

Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation - Voice of Children and Young People Thematic Evaluation Report, 2024



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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Executive Summary

In the Scottish Attainment Challenge, learner participation is crucial to ensuring that children and young people have a voice in the decisions that most affect them.

In particular, it is important that children and young people affected by poverty – those that the programme is designed to support – are able to influence and engage with the decisions that affect their education. Both learners and schools benefit from meaningful engagement with children and young people.

This report seeks to map out children and young people's engagement in decision-making across the Scottish Attainment Challenge to start to assess the extent to which children and young people are engaged in decision-making; how this differs across schools and local authorities, and across the learner journey; and, what is working well and what could be improved in such engagement.

A thematic approach to evaluation

The Evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) was established to provide learning about the overall implementation of the Fund and the extent to which progress has been made towards the outcomes of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

A refreshed approach to the Evaluation was developed in 2022, which included a thematic strand of evaluation, is designed to respond to emerging system priorities and to consider 'what works, for whom and in what circumstances'. Based on input from the ASF Evaluation Advisory Panel, three initial thematic areas were prioritised: Families & Communities; Readiness to Learn; and, Children and Young People's Voice.

Children and Young People Voice in the Scottish Attainment Challenge

In this thematic strand, we have utilised evidence from a survey of local authority Scottish Attainment Challenge Leads in 2023 and learning from initiatives undertaken through National Programmes, Education Scotland Attainment Advisors, and local authorities. The survey of local authority leads found that the majority indicated that engaging children and young people in decision making was a priority, and that ASF funding helped to support development of approaches to engage children and young people. Local authorities were asked to describe the types of activities they were undertaking, with Participatory Budgeting noted as an important mechanism for increasing engagement. Other examples included local authority wide pupil voice programmes, targeted focus groups, care experienced groups, and a social justice ambassadors programme.

A number of case studies are provided which seek to provide insight into the range of work currently in progress in engaging children and young people in decision-making. These include:

- The **#YSEquity Panel**, which was established by Young Scot through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding, which brings to together young people from diverse backgrounds to influence the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme on key areas.
- The **Education Scotland ‘children and young people voice’ pilot**, in collaboration with Forth Valley West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) is taking a UNCRC approach to support schools to determine the extent to which schools are engaging pupils in decision-making in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- The **Voice Network**, established as part of CPAG’s Scottish Attainment Challenge funded Cost of the School Day Project, which supports groups within schools with a range of activities and tools to enable children and young people from P5 to S6 to participate and develop their own school-level actions to address poverty-related issues in school.
- Stirling Council has established a programme of **Social Justice Ambassadors** across twelve primary schools and one secondary school in the local authority area.
- Initiatives from Youthlink to support partnership working between **youth work** and schools, and
- the establishment of **local care experienced groups** as part of the CELCIS Virtual Headteacher Network.

Summary of thematic evidence

Overall, the evidence considered suggests:

- A range of activity to engage children and young people in decision-making across the Scottish Attainment Challenge are in progress;
- Some activity is specific to the Scottish Attainment Challenge, but much is part of wider work around engaging children and young people in decision-making within local areas;
- Action is taking place at a range of levels, including for example Participatory Budgeting utilised within schools in relation to the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF). Activity through Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programmes also provides a key route;
- Good practice is developing, utilising work initiated through the Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programmes, through local authorities and other settings;
- Resources to support children and young people’s engagement in decision-making in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge are also developing.

Next steps

A detailed programme of activity for this thematic strand will be developed in consultation with the internal ASF Evaluation Working Group and the external Evaluation Advisory Panel. However, a number of key areas are suggested for ongoing focus, including extending the focus of the thematic strand to families' and communities' involvement in decision-making; a consideration of what is working and what could be improved in engaging children, young people and their families and communities in decision-making; and examination of the difference that involvement in decisions makes.

Introduction

Children and young people have the right to participate in decisions which affect them. This is a central right in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which was incorporated into Scottish legislation in January 2024. This means that the structures within which decisions are made in Scotland must enable children and young people to be heard and take an active role in their own lives and communities.

