

Education, Children and Young People Committee

13th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 11 May 2022

Scottish Attainment Challenge inquiry

Introduction

The Committee is scrutinising the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the Scottish Government's policy commitment to close the poverty-related attainment gap.

Evidence taken as part of its inquiry thus far has included written evidence received in response to the Committee's [call for views](#), which closed on 8 February. The Committee has also held four formal evidence sessions, on [9 February](#), [23 February](#), [20 April](#) and [4 May](#).

During these sessions, the Committee took evidence from—

- academics and policy experts who have researched the Scottish Attainment Challenge, on 9 February,
- third sector organisations that provide services funded through the Attainment Challenge, on 23 February,
- education trade unions on 20 April and
- Directors of Education on 4 May.

The Committee has also held informal engagement sessions with—

- children at Sidlaw Primary School;
- care experienced young people;
- young people supported by Barnardo's in Greenock;
- teachers; and
- parents and carers.

Notes of these sessions will be published on the [inquiry webpage](#).

Case study approach

The Committee has agreed to take evidence from case-study local authority areas involving witnesses from primary schools, secondary schools, and local authority representatives from the selected areas.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge is intended to provide significant autonomy to local authorities and schools and there will be a multitude of approaches within localities. Local authorities are grouped regionally in 'Regional Improvement Collaboratives' (RIC). Scrutiny of the Scottish Attainment Challenge at the level of a RIC will allow the Committee to compare different local authorities and how they work together and with Education Scotland.

The Committee has agreed that the West Partnership RIC, which consists of eight local authorities across the west of Scotland: East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, and West Dunbartonshire, form the case study area for this inquiry. Thirty-five percent of Scotland's school population attend a West Partnership school. There are over 1000 nurseries, primary, secondary and special schools in the West Partnership, serving mainly urban but also many rural communities.

On Monday 25 April, Members of the Committee met a group of teachers from local authorities in the West Partnership at St Roch's High School in Glasgow. On 27 April, Members of the Committee held an online meeting with parents/carers from within the West Partnership to discuss issues relating to the attainment challenge. On 9 May, Members will hold an informal engagement meeting with teachers from within the West Partnership who are members of the EIS.

Committee meeting

At its meeting today, the Committee will take evidence from officials at Education Scotland—

- Craig Clement, Strategic Director
- Pamela Di Nardo, Senior Regional Adviser
- Elizabeth Sommerville, Attainment Adviser
- Patricia Watson, Strategic Director

Supporting Information

- A SPICe briefing prepared for this session is included in the Annexe to this paper.

**Education, Children and Young People Committee Clerks
6 May 2022**

The logo for SPICe is a purple rounded rectangle with a gradient from light purple on the left to dark blue on the right. The text 'SPICe' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font.

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Education, Children and Young People Committee

Poverty-related attainment gap – Education Scotland

11 May 2022

Introduction

This meeting is part of the Committee's inquiry into the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the Scottish Government's policy commitment to close the poverty-related attainment gap. This week the Committee will take evidence from Education Scotland officials—

- Craig Clement, Strategic Director
- Patricia Watson, Strategic Director
- Pamela Di Nardo, Senior Regional Adviser
- Elizabeth Sommerville, Attainment Adviser

The Committee has undertaken four formal sessions with experts, third sector bodies, trade unions and local authorities. The official reports and papers are linked below.

- [9 February 2022, academics and experts](#)
- [23 February 2022, Third Sector](#)
- [20 April 2022, Trade Unions](#)
- [4 May 2022, Directors of Education](#)

The Committee issued [a call for views](#) which ran from 18 January 2022 to 8 February 2022. The Committee has [published 29 responses](#). A briefing on the themes from those submissions was included in Members' papers for the meeting of 20 April. The Convener sought information on approaches and evidence from other jurisdictions. A short paper outlining some work and examples was also included in members' papers for 20 April.

