

Evaluation Strategy for the Attainment Scotland Fund 2022-2026



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Section 1

Introduction

This strategy sets out the broad terms of Scottish Government's approach to evaluating the Attainment Scotland Fund during this parliamentary term. It has been designed following the [refresh of the Scottish Attainment Challenge](#), launched in March 2022, with its new 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 to deliver on the Scottish Government's vision of equity and excellence in education'

A detailed analytical plan outlining evaluation activity in support of the high level strategy will be published annually.

Scottish Attainment Challenge – what it is, what it seeks to achieve, why it is important

The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in February 2015 with the strategic aim of 'closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children and young people from the least and most disadvantaged communities'. The Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF), which supports the Scottish Attainment Challenge, prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing of those children adversely affected by poverty in Scotland's schools. Achieving excellence and equity in education are the key aims.

The evaluation journey so far

A programme of evaluation of the ASF has been ongoing since the inception of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The evaluation has aimed to provide learning about the overall implementation of the ASF and to assess progress towards the following long-term outcomes:

- Embedded and sustained practices related to addressing the impact of the poverty-related attainment gap.
- All children and young people are achieving the expected or excellent educational outcomes, regardless of their background.
- An education system which is aspirational, inclusive in practice and approaches for all including teachers, parents and carers, children and young people.
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people.

This has been supported to date by an [evaluation strategy](#) which was published in 2018 to cover Year 3 and 4 of the Fund. The evaluation strategy has been reviewed annually for Year 5 and 6 to ensure that the evaluation remains responsive to emerging developments both within the ASF and wider contextual factors. For example, the evaluation was adapted to take account of the impact of COVID-19 in Year 5 (2019-20) and Year 6 (2020-21).

To date the ASF Evaluation has reported on an annual, retrospective basis. An initial report on Year 1 and 2 (from 2015 - 2017) of the fund was published in 2017, with annual evaluation reports published from 2018 to 2022. In March 2021, Scottish Government and Education Scotland published the [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: progress report 2016 to 2021](#) five year impact report.

The most recent evaluation report, the [ASF Year 6 Evaluation Report](#), published in June 2022, covered the school year 2020/21. As in previous years, multiple evidence sources were utilised in preparing the ASF Year 6 report. This included:

- [ASF Headteacher Survey 2021](#) (published alongside the ASF Year 6 Evaluation Report)
- ASF Local Authority Survey 2021
- Administrative data (financial information)
- Challenge Authority and Schools Programme Progress Reports
- Quantitative data on attainment and wellbeing.

Refresh of Scottish Attainment Challenge

The refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in March 2022, introducing a number of changes to the programme at national, regional and local level. This includes the introduction of Strategic Equity Funding (SEF), replacing Challenge Authority and Schools Programme Funding, and Local Stretch Aims through the [Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress](#).

As part of the launch of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge, a refreshed programme [Logic Model](#) with revised inputs, activities and outcomes linked to the new Mission was developed through a collaborative process with a range of stakeholders. The high level Logic Model is included in Annex A.

Section 2

Towards a new evaluation approach

Scottish Government and Education Scotland have worked together to undertake a comprehensive review of the ASF Evaluation Strategy to ensure that the evaluation continues to assess progress towards closing the poverty related attainment gap within the context of the new Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission and offers insights into the operation of the refreshed programme.

The new evaluation approach is underpinned by the revised Logic Model, and builds on learning from the previous evaluation. It continues to address aspects considered within the first five years of the Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation, and identifies a number of further areas for evaluation focus.

Table 1: Summary of key changes in evaluation approach

1. A multi-year evaluation strategy, with shorter, more frequent publications scheduled;
2. An in-year rather than retrospective evaluation approach.
3. A broadened scope for the evaluation, to include the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund, and interaction between National Programmes and SAC programme. A thematic evaluation approach to interventions will also be in scope;
4. Widen the range of stakeholders involved in the evaluation, including the establishment of an Evaluation Advisory Panel to embed stakeholder collaboration in the implementation of the ASF Evaluation Strategy.

The sections below provide an overview of key aspects of the revised approach.

Multi-year evaluation strategy

The evaluation cycle is moving from an annual to a multi-year approach, which aims to build an evidence base over time, offering the opportunity to explore different aspects of the programme over points in time. This approach offers the scope to be more innovative, adaptive and flexible, pursuing key themes as they arise.

Some aspects of the evaluation, such as the NIF measures, will still be reported on annually or on a more regular basis. Other aspects will be considered across the five year period, with interim and summative reporting built in to the multi-year approach.

