Achieving Excellence and Equity

2025 National Improvement Framework

December 2024

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Achieving Excellence and Equity

- - - - -

2025 National Improvement Framework

Scottish education is well recognised globally as valuing both equity and excellence. The system invests significant resources to tackle poverty, close attainment gaps and strengthen the teaching profession.

International Council of Education Advisers, November 2023

Vision, Key Priorities, and Outcomes for Children and Young People

Our vision for education in Scotland

Scottish education should be ambitious, inclusive, and supportive in order to deliver:

- **Excellence through raising achievement and improving outcomes**: ensuring that every child and young person achieves the highest standards they can.

- **Achieving equity**: ensuring every child and young person has the same opportunity to succeed.

Key priorities of the National Improvement Framework

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education;
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing;
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people;
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people; and
- Improvement in achievement, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

The outcomes we expect to achieve:

- A globally respected, empowered, and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level that supports children, young people, and adult learners to thrive. The system enables the development of their knowledge, skills, values, and attributes that give them the best opportunity to succeed and contribute to Scotland's society and economy.
- Young people experiencing the benefit of schools and early years settings working in excellent partnerships with wider children's services and other partners, families, and communities, in line with the GIRFEC approach.
- Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment which gives young people the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to society, and shape a sustainable future, while celebrating and supporting progression for all.
- High levels of achievement across the curriculum for all learners, with action to close the poverty-related attainment gap.
- Highly skilled teachers and school-leaders driving excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all, especially those with additional support needs.
- Improving relationships and behaviour, and attendance, with increased engagement in learning and a culture of dignity and respect for all.
- An education system engaging in digital technology to enhance all aspects of learning and teaching, supported by a digitally-skilled workforce and tackling digital inequality.

Introduction

Ministers and local authorities share statutory responsibilities for education, as well as the wider wellbeing of children, young people, and families which are intertwined and longstanding.

Ministers set the strategic objectives for the education system and local authorities have responsibility for the provision of effective education for their area. The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 (as amended by the Education (Scotland) Act 2016) requires Scottish Ministers to produce a National Improvement Framework (NIF) for Scottish education, to be published and reviewed annually, to support delivery of a duty on Ministers and local authorities to secure improvement in the quality of school education, and to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap.

These areas of shared responsibility make it essential that national and local government work together, with a collective responsibility to improve educational outcomes. That is why the Programme for Government in September 2024 committed the Scottish Government to work in partnership with local authorities and wider children's services to improve attendance, attainment and the curriculum in schools to boost standards.

There is a clear role for a refocused Education Scotland looking at curriculum design, delivery and improvement, including the provision of resources to support high quality learning and teaching, support a national framework for professional learning and build on national leadership programmes. It will also work with local authorities to inform approaches to wellbeing, inclusion, behaviour and enabling better support for those with additional support needs.

The 2025 NIF is informed by discussions with stakeholders, including local government, headteachers, professional associations, and young people. It has been developed in consultation with COSLA and the Association of Directors of Education (ADES) and the outcomes and aspirations reflect those in the ADES framework for improvement which was published on 11 November. It also draws on the findings of the recent independent reviews of Scottish education to enable more effective long-term planning for improvement by the Scottish Government and local authorities. It takes account of the National Discussion on Scottish education, which was co-convened by the Scottish Government and COSLA.

Local authorities and schools should take account of the NIF and the national plan, when developing their own improvement plans.

Delivering Improvement

Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing impact of the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis, there are many strengths in Scottish education.

- In 2023 Scotland had a higher percentage of the population aged 25-64 with tertiary education compared to the UK, EU 25 average, and OECD average. (OECD, 2023)[1]