The Committee has undertaken a programme of informal sessions with young people, teachers and parent/carers. Some of the Committee's engagement has focused on the area covered by the West Partnership RIC. Links to the published write ups from this work can be found below—

- [Note from Sidlaw Primary School](#)
- [Note from virtual meeting with care experienced young people](#)
- [Note from Barnardos visit](#)

Further write-ups will be published in due course here.

Education Scotland have a key role in supporting teachers, schools and local authorities working to close the poverty related attainment gap. It also undertakes evaluations of the work and progress and providing a challenge function. Education Scotland has a wider role in supporting the education system and advising the Scottish Government on policy. The purpose of this paper is to support the Committee to explore these roles in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The role of Education Scotland has not been explored in detail during the previous sessions.

Refreshed approach to the Scottish Attainment Challenge

The briefing papers for the previous have discussed the refreshed model for SAC over the coming parliamentary session. This section will focus on the role of Education Scotland set out in the [Framework for recovery and accelerating progress](#) ("the Framework"). The Framework stated—

"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:

- 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 an agreed plan which provides universal, targeted and intensive support as required to ensure recovery, progress and achievement of stretch aims; and
- 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.

“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.

[Attainment Advisors’ key functions are to:

- Provide advice and guidance;
- Lead improvement and build quality; and
- Contribute to robust evaluation and impact.]

“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. 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.

“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.”

The Framework treated the inspectorate separately. The Framework stated—

“Her 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.”

Education Scotland has a key role in monitoring progress under the framework. Education Scotland will support local authorities as part of regular dialogue. The changing role of local authorities has implications here; under the Framework, local authorities have more of a strategic role in the spending of PEF than set out in previous iterations of PEF guidance and most will now have new local authority level budgets.

Local authorities will set local “stretch aims” to improve outcomes for all and close the poverty related attainment gap. These aims will be under a “core-plus” model. The Core aims should include overall progress and for reducing the poverty-related gaps in:

- achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels (literacy combined and numeracy combined);
- the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more pass at SCQF level 5;
- the proportion of school leavers attaining 1 or more pass at SCQF level 6;
- the proportion of 16-19 olds participating in education, employment or training; and
- a locally identified aim for health and wellbeing, to be measured using local datasets.

The “Plus” aims are to be considered of equal importance to the “Core” and should be specific to the local authority's own context and datasets. These Plus aims will be determined at the local level and the Framework provides examples of potential “Plus” aims—

- aims for pupils' wider achievement;
- aims for parental engagement in learning;
- aims regarding readiness to learn; or
- regarding the cost of the school day.

Local authorities are expected to work with their schools to agree these local 'stretch aims'. Education Scotland is expected to provide support and challenge through this process.

Education Scotland will hold quarterly meetings with the Scottish Government regarding progress at local authority-levels. The frame work stated—

“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.”

The Framework also set out how the Scottish Government and Education Scotland would approach managing the “rare cases where evidence suggests there is cause for concern”.

Education Scotland and the Scottish Government will also sample individual schools' annual Standards and Quality Reports to inform “understanding of the approaches to tackling the poverty-related attainment gap.”

[Education Scotland's website](#) highlights the importance of Attainment Advisors in supporting “schools and local authorities to ensure effective use of the various strands of [the ASF]”. Along with the targeted support, Education Scotland has a “universal support package offered through the Scottish Attainment Challenge”. This includes:

- **Attainment Advisors** – all local Authorities have direct access to a named Attainment Advisor who works collaboratively alongside local authority staff on agreed priorities which support the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- **National Improvement Hub** - a virtual centre of educational expertise that supports the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Through the hub we move knowledge to action around the education system. It incorporates a range of features to build collaborative learning and engage leaders and practitioners to support a self-improving education system.
- **Support for regional improvement collaboratives** - Attainment Advisors working as part of Education Scotland's regional improvement teams support the development and delivery of regional improvement collaborative plans to ensure a strong focus on equity and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

National Improvement Hub

The National Improvement Hub is intended to provide information and support for practitioners to improve their practice to improve outcomes. It includes: self-evaluation and improvement frameworks, research, teaching and assessment resources, exemplars of practice and support for on-line collaboration and networks through Glow.

