaders. This will have a focus on supporting collaboration and sharing practice within and between local authorities to maximise impact of the resources to support children and young people affected by poverty.
- Work with Scottish Government to sample PEF plans.

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).

They will work collaboratively with local authority staff in their varying roles to co-create and deliver a programme of support and challenge to be delivered across the local authority. This universal, targeted or intensive support aims to support recovery and accelerate progress in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap and improving outcomes for children and young people affected by poverty. It will include monitoring, evaluating and providing feedback on progress towards achieving the agreed aims, the impact of the Attainment Scotland Fund at local level and Scottish Attainment Challenge self-evaluation and reporting. This will include both local authority stretch aims and schools' aims/outcomes, including special schools. Attainment Advisors have a role and responsibility to support and challenge the effective planning, implementation and evaluation of the impact of all aspects of the ASF, including SEF, PEF and CECYP funding and local authorities should provide appropriate access for this to take place.

Fig. 2. Attainment Advisors – 3 key functions



Education Scotland will evaluate the impact of their work against the outcomes and measures set out in the organisation's corporate plan and draw on stakeholder feedback to support this; and through the Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation by Scottish Government.

#### 4.4 Scottish Government

The Scottish Government is responsible for delivering the policy agenda of Ministers and supporting key partners to contribute to that. In the context of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, this includes:

- responsibility for the improvement in the quality of school education provided for Scotland;
- in doing the above, exercising powers to reduce inequalities of outcome for pupils impacted by socio-economic disadvantage;
- accountability to Parliament;
- setting policy framework for the Scottish Attainment Challenge, based on extensive stakeholder consultation and agreement of Ministers;

- distributing funding to local authorities and (indirectly) to schools via the Attainment Scotland Fund to support local implementation of the Scottish Attainment Challenge;
- monitoring the investment of Attainment Scotland Fund and national progress towards achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge;
- engaging in annual dialogue, alongside Education Scotland, on locally identified stretch aims and the associated Attainment Scotland Fund allocations used to contribute to plans to achieve those aims;
- engaging in annual dialogue, alongside Education Scotland, on local progress towards identified stretch aims;
- supporting and challenging, with and through Education Scotland, limited progress and variation in outcomes;
- gathering and publication of attainment and other related data; and
- collaborating across government and other partners to ensure a coherent and impactful policy landscape to support progress in both the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the [national mission to tackle child poverty](#).

#### **4.5 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education has a key role in giving assurance about the quality of education children and young people experience. HM Inspectors also have a unique role in providing evidence to inform policy and practice because the advice is independent and based on first-hand, observed evidence of the impact of policy implementation on the learner. HM Inspectors will inspect the effectiveness of the arrangements to accelerate progress on improving outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty are being improved. They will gather and share evidence of what is working well and where further development is needed. Evidence from inspection activity will also be used to help leaders and practitioners to build their own capacity to improve.

#### **4.6 Other services and partners**

A range of other services, partners and stakeholders beyond local and national government and its agencies have vital contributions to make to achieve the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Amongst these are:

- children, young people and their families, who (as noted above and is clear in the associated guidance for the Scottish Attainment Challenge funding streams) have a key role in influencing the approaches undertaken locally and also in sharing their views on the success/impact of any given approach. As is clear in the UNCRC, "every child has the right to express their views, feelings

and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously" (Article 12, UNCRC);

- the third sector, with its wide range of national and community- based organisations whose skills and expertise are vital supports that local authorities and schools should seek to draw on to support and enhance their work to achieve the Scottish Attainment Challenge mission; and
- academic institutions have a vital role to play in terms of the support that they can provide to local authorities and schools, the training of new teachers and leaders, and research on equitable approaches to education in Scotland and internationally.

## **Annex A: Key considerations and templates for setting stretch aims**

When setting stretch aims, local authorities are asked to consider the following:

- Previous years' ACEL, Insight and Annual Participation Measure data, considering:
  - ACEL data since 2016/17
  - Insight data since 2017/18 (on the basis that that is what is available on the Insight platform)
  - APM data since 2016
- When reviewing those data, consider average annual improvements, and best annual improvements.
- The different approaches to certification employed by the SQA during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The existing stretch aims for 2022/23 and how progress over three years can be made.
- The impact of Covid-19 on data and on children and young people.
- The impact of the cost of living crisis on children, young people and their families.
- The increased impact that local approaches and interventions for equity are expected to have on children and young people's attainment and health and wellbeing.
- Virtual comparators and/or progress/ambitions of comparable local authorities; or neighbouring local authorities in RICs.
- A range of local contextual factors.