Young people have the right to be heard, and evidence shows that meaningful engagement has benefits for both individuals and public services. This is particularly the case in education, where there is considerable evidence from research that supports the view that addressing learner participation makes for effective policy making, enhances school life, and improves a range of outcomes for learners.

In the Scottish Attainment Challenge, learner participation is crucial to ensuring that children and young people have a voice in the decisions that most affect them. In particular, it is important that children and young people affected by poverty – those that the programme is designed to support – are able to influence and engage with the decisions that affect their education. Both learners and schools benefit from meaningful engagement with children and young people.

This report

This thematic report aims to map out children and young people's engagement in decision-making across the Attainment Scotland Fund. This will start to assess the extent to which children and young people are engaged in decision-making, how this differs across schools and local authorities, and across the learner journey, as well as any evidence of the difference such involvement is making, what is working well and what could be improved in such engagement.

Additionally, this thematic report provides a number of case studies related to work being undertaken to engage children and young people in decision-making in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. This will support our developing understanding of the national picture, capturing work from across Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programmes, Education Scotland Attainment Advisor-led projects and existing activity related to engaging children and young people in decision-making at the local level in the context of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

Whilst this report predominantly focuses on voice from the perspective of children and young people, the broader theme relates to engagement of families and communities in decision-making as well as children and young people. This wider aspect will be considered further in future thematic reporting.

Evaluation Questions

The [Scottish Attainment Challenge Logic Model](#) published in 2022 illustrates, at a high level, the activities that will lead to the short, medium and long term outcomes designed to achieve 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’*.

The refresh of the Logic Model in 2022 introduced a new outcome domain related to engagement with children and young people and their families, reflecting the importance of engaging children and young people in the programme. This was introduced in both short-term and medium-term outcomes:

- **Short-term engagement outcome:** ‘Meaningful engagement with children and young people and their families and communities embedded in decision-making in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge.’
- **Long-term engagement outcome:** ‘Embedded engagement and participation of children and young people, families and communities in the learner journey’.

The [Evaluation Strategy](#) developed for 2022 – 26 included a new evaluation question related to engagement in decision-making/voice:

<p>Engagement in Decision Making</p> <p>‘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>And the related Sub-evaluation questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How and to what extent were children and young people and their families and communities engaged in decision-making?• Did this differ across schools and Local Authority areas, and/or across stages of the learner journey (eg primary versus secondary)?• What difference did children and young people’s involvement in decision-making make?• What difference did families and communities involvement in decision-making make?• What is working well and what could be improved in engaging children, young people and their families and communities in decision-making?• To what extent is engagement in decision-making embedded in approaches and across stages?
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Children's voice in decision-making: what does the evidence tell us?

Primary sources of research evidence have been considered to support this initial mapping exercise. This includes data gathered specifically through the survey of Local Authority Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) Leads undertaken in summer 2023¹.

Overall, the Local Authority SAC Leads Survey results indicate that engaging children and young people, families and communities in decision-making is a priority to some extent rather than a key priority. Additionally, the Attainment Scotland Fund is perceived as supporting the development of approaches to engaging children and young people, families and communities in local authorities to some extent. These findings are outlined in further detail below.

Strategic priority: engaging children and young people, families and communities in decision-making

Most local authorities who responded to the survey considered that engaging children and young people, families and communities in decision-making was a strategic priority for their local authority in relation to their approach to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. From eighteen responses to this survey question, five indicated this was to a great extent, and ten that this was to some extent. Three local authority respondents viewed families and communities as a strategic priority to only a limited extent.

Extent ASF supporting development of approaches in local authority: engaging children and young people, families and communities in decision-making

Most local authority respondents considered that ASF was supporting the development of approaches to engaging children and young people, families and communities in their local authority. From eighteen responses to this survey question, four respondents viewed this as occurring to a great extent and eleven to some extent. Three respondents considered this was occurring only to a limited extent.