Figure 1 below provides an outline model of the multi-year evaluation strategy for illustrative purposes. As this indicates, four strands of evaluation focus are proposed:

- **Process evaluation** to consider implementation of the refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund, including Strategic Equity Fund, Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund;
- A **thematic strand of evaluation** which will respond to emerging system priorities and consider 'what works, for whom and in what circumstances'. An early thematic focus on engaging families and communities is planned, for example, with other themes, such as a focus on the cost of living crisis, emerging in response to system needs;
- Reporting on the **National Improvement Framework (NIF) measures**;
- **Evaluation of the impact of ASF**, through a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Detailed analytical plans will be developed on an annual basis.

Figure 1: Outline model of ASF multi-year evaluation strategy

Evaluation Focus	Year 1 (2022/23)	Year 2 (2023/24)	Year 3 (2024/25)	Year 4 (2025/26)	Year 5 (2026/27)
Process – implementation of SAC Refresh	Process and implementation		Embedded processes (Interim reporting)		Summative Process and Implementation
Thematic/what works, for whom, in what circumstances – responsive to emerging system priorities					
NIF measures	Annual reporting	Annual reporting	Annual reporting	Annual reporting	Annual reporting
Impact		Impact (qualitative/quantitative)	Impact (qualitative/quantitative) (Interim reporting)	Impact (qualitative/quantitative)	Summative Impact

Moving from retrospective to in-year evaluation approach

In order to provide more timely evidence in line with the intention to enable insight into the current year of the programme to support ongoing improvement, the approach will focus on evaluation in ‘real time’ rather than retrospective evaluation of the previous school year¹. This will be supported by shorter, more frequent publications in place of the previous retrospective annual reporting format.

Evaluation Scope

The scope of the initial evaluation focused on the Challenge Authorities Fund, Schools Programme Fund and Pupil Equity Fund. The revised scope will include the Strategic Equity Fund and Pupil Equity Fund, and will be broadened to include the Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) Fund. How the National Programmes interact with the Scottish Attainment Challenge (such as partnership working) will also be in scope.

Whilst individual interventions² for equity are outwith the scope of the evaluation, as it would not be feasible to undertake a rigorous evaluation of the large number of

¹ Real time evaluation is intended to provide learning which can affect or impact on programmes as they happen. It typically involves real time data collection, rapid reporting back of evaluation data, multiple timings of evaluative activity and support for different types of learning, including engaging different stakeholders together in problem solving and action planning.

² Interventions are designed activities which are put in place to effect change within a specific context.

interventions, evaluation at the thematic level (for example, families and communities) is within scope.

Evaluation Advisory Panel

In order to ensure the views of external stakeholders are included, an Evaluation Advisory Panel comprised of membership across key stakeholder groups has been established to ensure external views, experience and expertise are embedded in the implementation and ongoing delivery of the ASF Evaluation Strategy. The Panel operates similarly to a Research Advisory Group throughout the duration of the Scottish Attainment Challenge Programme. The panel meets at key stages in the implementation of the Evaluation Strategy and operates in an Advisory capacity which supports Scottish Government Analysts and the internal working groups comprising Scottish Government and Education Scotland.

Guiding principles

A initial set of guiding principles to inform the development of the ASF Evaluation Strategy have been drawn together:

- Informed by emerging theory and practice, including relevant evidence on improving outcomes for children and young people.
- Emphasis on providing learning for the system and policy makers through regular reporting and dissemination to support utilisation of emerging evidence as it becomes available.
- Evidence closer to 'real time' to ensure learning supports system change/improvement through regular feedback (e.g. seeks to ensure early evidence on implementation of Strategic Equity Fund, the Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress, Stretch Aims etc).
- Emphasis on developing a body of evidence which continues to 'tell the story' of the development of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, ensuring there are points of continuity between initial Scottish Attainment Challenge programme and the refreshed programme.
- Ensures inclusion of wider stakeholder voices, including children and young people, families, practitioners, and communities as well as reflecting the increased emphasis on partnership working with youth sector.
- Responds to issues raised in relevant national audits and reviews, and takes into account the broader policy context such as The Promise, education reform and changes to the curriculum.
- Mixed methods approaches, drawing on wider expertise and ensuring a mix of in-house, collaborative and commissioned pieces.
- Focuses on the programmatic level, but seeks to contribute to the evidence base on 'what works/for whom/in what circumstances'.

Section 3

Aims of evaluation

The evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the refreshed Attainment Scotland Fund and the extent to which progress has been made towards meeting intended outcomes articulated in the Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model in support of the Scottish Attainment Challenge 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 to deliver on the Scottish Government's vision of equity and excellence in education'.