Examples of the type of resource included in the NIH is the [Equality and Equity Toolkit](#), which was co-produced with Connect, and [Delivering equity and closing the poverty related attainment gap](#).

PEF guidance highlights a number of resources which can support schools in deciding how to spend PEF monies. These include—

- [Scottish Attainment Challenge – Self-evaluation resource](#)
- [Getting It Right For All Learners during COVID-19](#)
- [Guidance on working with the third sector](#)
- [Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit](#)
- Accessing advice from Attainment Advisors who “can be integral to facilitating good communication between headteachers, helping to share best practice and provide guidance on effective planning, implementation and evaluation of interventions in schools, local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives.”

The first three bullets are all found on the NIH.

The PEF guidance stated that Education Scotland are in the process of developing an Equity Toolkit which is expected to be available from the summer of 2022.

One part of the [Scottish Government's recovery plan](#) from the pandemic is to maintain a focus on equity in Education. The NIH has several pieces of guidance to support schools in the response to the pandemic.

Education Scotland published [Recalibrating Equity and Social Justice in Scottish Education: Bouncing forward after COVID-19 lockdowns](#) on the NIH. This identified “six broad principles which can be used to help schools and local authorities consider their use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and supports to recalibrate equity and help learners to bounce forward after COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures.” These were:

- Impact of Covid-19
Children from deprived families are more likely to be affected more than other learners by school closures
- Prioritise re-engagement
Both physically being present and emotionally
- Identifying learners most impacted by poverty & COVID-19
All educational establishments, local authorities and national agencies need to use data as an evidence base. The resource also identifies the following groups of young people who might be particularly affected—
 - Groups who were already low achieving educational groups

- Younger children
- Children experiencing transitions
- Children and young people with existing mental health, social and emotional difficulties
- Learners with additional support needs
- Intensifying support in the short-term
Focus on those who need the most support. Prioritise targeted supports for core literacy and numeracy, language development, social learning, physical skills or concentration.
- High quality universal and targeted provision is vital
Particularly suggests targeted small group or 1-to-1 interventions using classroom assistants.
- Long-term strategic vision still required
The poverty related attainment gap has been a factor of our society before the current pandemic. These underpinning, deep rooted causes need to continue to be prioritised and tackled by all.

Regional Improvement Collaboratives

Since 2017, Education Scotland has moved towards regional working and support for the development of the six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs). The intention was to ensure more direct capacity building with practitioners, schools, local authorities.

Education Scotland are partners in each of the six RICs across Scotland. The Scottish Government [published a review of the RICs in December 2021](#). This found that after a patchy start, RICs appear to be adding value. The review stated that there is evidence that RICs are having an impact on a range of areas, including—

- developing the skills of school staff and delivery of lessons
- skills and consistency around assessment and moderation
- leadership and improvement planning skills
- building a collaborative culture between local authorities
- new online and blended learning opportunities for pupils.

The review stated—

“Education Scotland regional improvement teams have co-produced, led and been involved in a wide range of RIC activities, including supporting networks, delivering learning, quality assurance, peer review and direct support to schools. Collaborative relationships have strengthened over time. Some felt

that there remained some tensions in the relationship due to a lack of clarity around the role of Education Scotland in relation to RICs.”(page i)

Role of Attainment Advisors

There are around 32 Attainment Advisors (“AAs”) across Scotland and every local authority is intended to have access to an AA. As is noted above, AAs’ key functions are to:

- Provide advice and guidance;
- Lead improvement and build quality; and
- Contribute to robust evaluation and impact.

And this includes “support and challenge the effective planning, implementation and evaluation of the impact of all aspects of the ASF, including SEF, PEF and CECYP funding”.

The Scottish Government’s [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: A report on progress 2016-2021](#), published in March 2021, said—

“Schools select interventions based on a wide range of information, such as local authority support, AA advice and guidance, consideration of data, research on interventions, and input from staff, parents and pupils.”