Local authority respondents were invited to provide further detail on their work in relation to engaging children and young people, families and communities in decision-making in relation to the Attainment Scotland Fund, with responses highlighting a range of interventions, programmes and approaches in terms of their

¹ A previous report on the Scottish Attainment Challenge Local Authority Leads Survey 2023 published in September 2023 focused on the findings from the process-related questions in the survey. For further details on the survey please see Annex A.

work in this area. Participatory Budgeting (PB) was noted as an important mechanism for increased engagement in decision-making by children and young people in relation to Pupil Equity Funding (PEF).

Some respondents noted such activities were progressing as part of core funding or through partnerships and so were not necessarily specific to the ASF. For example, a small number of local authorities described pupil voice projects or programmes in progress as well as actions being taken forward as part of more generic activity or with stakeholders including families and communities.

Survey respondents described a range of ways in which local authorities engaged children and young people in decision-making in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. A number of examples are outlined below:

- Local authority-wide pupil voice programme resourced through core funding;
- Focus sessions taking place led by central officers to gather opinions of children and young people on ASF interventions;
- Participatory Budgeting. For example, one local authority respondent noted that all PEF plans made use of participatory budgeting - *'Participatory budgeting using PEF has provided opportunities for children and families to be effectively involved in the decision-making process making a positive impact on their own communities'*. Another respondent described Participatory Budgeting (PB) as being embedded in both local authority Finance for Equity guidelines and in School Improvement Planning processes;
- One local authority noted that all PEF decisions should involve all stakeholders;
- One local authority describe existing activities to involve the learner voice in key decisions impacting them, such as a Care Experienced Children and Young People (CECYP) Champions Board;
- Empowering Clusters Model noted to facilitate this in one local authority as a multi-agency approach to best meet needs of children and young people;
- Range of activity to develop youth voice and approaches to consultation in one local authority described, as well as the development of *'more robust approaches to gathering and analysing stakeholders' views'*;
- Social Justice Ambassadors programme which one local authority has established².

The evidence broadly indicates that local authorities previously in receipt of Challenge Authority³ funding tended to have more developed approaches to engaging children and young people in decision-making in relation to the Attainment Scotland Fund, although this was not universally the case. A number of respondents of local authorities which were not involved in either the Challenge

² Further detail on the Social Justice Ambassadors Programme is provided in Case Study 4 below.

³ Nine local authorities received Challenge Authority funding and 73 schools in local authorities outwith Challenge Authority areas received Schools Programme funding under the Attainment Scotland Fund prior to the SAC refresh in March 2022

Authorities or Schools Programme described in particular the use of Participatory Budgeting (PB). For example, one local authority respondent noted that PB was an approach '*supporting children and young people to identify the barriers to their learning, and what would make the biggest difference*'.

There was acknowledgement by some survey respondents of the need for further work in this area. For example, one local authority respondent noted the requirement for further cross-directorate/joint working as an important element of this. One local authority noted that as a local authority they have not had sufficient strategic focus on the inclusion of children and young people and families in decision-making to date but highlighted this as an area they are seeking to further focus on. Another local authority respondent noted that all these aspects would be a focus in the next improvement plan.

In the [2022-23 Stretch Aims](#) submitted by local authorities in September 2022, and subsequent combined [2023-26 Stretch Aims](#) submitted by local authorities in September 2023, engaging children and young people in decision-making does not appear explicitly within 'Plus' Stretch Aims. However, there were several instances in which engagement in decision-making was clearly an element within 'Plus' Stretch Aims. For example, one local authority included a 'Plus' stretch aim related to engagement in Participatory Budgeting (PB) in 2022. This stated that 'all schools will have an updated poverty proofing statement which has evolved through participatory budgeting approaches with the school community, and through which they can demonstrate the impact of improvements on learning, engagement & families'. Measures for this Stretch Aim were based on the percentage of schools using Participatory Budgeting and the percentage of schools with a Cost of the School Day/Poverty Proofing Statement.

In terms of the process local authorities described in undertaking the development of their Stretch Aims, there were a small number of examples of children and young people's involvement in decision-making in relation to setting of Stretch Aims. Development of Stretch Aims was however noted to be an aspect in which there may be further scope for engaging children and young people in decision-making, as well as more broadly in terms of engaging parents/families and communities.