The evaluation has the following objectives:

1. Assess the impact of the overall fund in improving outcomes in educational attainment and achievement and health and wellbeing and closing the attainment gap between the most and least socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people.
2. Building on progress evidenced in the ASF Evaluation 2015/16 – 2021/22, assess the extent of progress towards meeting the short, medium and long term outcomes articulated in the Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model, including: data and evidence, culture and ethos, embedded practices, and readiness to learn.
3. (a) Provide learning and increase the evidence base of what works and what could be improved for whom, and in what circumstances, to improve educational attainment and achievement, and health and wellbeing of pupils impacted by poverty within the Scottish policy context as well as contributing to the wider evidence base;
and
(b) To provide further learning on what works and what could be improved around the specific funding streams (Strategic Equity Fund, Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund) and at the thematic level of intervention.
4. Provide learning on what worked well and what could be improved in the process of implementing the ASF overall, as well as a specific focus at the funding stream level in terms of the Strategic Equity Fund, Pupil Equity Fund and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund.
5. Provide learning on which factors helped and hindered the fund progressing towards its outcomes, with a specific focus on the impact of COVID-19 and other contextual factors such as the cost of living crisis. Additionally, to provide learning on connections between ASF and other relevant policies at national, local authority and school level.

These objectives are underpinned by a set of evaluation questions covering a range of themes. Evaluation questions are directly related to the revised Logic Model, suggesting both continued and new areas of focus for the evaluation, as shown in Annex B.

The main evaluation questions are:

1. Governance

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

2. Funding

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

3. Implementation

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

4. Approaches

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

5. Monitoring and evaluation

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

6. Collaboration

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

7. Data and evidence

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

8. Engagement with and support for families and communities

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

9. Perceptions of local impact

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

10. Unintended consequences

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

11. Approaches

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

12. Engagement in decision-making (Voice)

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

13. Readiness to learn

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

14. Culture and ethos

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

15. Closing the gap/educational outcomes

To what extent did the fund contribute to a closing of the attainment gap between the most and least socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people, in line with the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge Mission?