However, the same report noted that, in a survey of Headteachers, 3% identified “Support and guidance from Attainment Advisors” a factor that “supported progress towards closing the poverty-related gap in attainment or health and wellbeing”.

Ruth Binks from Inverclyde Council told the Committee that the AA that her local authority works alongside advocates an “Adopt, Adapt, Abandon” approach. This suggests the language of a Plan-Do-Study-Act approach, which [the Carnegie Foundation](#) suggests is a “pragmatic scientific method for iterative testing of changes in complex systems”. This also suggests that schools are supported in taking measured risks in their approaches.

Professor Becky Francis explained how the EEF is working in England to ensure that knowledge of research-based intervention is shared across schools. She said that this goes much further than simply directing schools to guidance. She said—

“We have a research school network and regional brokers, who are employed by the EEF to mobilise a hub-and-spoke regional profile in different areas of England, in order to ensure the school-to-school [collaboration]. We know the evidence, but teachers are most likely to listen to other teachers, so our research school network of 40 schools works very closely with the EEF across England to promote our resources, run continuing professional development for other schools, and initiate school-led programmes on how to use the evidence. We supply the evidence on proven projects that schools can purchase with pupil premium funding and on approaches that they can draw

on and develop, again using the pupil premium resource. As you will have seen, the guidance that has been developed in England goes a little beyond the position in Scotland, in encouraging schools to use our resources.” (OR 9 February 2022, cols 27-28)

National Programmes and Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund

Previous papers have focused on Pupil Equity Funding and the new Strategic Equity Fund. The Attainment Scotland fund also includes monies for National Programmes and the Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund.

National programmes

In 2021-22 national programmes funded under the ASF totalled just under £6.2m. These were:

Young Scot – #YSAttain programme	£129,000
Curiosity Collective – Children's University	£50,000
Youth Link – youth work and schools partnership programme	£115,000
Winning Scotland – Mindset in Education	£50,000
Child Poverty Action Group – Cost of the School Day	£93,000
Attainment Scotland Fund evaluation (inc headteacher survey and local authority survey)	£60,000
Scottish Council of Deans of Education – <i>Developing pedagogies that work for pre-service and early career teachers to reduce the attainment gaps in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing</i>	£58,000
Teacher recruitment and professional learning and leadership	£1,530,000
Education Scotland – Attainment Advisors	£1,000,000
Training of Educational Psychologists	£627,000
Regional Improvement Collaboratives	£2,000,000
Scottish Mentoring and Leadership programme	£399,000
CELCIS – Virtual Headteacher Network	£50,000
Total	£6,161,000

In 2022-23, the funding for National Programmes will increase to around £13.3m. SPICe understands that much of the list above is likely to continue, although exact allocations are still to be confirmed.

The increase from £6.2m to £13.3m is largely accounted for by the additional investment in a national youth work/community learning and development fund (£2m) and the Easter study support funding (£4m).

Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund

[New national guidance for the CECYP Fund stated—](#)

“The Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund is a targeted resource provided to local authorities to support care experienced children and young people from birth to the age of 26. The funding is provided to local authorities and aims to improve the educational outcomes for care experienced children and young people, supported by the strategic goals of The Promise and the Scottish Attainment Challenge.”

The scope of this fund is somewhat different to the other funding streams – it covers support for children and young people both before and after school-age. It is intended to support local authorities, as corporate parents, to support care experienced children and young people inside and outside of school. The guidance states that local authority planning activities under this fund should take place jointly between the Chief Social Work Officer and Chief Education Officer, with support from the AA. The guidance also highlights CELCIS’ [Looked After and Learning](#) as a resource that can inform planning for activities under the CECYP fund.

As with other aspects of the ASF, local authorities provide “end year reports submitted to the Scottish Government and Education Scotland, highlighting evidence of the impact on attainment alongside qualitative and, where available, quantitative information.”

In 2021-22, the total value of the fund was £11.5m. The [local authority-level allocations for 21-22 are set out on the Scottish Government website](#) but those allocations for 22-23 have not yet been published. Allocations are based on the number of looked after child aged 5-15 in the Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland. The [published drawdown dates for 22-23](#) are—

- First Drawdown: January 2023
- Second Drawdown: May 2023

It is notable that the second date falls in the 23-24 financial year.