Case studies on engaging children and young people in decision-making

In seeking to gather evidence to address the evaluation question: '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?', the thematic exploration has sought to map out children and young people's engagement in decision-making within the Scottish Attainment Challenge and, as part of this, to bring forward a number of examples of initiatives and approaches to engaging children and young people in decision-making in the context of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

The case studies below all provide examples of current work being taken forward in different contexts and locations. This includes examples of work funded by the Scottish Attainment Challenge being taken forward by partner third sector organisations as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programmes⁴, work being taken forward in partnership with Education Scotland Attainment Advisors, and local authority initiatives.

The case studies provided are not exhaustive but rather seek to provide insight into the range of work currently in progress. As this thematic aspect progresses, we will continue to develop and share case studies to build awareness of approaches to and benefits of children and young people's engagement in decision-making in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge and support system-wide developments in relation to children and young people's engagement.

Case study 1: Young Scot #YSEquity Panel

Young Scot, through Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programmes funding, has supported a group of young people (#YSEquity Panel⁵) from diverse backgrounds to ensure equitable space for debate and conversation between young people and decision makers, to influence the Scottish Attainment Challenge programme on key areas including factors that can contribute towards a readiness to learn, one of the thematic areas of focus for the ASF Evaluation⁶. The meetings of the #YSEquity Panel have followed Young Scot's #YSHive processes – enabling young people to share their experiences, lead conversations, develop their own ideas, and drive change as part of decision-making. The #YSHive programme is an approach to engaging children and young people described by Young Scot as follows:

'empowering young people to be system changers and influencers by sharing power with organisations and tackling society's toughest challenges. Co-designed by young people, organisations partner with young people to define, design and deliver new policies and service improvements. The range of engaging, creative and ethical design models create conditions, discover insights and shape ideas to unlock culture and system change.'

Utilising co-design approaches and methods, the #YSEquity Panel began by exploring how being ready to learn feels, what is needed and what, if any, impact

⁴ In addition to the distribution of funding to local authorities through the Attainment Scotland Fund, the Scottish Government provides investment for a number of National Programmes as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge to enhance support across the system [Pupil attainment: closing the gap - Schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/pupils-attainment-closing-the-gap-schools).

⁵ Initially, this panel was known as the #YSAttain Panel, but with the refresh of the Scottish Attainment Challenge in March 2022, this was updated and renamed the #YSEquity Panel. Young Scot refreshed the membership of the Panel throughout 2022/2023, recruiting new Panel members to represent the Panel around issues of equity in education.

⁶ Readiness to learn is the focus of a [companion ASF thematic report](#).

the pandemic and cost of living crisis has had on their readiness to learn. The Panel have also explored how their place, communities, environment, and relationships can support them to feel ready to learn. Through their work, the #YSEquity Panel have identified barriers that may stop young people feeling ready to learn as well as created a prioritised list of what young people need to be ready to learn.

One of the activities which the #YSEquity Panel has been involved in throughout 2023 is contributing to the design of a survey, developed and delivered by Young Scot, encouraging young people across Scotland to share their thoughts on what they need to learn⁷.

Further information on the #YSEquity Panel is available from Young Scot yshive@young.scot.

Case study 2: Children and Young People Voice Pilot – Education Scotland Attainment Advisors in collaboration with Forth Valley West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative

Throughout 2023, a small group of Education Scotland Attainment Advisors worked together with colleagues within the Forth Valley West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) to develop and undertake a pilot 'children and young people voice' project. Taking a United Nations Convention of Children's Rights (UNCRC) approach, and working in collaboration with colleagues from across Community Learning and Development (CLD) and schools across Forth Valley and West Lothian, the project developed a core set of questions to support schools in Forth Valley and West Lothian to determine the extent to which children and young people are engaged in decision-making in terms of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

The three questions were:

- How does your school work with you to overcome any barriers you find?
- What has your involvement/ experience of participatory budgeting been?
- What areas of school life has your say/voice influenced?

