



ATTAINMENT: BROAD GENERAL EDUCATION & SQA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 2023

Report by Chief Officer for Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide a summary to the Comhairle of attainment performance and outcomes in the Broad General Education (P1-S3) and Senior Phase (S4-6) in the 2022-23 session.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 Tracking and reporting of progress in attainment and performance each summer consists of three key areas.
- 1) The annual survey of teacher judgement in the Broad General Education reporting on performance of learners in P1, P4, P7 and S3 within Curriculum for Excellence.
 - 2) The reporting of the results of SQA examinations in the senior phase; the main focus of which tends to be on National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher awards but also includes a number of other course results.
 - 3) The SDS Annual Participation Measure that reports on the participation of 16-19 year olds in education, training or employment.
- 2.2 Based on the teacher judgement survey of the BGE for 2023, an average of 87.5% of curricular milestones were achieved across numeracy and literacy combined in Comhairle schools for P1, P4, P7 and S3. This compares to 83.2% in 2022 and 76.2% in 2021.
- 2.3 2023 was the second year that schools presented learners for external examinations after the Covid-19 pandemic. As with 2022, there were a significant number of changes made by SQA in relation to assessment modifications, course delivery and grade boundaries for awards. Consequently, results for 2023 continue to need to be considered with a degree of uniqueness and scope for accurate and meaningful year-on-year comparisons is limited.
- 2.4 From a total of 2366 presentations, A-C passes at National 5 were 79.8%, followed by 78.3% at Higher and 66.7% at Advanced Higher. Results in the Western Isles continued to be above national averages for National 5 and Higher and mirrored the national trend of overall decreases on the previous year. The drop in A-C passes at Advanced Higher is significant and is being investigated by schools.
- 2.5 The SDS Annual Participation Measure for 2023 reports that the Comhairle has the second-highest rate of participation in Scotland for 16–19-year-olds in education, training or employment, with a rate of 97.6%. Furthermore, Comhairle schools continue to report some of the highest success rates in Scotland for sustained post-school destinations, with 97.1% of our leavers continuing to be in a positive destination three months after leaving school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle note the Report.**

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Appendix:

Background Papers:

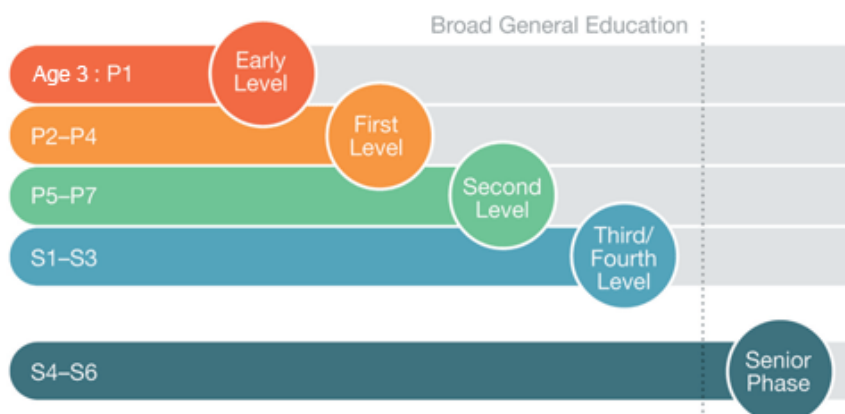
IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	Applicable UNCRC Articles: 28 – A Right to Education 29 – Goals of Education
Corporate Strategy	2.1.1 – Attainment rates continue to improve. 2.1.3 – Schools are centres of lifelong learning and key assets to the community.
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 Whilst the direct impact of the Covid-19 pandemic lessened during the 2022-23 academic session, with no school closures and less absences attributed to Covid-19, there was disruption to learning time from several days of industrial action between November 2022 and April 2023 that affected key points in the annual assessment calendar.
- 5.2 The teacher judgement survey of the Broad General Education (BGE) is an exercise that is undertaken annually and involves the reporting by all schools of the achievement of levels within the Curriculum for Excellence (CFE). Data is recorded for literacy (Gàidhlig & English) and numeracy for P1, P4, P7 and S3.
- 5.3 In the CFE teacher judgement survey, teachers must use professional judgement to determine the level of attainment in literacy and numeracy in relation to the milestone years in the national progression pathway, as set out below:



- 5.4 The 2023 SQA examination programme saw a second year of external assessment after the significant disruption caused by Covid-19 to senior phase assessments in 2020 and 2021. Although there was a full programme of external examinations for a second year, it should be noted that the SQA continued to make significant adjustments to course delivery, assessment requirements and expectations and grade boundaries for marking exams and making awards. As such, the 2023 results continue to have a degree of uniqueness, as is the case with data for 2020 to 2022, and caution must be expressed in drawing year-on-year comparisons with these years and with pre-pandemic data from 2019 and before.