Evaluation

The Scottish Government's [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: A report on progress 2016-2021](#), published in March 2021 referenced a number of sources of information. This included a 5 year professional review undertaken by AAs. It also referenced a 2019 inspection report, [How well are the Scottish Attainment Challenge authorities improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap?](#)

In the foreword to the 2019 inspection report stated—

“The evidence shows clearly that where progress is greatest and outcomes strongest, there is very strong leadership and a culture of relentless drive for improvement. However, there is still variability in the rate of progress between authorities and there is scope for a few authorities to strengthen leadership at all levels and improve approaches to self-evaluation and the use of data.”

As members will be aware, Audit Scotland's 2021 report, [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#), also identified a need for greater consistency in progress across the country, as well as noting that progress has been limited. The Framework also acknowledged that more progress is required. It contextualised the continuing work of the Scottish Attainment Challenge within—

- A need to continue progress, and to speed up progress and to tackle variation in outcomes between and within local authority areas.
- A need to address the negative impact of Covid-19 on children's health and wellbeing and learning.

Education Scotland recently published [Pupil Equity Funding: Looking inwards, outwards, forwards](#). This publication was based on field work across the country and is intended to share practice and to “help staff involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of PEF to reflect and build on their current practice as we enter the next phase of the Scottish Attainment Challenge”. This work reported that “local authorities identified a number of areas they would like to further develop including updating local guidance, supporting increased collaboration with stakeholders, continuing to develop data literacy in staff and the way data is used to measure the impact of PEF.” It concluded—

“In light of the refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge it will be important for school leaders and local authority staff to work together to consider how they will build on current practice to:

- report robustly on the impact of PEF on children and young people affected by poverty
- ensure clear roles and responsibilities for headteachers, local authority officers and attainment advisors in relation to PEF

- develop longer-term planning which will maximise funding and allow engagement with partners to deliver the most appropriate approaches for closing poverty-related gaps
- meaningfully involve children, young people and their parents in the planning, implementation and evaluation of PEF”

The methodology of this work was—

“Between November 2021 and January 2022 attainment advisors met with officers from each of the 32 local authorities to discuss their approaches to supporting schools in their use of PEF. The attainment advisors also met with the headteachers or nominated staff from each of the selected schools to gather examples of their practice in relation to PEF. In addition to these interviews with the selected schools attainment advisors, with the permission of headteachers and local authorities, also highlighted some further examples of work which has been drawn upon.”

This document provides a useful set of examples about practice in schools and local authorities. However, the role and quality of support provided by Education Scotland is does not appear to have been evaluated in this document.

A theme of discussions both in formal meetings and during the informal sessions the Committee has undertaken has been how to measure impact of interventions. Particularly how to capture and value more intangible outcomes, such as engagement in learning and health and wellbeing.

Professor Ainscow drew the distinction between the goal of the policy to support equity in education across the broad aims of the curriculum and the measurement of the policy – closing the gap based on attainment particularly in literacy and numeracy. (OR 9 February 2022, col 3) Jim Thewliss also argued that “attainment is too narrow a focus”. (OR 20 April 2022, col 7)

The Framework notes that “additional national measures reflecting wider poverty-related and health and wellbeing issues will need to be developed and agreed for future versions of the Framework from the start of the school year 2023-24.” It is possible that any future national measure will reflect local authorities’ stretch HWB aims if agreement on how to measure this emerges through these processes.