The pilot was on a voluntary basis for schools to engage between May and June 2023. It was anonymous and schools were given a code to ensure this was the case.

A [report on the pilot project, and a resource to support schools](#) who are interested in utilising the experience of the pilot to engage with children and young people in their own school is available.

⁷ This is reported on further in the [Readiness to Learn Thematic Report](#) published as a companion document.

For further information, please contact EDSSAC@educationscotland.gov.scot.

Case study 3: Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland Cost of the School Day Voice Network and the Big Question

In 2023, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland established a new Voice Network as part of its Cost of the School Day Project with funding through the Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programmes. The Voice Network promotes the work of existing Cost of the School Day groups in schools, and supports the development of new equity groups.

There are currently over 280 schools participating in the Voice Network across 30 local authority areas. Supported by CPAG's Cost of the School Day Participation Officer, the Network supports Cost of the School Day groups within schools with a range of activities and tools to enable children and young people from P5 to S6 to participate and develop their own school-level actions to address poverty-related issues in school.

Cost of the School Day Voice Network member schools took part in the first national Cost of the School Day Big Question in Challenge Poverty Week in October 2023. Big Questions is a way for Cost of the School Day Voice Network member schools to provide their views in order to inform and influence national policy. This is done during school facilitated sessions using the online platform Mentimeter which enables children and young people taking part to vote on their smartphones or other devices in response to a number of questions. Over 5000 children and young people across schools participated in the first Big Question in October 2023, which asked what decision-makers need to do about food and trips to 'make sure that every child can take part, learn and be happy at school'. One aspect of the Big Question related to Voice Network members' views on what children and young people need to be ready to learn⁸. The Cost of the School Day Project at CPAG will be using the Big Question findings in its ongoing work with policy-makers.

Future Big Questions will ask children and young people about other equity issues such as school uniform, clubs, transport, financial support, stigma and resources.

Further information from Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland Cost of the School Day Costoftheschoolday@cpagscotland.org.uk.

Case study 4: Social Justice Ambassadors Programme, Stirling Council

Stirling Council has established a programme of Social Justice Ambassadors across twelve primary schools and one secondary school in the local authority area.

⁸ This is reported on further in the [Readiness to Learn Thematic Report](#) published as a companion document.

In 2022/23 school year, Social Justice Ambassadors were supported to undertake research within their school and local community to identify how the funding available to the school could best be spent to address the poverty-related attainment gap within their school.

As a result of this approach, some schools have introduced changes to their use of funding and strengthened work being undertaken within the school to address the poverty-related attainment gap. Examples of developments introduced across schools as a result of the Social Justice Ambassadors Programme include:

- increasing or changing the type of wider opportunities available to children in their schools;
- interventions aimed at reducing the cost of the school day, for example through the introduction of 'take what you need trolleys'.

A short video has been developed by a number of schools to describe the work and its impact. A celebration event, held in June 2023, gave children and young people involved the chance to share and celebrate their learning, with approximately 50 children and young people participating.

The Social Justice Ambassadors programme has been recognised in an internal audit of SAC as effective practice which could be rolled out further across educational establishments within the local authority. The Forth Valley West Lothian (FVWL) blog on Inspiration Hub has further detail: [Social Justice Ambassadors programme: poverty and equity – The Inspiration Hub](#)

Further information on the Social Justice Ambassadors approach at Stirling Council is available from Gillian Robertson robertsong15s@stirling.gov.uk.

Case study 5: Youth Work and Schools Partnerships, YouthLink Scotland

As one of the Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programmes, the team at YouthLink Scotland supports partnership working between schools and youth work to better meet the educational needs of young people affected by poverty and other inequalities. The team has worked recently with local youth work organisations and the senior leadership team at one of the secondary schools in Edinburgh to gather young people's views on their learning experiences in school and community to inform partnership planning. Youth work and school partners identified young people who were struggling to attend or engage in school but who *did* have established learning relationships with one or more of the youth work teams. In the context of these existing relationships, youth workers supported a series of individual conversations with young people to explore their view of themselves as learners, their experiences of education in both school and youth work settings, and their ideas for change.