DETAIL

Broad General Education (Nursery to S3)

- 6.1 The table below provides a summary of the percentage of learners at each stage that achieved the typical curricular milestone in June 2023, as set out in the diagram at paragraph 5.3.

Percentage CFE Attainment in P1, P4, P7 and S3 for 2022-23

Stage	English Listening & Talking	English Reading	English Writing	Numeracy	Eisteachd & Labhairt Gàidhlig	Leughadh Gàidhlig	Sgrìobhadh Gàidhlig
P1 Early	82.2	81.3	80.4	86.9	92.0	94.4	91.2
P4 First	84.7	77.1	72.2	76.3	86.7	79.1	73.3
P7 Second	91.3	89.4	83.7	84.5	92.5	85.0	79.6
S3 Third +	95.9	95.2	94.5	91.7	100	100	98.4

- 6.2 The table below sets out the percentage change in attainment this year compared to the last recording in 2022 (a positive percentage indicates higher attainment in 2023 than in 2022, e.g., attainment in English Writing at P1 was 3.1% higher in 2023 than in 2022). It is not possible to provide cohort comparison data for the 2023 year group as their last milestone point was in 2020, the year that no data was recorded due to Covid-19.

Percentage Change in Attainment from 2022 to 2023

Stage	English Listening & Talking	English Reading	English Writing	Numeracy	Eisteachd & Labhairt Gàidhlig	Leughadh Gàidhlig	Sgrìobhadh Gàidhlig
P1 Early	-2.6	-0.5	+3.1	+5.1	+1.9	+3.4	+2.9
P4 First	+3.1	-1.8	+1.1	+1.2	-0.9	-1.4	+6.0
P7 Second	+6.9	+5.8	+9.9	+4.9	+10.5	+7.0	+8.6
S3 Third +	+4.1	+4.2	+6.3	+0.7	+7.1	+8.3	+7.8

- 6.3 When observing changes in attainment compared to that of the previous year, there is evidence of important improvements across all stages and organisers. This year, an average of 87.5% of learners

achieved or exceeded their curriculum level in numeracy and literacy combined across P1, P4, P7 and S3. This compares to 83.2% in 2022 and 76.2% in 2021.

- 6.4 Improving attainment in writing continues to be a priority for the Comhairle and two schools engaged in a writing improvement pilot project last session with the Scottish Government Children & Young People’s Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC) focusing on P4 writing. The pilot phase of the project reported 18% increase in attainment in one school and 15% increase in another. This project is now being rolled out across more Comhairle schools this session.
- 6.5 National attainment data has not yet been published for P1 to S3 for this period so comparisons cannot be drawn with national trends at these stages. National data is typically made available in December each year.
- 6.6 Closing the Poverty-related attainment gap continues to be a national priority and features strongly in the Scottish Government’s National Improvement Framework. It is also an important local priority and, as we see evidence of more families locally feeling the effects of poverty and increasing living costs, our schools are tasked with ensuring resources are being deployed to support and address poverty-related attainment issues.
- 6.7 Schools in the Western Isles access and use Pupil Equity Funding (PEF); grant funding distributed annually as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Using a range of indicators, schools identify cohorts of pupils that are experiencing poverty-related attainment issues and use their resources to support these learners.
- 6.8 Attainment data for learners identified by schools to be in receipt of PEF is included in the table below. Cohort sizes for PEF within subjects in each year group are small and can vary from 39 to less than five and this can result in significant variations in data when expressed as percentages. Collectively across literacy and numeracy, the attainment gap between learners in receipt of PEF compared to those that were not was 21.4%. The attainment gap for last year’s P1, P4, P7 and S3 was 19.8%.

Percentage CFE Attainment in P1, P4, P7 and S3 for Pupils in Receipt of PEF 2022-23

Stage	English Listening & Talking	English Reading	English Writing	Numeracy	Eisteachd & Labhairt Gàidhlig	Leughadh Gàidhlig	Sgrìobhadh Gàidhlig
P1 Early	43.8	62.5	62.5	75.0	88.9	88.9	88.9
P4 First	79.2	62.5	54.2	51.3	93.3	60.0	53.3
P7 Second	67.6	73.0	64.9	56.8	100	100	66.7
S3 Third +	68.2	68.2	68.2	77.3	*	*	*

* Data suppressed due to cohort size of five or less.