This is not an exhaustive list.

## Template

Stretch aims should be presented in the below template when submitted to Scottish Government. This template will show a local authority's overall stretch aim for 2025/26, supported by an annual trajectory for progress in 2023/24 and 2024/25. The trajectory for progress can be broad aims (i.e. a window to assure the local authority they are on track), whilst the 2025/26 stretch aims should be a specific aim rather than a range (e.g. for a gap to narrow to 6pp in 2025/26).

<b>Core stretch aim</b>				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2023/24				
2024/25				
2025/26 Stretch aim				

### **Additional information and rationale for aims (maximum 300 words )**

Space for local authorities to recognise trends over time, patterns (or lack of) in any section of data, reflections on outlying influences which would explain significant aspects of the data e.g. COVID-19 or if there are significant variances in performance due to cohort size where numbers of young people in either Q1 or Q5 differ significantly.



## Exemplars

Some exemplars of what these might look like are set out below.

<b>ACEL Numeracy combined P1, P4 &amp; P7</b>				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	SIMD Quintile 1	SIMD Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2023-24	80-84%	76-80%	85-87%	11-5pp
2024-25	83-87%	79-84%	86-88%	9-2pp
<b>2025-26 Stretch aim</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>6pp</b>

### **Additional information (maximum 300 words )**

The ACEL Numeracy combined P1, P4 & P7 stretch aims for 2026, are ambitious and clearly demonstrate improvement overtime. The pattern emerging pre-pandemic demonstrates improving results both in overall levels and in narrowing the poverty-related attainment gap. However, this pattern has been interrupted due to Covid-19, although the gap has remained similar.

Pre-covid levels were on average 80%, with the highest overall at 82% in 2017-18. Post covid saw the results decreasing from 81% in 2018-19 down to 75% in 2020-21. In 2021-22, attainment rose from 75% to 77%. If accelerated progress continues each year within the parameters of between 3pp and 4pp, the expectation will see overall levels of 88% by 2026.

In 2016-17 the poverty-related attainment gap was 15pp, narrowing by 4pp to 11pp by 2022. If levels of attainment from Q1 and Q5 continues to increase as suggested above, then the predicted 2026 aim would result in a narrowing of the gap over the next three years by 11pp to 6pp.

<b>1+@ Level 5 (all SCQF)</b>				
Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	Quintile 1	Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2023-24	91-93%	84-86%	95-97%	13pp-9pp
2024-25	92-94%	86-89%	96-98%	12pp-9pp
<b>2025-26 Stretch aim</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>9pp</b>

**Additional information (maximum 300 words )**

Overall attainment has improved since 2017/18. The biggest annual increase was 1.8pp in 2021/22. The aim would be to improve attainment by a further 3.1pp between 2022 and 2026 whilst improving Q1 attainment by 6.9pp during that same period. Q5 attainment is set to improve by 2.7pp, which is close to overall attainment level targets. A number of level 5 projects were introduced during 2022/23 and should result in the greatest impact on Q1 attainment by around 2-3pp annually against 1pp targets for overall and Q5 levels.

**Annual Participation Measure**

Annual Trajectory	Overall levels	Quintile 1	Quintile 5	Gap (Q1 – Q5)
2023-24	91-92%	85-87%	94-96%	11-7pp
2024-25	92-93%	86-88%	95-96%	10-7pp
<b>2025-26 Stretch aim</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>96%</b>	<b>8pp</b>

**Additional information (maximum 300 words )**

The local authority has set a stretch aim target of 93% for 2025-26 which is 2.5pp higher than their highest overall level of 90.5% recorded in 2021-22. The local authority also aims to close the gap between most and least deprived young adults (16-19 year olds) participating in education, training or employment to 8pp by 2025-26 which is 2.4pp improvement on the gap of 10.4 pp recorded in 2021-22.



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