YouthLink Scotland gathered the data and insights from these conversations. Some clear themes emerged: young people highlighted significant issues with anxiety, challenges with the classroom environment and reinforced the importance of relationships for learning. They also clearly articulated the differences between classroom-based learning and a youth work approach, and the value of having access to learning outside the classroom. School and youth work partners worked together to review the feedback from young people and agree on a plan of action in response.

City of Edinburgh Council is now working alongside the YouthLink Scotland team and LAYC (Lothian Association of Youth Clubs) to take this approach out to other communities in the city to inform co-design of education provision and PEF funding in a place-based curriculum.

Further information available from Gill Gracie, Youth Work and Schools, YouthLink Scotland ggracie@youthlink.scot.

Case study 6: Virtual School Headteacher (VSHT) Development of ‘Care Experienced’ Children and Young People Groups, CELCIS

The Virtual School Headteacher (VSHT) in Aberdeenshire has been supporting the establishment and growth of ‘care experienced groups’ within schools in the local authority area.

The project was initiated by a Principal Teacher in one secondary school asking care experienced pupils whether they would be interested in joining a group for care experienced learners. This resulted in the establishment of a care experienced group within the school, who the VSHT started to liaise with on first coming into post. The group was able to undertake a residential trip shortly before the first COVID-19 lockdown, and continued to meet online throughout the lockdown. Since the establishment of this first group, the VSHT has supported and encouraged other schools in the local authority to grow groups based on the needs of their communities. The VSHT uses social media to communicate with young people and an online platform, ‘Your Place, Your Space’, where schools and learners share their experiences as well as providing a forum for all local care experienced young people to link them to organisations and showcases work across the local authority.

Care experienced groups of young people have met consistently and regularly, as part of the school timetable, in two schools in Aberdeenshire, providing safe spaces for children and young people who share common experiences to meet together whilst learning and participating in a range of cultural, social and voluntary activities both in and out of school. Teaching staff have developed greater understanding of this group of learners in their schools and their needs, have access to information which is helping to further reduce barriers to learning, and are able to quickly offer bespoke support as and when needs arise. There have been multiple benefits for individual learners within the groups and learners have been supported to access additional tuition, helped with transport to work experience opportunities, and have attended career-related training and courses.

This case study, which is adapted from a 2022 publication, points towards a model that creates sustainable safe spaces for learners and a mechanism for schools to get to know care experienced learners in a deep and nuanced way. Further information is available on the [CELCIS webpage link on Virtual School Headteacher Case Studies](#).

For further information about Virtual Schools Headteachers (VSHTs) in Scotland please contact celcis@strath.ac.uk.

Summary

- There is a range of activity in progress to engage children and young people in decision-making in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- Some of the work engaging children and young people is taking place specific to ASF, but much is part of wider work around engaging children and young people in decision-making within local areas.
- Actions are taking place at a range of levels. Participatory Budgeting (PB) is one approach being utilised within schools as evidenced by the inclusion of this approach as part of School Improvement Plans. Funding through the Scottish Attainment Challenge National Programmes also provides a key route, as illustrated through some of the case studies.
- Former Challenge Authorities, and some local authorities which had previously had schools in receipt of Schools Programme funding, described particular approaches. There is some evidence suggesting some local authorities which were not involved in either the Challenge Authorities or Schools Programme acknowledged the need for further work in this regard.
- There are numerous examples where this work is effectively taking place and developing, but it is clearly an area where further developments are progressing or planned.
- Good practice is developing, and utilising work both initiated through the National Programmes and local authorities, as well as other examples.
- Resources to support children and young people's engagement in decision-making in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge are also developing.

Annex B outlines the Evaluation sub-evaluation questions in turn, and provides a progress 'stock take' on the basis of the evidence considered to date.

Next steps

The thematic evaluation will continue to consider engagement in decision-making/voice in the context of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

In 2023/24, we will continue to progress this exploration, taking forward the learning which has emerged in relation to the sub-evaluation questions outlined above to focus our approach in this next phase.