[1] Education at a Glance 2023 | OECD

- Record levels of literacy and numeracy attainment at primary and secondary school level. (Scottish Government, Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (ACEL) data, 10 Dec 2024)[2]
- Record low attainment gap in literacy for primary pupils, and in literacy and numeracy at secondary level. (Scottish Government, ACEL data, 10 Dec 2024)
- Record high positive initial school leaver destinations (95.9%) – the poverty-related gap has reduced by three quarters since 2009/10. (Scottish Government, summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations, 2024)[3]
- Scotland has the highest level of spending per pupil in the UK, and the best teacher-pupil ratio. We invested £8,500 per school pupil last year in Scotland. (Institute for Fiscal Studies, April 2023)[4]
- A record number of school buildings across Scotland are in a good or satisfactory condition since recorded figures began – the proportion of schools in a 'good' or 'satisfactory' condition has increased from 62.7% in April 2007 to 91.7% in April 2024. (Scottish Government, school estates supplementary statistics, 2024)[5]
- The number of pupil support assistants increased again in 2023 - there are now 490,750 hours per week for pupil support assistants equating to an estimated FTE of 17,330, an increase of 725 (4.4%) on 2022. (Scottish Government, school support staff statistics, 2023)[6]

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on education, both in Scotland, and internationally, and we have seen sustained financial pressures on schools as a result of austerity. There is variation in the quality of learning and outcomes for children and young people across Scotland. That is why, in the coming year, and for the remainder of this Parliament, we will focus on the improving the ABC - attendance, achievement, behaviour and the curriculum in schools - to boost standards. The Scottish Government, COSLA, and ADES will also establish a joint Education Assurance Board to work together to improve learning outcomes for children and young people.

We need, also, to establish a clear long-term strategy for the future of Scottish education. A series of independent reports[7], including the National Discussion on Education, have considered Scotland's approach to qualifications and assessment. These reports informed the work of the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (IRQA) led by Professor Louise Hayward and its final report: It's Our Future[8].

---

[2] Scottish Government, Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence data, 2024
[3] Scottish Government, summary statistics for schools in Scotland, 2024
[4] Growing gap in school spending per pupil between Scotland and the rest of the UK | Institute for Fiscal Studies
[5] Scottish Government, school estates statistics, 2024
[6] Scottish Government, school support staff statistics, 2023
[7] Scotland Curriculum for Excellence: Into the future, OECD, 2021
Upper Secondary Student Assessment in Scotland, Professor Stobart, OECD, 2021
Putting Learners at the Centre, Professor Muir, 2022
All Learners in Scotland Matter, Scottish Government, 2023
Fit for the Future: developing a post-school learning system, James Withers, 2023
[8] It's Our Future – Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment, Professor Hayward, 2023

At its most recent meeting in June 2024, the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA) said that it was important to have both a long-term strategy and a focus on a smaller number of key areas to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people now.

The 2025 refreshed NIF provides that long-term strategy for Scottish education. It addresses the findings of these independent reviews of Scottish education to enable more effective long-term planning for improvement by the Scottish Government, national organisations, and local authorities. It also reflects the guiding values for putting learners at the heart of our education system as set out in the National Discussion.

- It should be **ambitious** by having high expectations for all learners and enabling each child and young person to develop and achieve their ambitions.

- The Scottish education system should be **inclusive** by valuing, respecting, recognising, and representing the diversity of all children and young people, and provide equitable educational experiences and opportunities for all learners.

- And the Scottish education system should be **supportive** - engaging each child, young person, and adult meaningfully and appropriately in an education process that provides the necessary supports for all learners to progress, achieve, and realise their personal ambitions.

The Education (Scotland) Bill 2024 provides the opportunity for organisations to reset their relationships with each other and their partners in the education system. It is the first building block in a holistic, coherent, whole system approach to a reformed Scottish education system.

Schools do not exist in a vacuum. Delivering improvement and closing the poverty-related attainment gap is something that schools cannot address on their own. There needs to be a more holistic approach to take account of the wider relationship between home and schools, and ensure local services can work across institutional boundaries in partnership with schools so that the interests and views of practitioners and learners are prioritised. This was a key strength during Scotland's response to the pandemic, and one we need to build on while we deal with the ongoing impact of the pandemic, and the cost-of-living crisis on our children and young people.

By taking this long-term, collaborative approach, we aim to achieve the outcomes set out at the start of this document.

The full details of the actions that will be taken to deliver the outcomes, the evidence to support them, and how we will measure progress will be set out in an Improvement Plan which will be published early in the New Year.

© Crown copyright 2024

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit **nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3** or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: **psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk**.

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

This publication is available at **www.gov.scot**

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-83691-121-0 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, December 2024

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS1533410 (12/24)

w w w . g o v . s c o t