16. Achievement

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

17. Embedded practices and culture

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

18. Education system

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

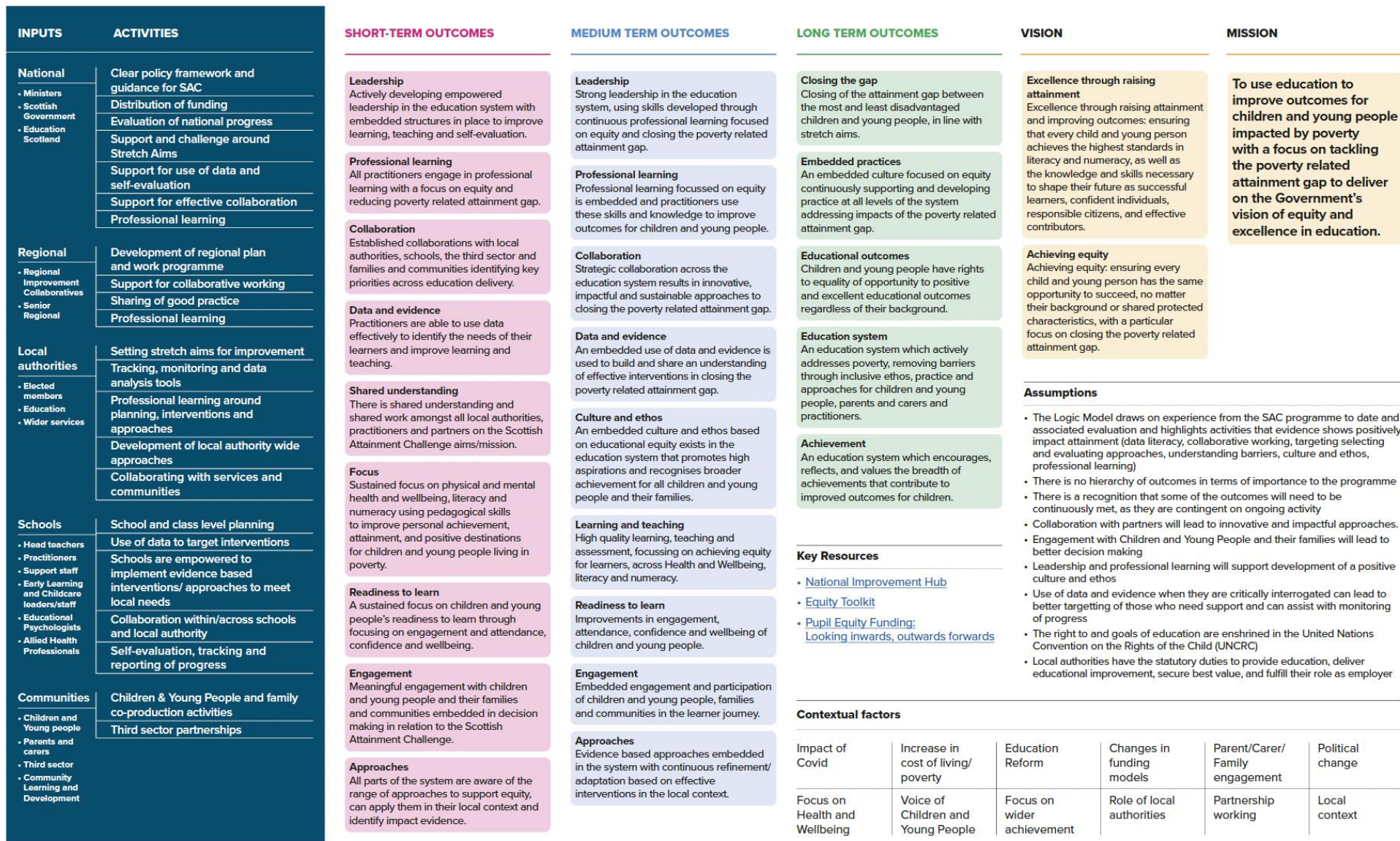
Section 4

Review

The evaluation strategy will remain in place for the duration of this Scottish Attainment Challenge. However, in line with the iterative development and review of the previous strategy, there will be an annual review process to ensure that it remains responsive to emerging needs and priorities.

Annex A - Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model

Tackling the Poverty-Related Attainment Gap – Our Theory of Change The Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model



Annex B - Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation Questions Mapped to Outcome Areas

ASF Evaluation Review – Evaluation Questions mapped to Logic Model – August 2022

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES & OUTPUTS	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
<p>1. Governance What worked well and what could be improved in the national and local governance and support with implementation of the refreshed SAC?</p> <p>2. Funding What funding was allocated through the SAC Refresh ASF to schools and LA's, to what extent was it used within funds requirements and/or supplemented with other funding sources? What were stakeholders views on the implementation of the new funding structure introduced with the SAC refresh?</p>	<p>3. Implementation How did local authorities implement the Strategic Equity Fund alongside PEF and CECYP?</p> <p>4. Approaches How do the approaches for equity support pupils (and parents) from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds?</p> <p>5. Monitoring and evaluation How are schools and local authorities monitoring, refining and evaluating their approaches to address the poverty-related attainment gap?</p>	<p>6. Collaboration To what extent has the Fund resulted in established and/or strategic collaborations, and what has been the impact?</p> <p>7. Data and evidence To what extent have schools and authorities embedded use of data, analysis and evidence to drive improvements as part of the fund?</p> <p>8. Engagement with and support for families and communities To what extent has the fund embedded engagement with and support for families and communities?</p> <p>9. Perceptions of local impact To what extent did schools, local authorities and other stakeholders, including pupils, families and communities feel there had been progress towards achieving outcomes?</p> <p>10. Unintended consequences Did the changes to the funding structure with the refreshed SAC have any unintended consequences?</p> <p>11. Approaches To what extent was there awareness of and use of evidence based approaches and to what extent were approaches embedded in the system, refined and adapted based on effective interventions in the local context?</p> <p>12. Engagement in decision-making (Voice) To what extent were children and young people and their families and communities engaged in decision-making, what was the impact of this engagement, and was there evidence of engagement becoming embedded in the learner journey?</p> <p>13. Readiness to learn To what extent was there improvement in children and young people's readiness to learn through focusing on engagement, attendance, confidence and wellbeing?</p> <p>14. Culture and ethos To what extent was culture and ethos based on educational equity embedded in the education system that promotes high aspirations and recognises broader achievement for all children and young people and their families.</p>	<p>15. Closing the gap/educational outcomes To what extent did the fund contribute to a closing of the attainment gap between the most and least socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people, in line with stretch aims?</p> <p>16. Achievement To what extent did the fund contribute to an education system which encourages, reflects and values the breadth of achievements that contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people.</p> <p>17. Embedded practices and culture To what extent did the fund contribute to an embedded culture of equity at different levels of the education system?</p> <p>18. Education system To what extent did the fund contribute to an education system which actively addresses poverty, removing barriers through inclusive ethos, practice and approaches for children and young people, parents and carers and practitioners?</p>	