Senior Phase (S4-S6)

- 6.9 Senior Phase (S4-6) attainment performance is indicated below using the results of awards in SQA National Qualifications at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher levels. Significant caution must still be taken when drawing comparisons between performance in 2023 and other years. With no examinations in 2020 or 2021 and changes made to course delivery, internal assessments, exam content and grade boundaries in 2022 and 2023, the data for each of the last five years stands alone in terms of seeking trends and patterns.

- 2019** – Full traditional SQA exam timetable for all courses
- 2020** – Exams cancelled: Awards submitted by schools and then adjusted using an SQA algorithm. Scottish Government then adjusted awards lowered by SQA again post-release.
- 2021** – Exams cancelled: All awards made based on teacher judgement of evidence and subject to local moderation and quality assurance checks.
- 2022** – Full diet of SQA examinations but with important changes to course delivery, assessments, exams and grade boundaries.
- 2023** – Full diet of SQA examinations but with adjustments to courses and grade boundaries but not to the same extent as in 2022.

6.10 The percentage of A-C passes at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher in Comhairle Schools is shown below, with comparison provided to the Scottish average pass rate.

2023 SQA Course Level	CNES Presentations	CNES A-C Pass Rate	Scotland A-C Pass Rate
National 5	1482	79.8%	78.8%
Higher	800	78.3%	77.1%
Advanced Higher	84	66.7%	79.8%
Combined	2366	78.8%	78.5%

6.11 The attainment in SQA courses for 2022 is provided below.

2022 SQA Course Level	CNES Presentations	CNES A-C Pass Rate	Scotland A-C Pass Rate
National 5	1464	84.5%	80.8%
Higher	743	84.7%	78.9%
Advanced Higher	80	76.3%	81.3%
Combined	2287	84.3%	80.3%

6.12 The A-C pass rate for Comhairle schools in 2023 continues to be higher than the Scottish average at National 5 and Higher and demonstrates strong performance by many of our learners. Analysis of results indicate very good performance in S4 and by some in S5, but issues have been identified by schools in a number of course presentations at National 5 and Advanced Higher across S5 and S6. Work is being undertaken to address these matters and, over the coming weeks, our schools will be analysing performance in detail and addressing issues identified in presentation policies and course delivery.

6.13 At this stage, only headline attainment data for S4-6 has been published. In late September the Insight SQA Benchmarking tool will be updated to include 2023 results and a deep and detailed analysis will be able to be undertaken across schools and courses. Schools will then use this information to recognise success, identify priorities and plan improvement.

Annual Participation Measure

6.14 Each year, Skills Development Scotland (SDS) works with Scottish Government to collate and report on participation of all young people aged 16 to 19. The measure is defined as the percentage of young adults aged 16-19 participating in education, training or employment. It is a key national measure of the success of participation and outcomes for young people.

6.15 For young people in the Comhairle area, the Annual Participation Measure reports for 2022-23 that 97.6% of 16–19-year-olds are participating in education, training or employment. This represents an

increase from 96.2% in 2022 and matches the highest rate seen in the Western Isles back in 2018. This compares positively to the national participation rate of 94.3%.

6.16 The tables below provide a summary of current and historic data from the Annual Participation Measure, including a breakdown by each category.

Year	CNES % Participation Total	National % Participation Total
2023	97.6	94.3
2022	96.2	92.4
2021	95.6	92.2
2020	95.5	92.1
2019	95.5	91.6

Year	CNES % in Education	CNES % in Training	CNES % In Employment	National % in Education	National % in Training	National % in employment
2023	65.6	1.2	30.8	71.3	1.6	21.4
2022	63.8	1.8	30.6	73.0	1.7	17.5
2021	70.2	2.6	22.9	74.8	1.8	15.5
2020	69.9	2.0	23.7	72.0	1.8	18.3
2019	69.9	1.4	24.3	71.5	2.0	18.2

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Across the stages of the Curriculum for Excellence, learners in the Western Isles saw important success and achievements in attainment in the 2022-23 academic year. It is important to note that success for our learners goes far beyond the attainment data listed above and we continue to see our children and young people excel in the fields of music, sport, culture, leadership and community activity. As well as focusing on attainment, our schools aim to recognise achievement and success in all aspects of our learner's growth and development and try to foster strong participation and engagement for all. We also recognise the high percentage rate of participation in the SDS Annual Participation Measure and sustained positive post-school destinations as other indicators of the success of the outcomes of our service.
- 7.2 Whilst there are clear strengths in attainment across our schools, we recognise that there continue to be areas for development and School Improvement Plans for the year ahead document the work schools will be doing throughout the year ahead to progress these priorities.