A detailed programme of activity for this thematic strand will be developed in consultation with the internal ASF Evaluation Working Group and the external Evaluation Advisory Panel. However, a number of key areas are suggested for ongoing focus, including:

- Families and communities' involvement in decision-making.
- What is working well and what could be improved in engaging children, young people and their families and communities in decision-making?
- What difference did (children and young people), families and communities involvement in decision-making make?

Annex A: The Survey of Local Authority Scottish Attainment Challenge Leads 2022/23

The Survey of Local Authority Scottish Attainment Challenge Leads was issued on 11 May and closed on 12 June 2023 and received 19 responses from across the 32 local authorities, which constitutes a 59% response rate.

Responses include seven responses from previous Challenge Authorities, five responses from local authorities previously in receipt of Schools Programme funding and seven local authorities previously in receipt of PEF only.

A [previous report on the Scottish Attainment Challenge Local Authority Leads Survey 2023](#) was published in September 2023 focused on the findings from the process-related questions in the survey.

Annex B: Progress ‘stock take’ of evidence in relation to Evaluation sub-questions

Evaluation Sub-questions	Summary of evidence progress
<p>How and to what extent were children and young people and their families and communities engaged in decision-making?</p>	<p>To date, the thematic focus has primarily related to engagement of children and young people in decision-making. Families and communities’ involvement in decision-making has not been focus of this thematic project to date but is an area for further exploration in the thematic evaluation going forward.</p> <p>Evidence has been gathered related to how children and young people are engaged in decision-making in relation to the ASF, and to what extent. This suggests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a range of approaches and mechanisms to engaging children and young people in decision-making; and, - whilst varied, engagement of children and young people is taking place to some extent and in a range of contexts, and employing a range of approaches.
<p>Did this differ across schools and Local Authority areas, and/or across stages of the learner journey (eg primary versus secondary)?</p>	<p>Fairly diverse with evidence of established approaches in some schools/Local Authority areas.</p> <p>Less evidence of stages has emerged to date, but it appears that there is a greater emphasis at secondary than at primary.</p>
<p>What difference did (children and young people), families and communities involvement in decision-making make?</p>	<p>Limited evidence gathered to date of impact in terms of children and young people’s engagement in decision-making in relation to ASF. This is an area for ongoing exploration in the evaluation.</p> <p>Families and communities’ involvement in decision-making has not been focus of this thematic project to date, but is an area for further exploration in the thematic evaluation going forward.</p>
<p>What is working well and what could be</p>	<p>Although not fully explored to date, there are a number of points which are emerging, including:</p>

<p>improved in engaging children, young people and their families and communities in decision-making?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - young people's preparation for engagement; - the mechanism for engagement; and, - use of innovative and engaging approaches, including co-design models. <p>This is area for further exploration in the thematic evaluation going forward.</p>
<p>To what extent is engagement in decision-making embedded in approaches and across stages?</p>	<p>As noted above in terms of diversity of experience, approaches vary widely and appear to be embedded to a greater or lesser extent.</p> <p>The work is not necessarily specific to the Attainment Scotland Fund, and reflects wider work related to engaging children and young people/pupil voice.</p> <p>There is acknowledgement that there is further requirement to focus on engaging children and young people in decision-making in relation to the ASF in some local authorities.</p>



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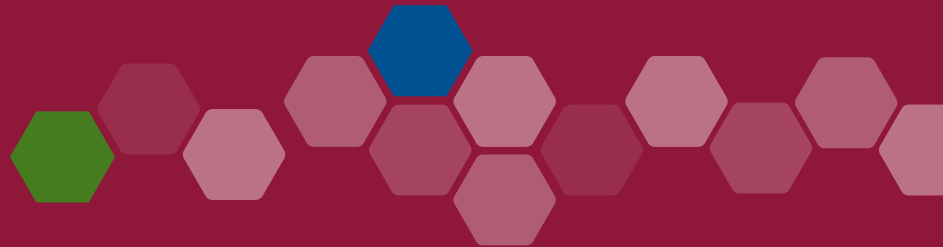
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