Professor Becky Francis from the EEF highlighted the importance of literacy and numeracy attainment—

“Attainment is the key predictor of pupil life outcomes. That is well evidenced, particularly for maths and English outcomes. Although none of us would disagree that the curriculum should be broad and balanced and although pupil experience is important and supports attainment, the job of schools is to promote capability and knowledge in the curriculum and ensure that pupils gain that capability and knowledge. Therefore, it is right that we publicly measure those outcomes to see what value we gain from the school system.” (OR 9 February 2022, col 7)

Emma Cosgrove suggested that developing the capacity within schools to evaluate interventions is important but it is a complex activity. She particularly highlighted that interventions should be compared to other possible additional work. She said—

“That is not just about gathering metrics on a programme in isolation; it is also about benchmarking with other programmes and constructing control groups that allow you to get into the detail of what is happening and what is succeeding for pupils. That has a resource dimension; it is expensive to do that sort of thing well, and in the current climate it will be difficult to carve money out for that purpose. In the long run, however, such an approach is incredibly important for building on success.” (OR 9 February 2022, col 19)

Emma Cosgrove also argued that it is important to ensure “we have a really good understanding about what works and how we will get to the targets although we have been knocked off course [by the pandemic]”. (OR 9 February 2022, col 21) Jim Thewliss agreed and suggested that longitudinal studies should take place to understand the impacts of interventions in the longer term.

Professor Francis discussed how the EEF had supported schools to take part in research projects. She told the Committee—

“When the Education Endowment Foundation started 10 years ago, there was real anxiety about running large-scale randomised controlled trials in education. Very little of that had been done previously in the UK, or in educational research across the board.

“I am proud to say that, 10 years on, more than half of the schools in England have been involved in one of our randomised controlled trials. The energy, effort and commitment of teachers and schools in participating in research and being part of that collaboration towards evidence-led practice has been eye watering and inspiring. Cohort research obviously takes place in different universities—including University College London’s institute of education, which I used to run—but there is the national pupil database. We link our [randomised controlled trials] work with that database, which enables us to [track progress].” (OR 9 February 2022, col 32)

This links to actions outlined in [Education Scotland’s Corporate Plan 2021–2026](#). This stated that Education Scotland (among a high number of actions) will focus on “engaging in innovation and research, experimentation and enquiry as we move forward”. It will also seek to enhance “Scotland’s education research capacity”.

Developing policy

[Education Scotland’s Corporate Plan 2021–2026](#) sets out its own role in the Scottish Education system. It says—

“Education Scotland is the national improvement agency for education in Scotland. ... Scottish Ministers have charged us with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education and thereby securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for learners of all ages.

“To achieve these aims, we work in the following ways across education sectors, and at national, regional, local and establishment levels:

- providing professional learning and leadership programmes;
- providing improvement support, including face to face and digital resources;
- carrying out independent external scrutiny activity, including inspection and review;
- managing the development of national digital resources, including Glow, our online learning platform, which provides a safe environment for educators, learners and parents to communicate, and collaborate;
- providing independent policy advice to Ministers and civil servants, informed by our evidence.

“Our role means that, in addition to supporting the system and gathering evidence on the performance of the system, we also provide professional analysis and interpret a wide range of data relating to Scottish education. In essence, we add value to Scottish education by making sense of the system in its totality.”

The [Scottish Government stated](#)—

“This next phase of the SAC has been developed in partnership with and agreed by COSLA and builds on the evidence set out in the Scottish Government and Education Scotland 5 year report on progress towards closing the poverty related attainment gap, the Equity Audit, the Audit Scotland report on educational outcomes, and the OECD review.”

The role of Education Scotland of “providing independent policy advice to Ministers and civil servants, informed by our evidence” in this process is not clear.

The Scottish Government’s [Closing the poverty-related attainment gap: A report on progress 2016-2021](#) stated that “the SAC approach drew from the lessons of the City Challenges in England (London and Manchester) and Challenge Cymru in Wales”. The City Challenge programme was discussed in SPICe paper prepared for the Committee for its meeting on 20 April.

The SPICe paper for 20 April also highlighted work by the OECD and Eurydice which made recommendations in how to promote equity in education systems at a system-wide level.

As noted above, Education Scotland recently published [Pupil Equity Funding: Looking inwards, outwards, forwards](#) and this is referenced in the Framework.

The OECD’s report into CfE observed that rotation of top administrative and executive positions in Scotland’s education system among a relatively small number

of individuals limits creative thinking and constructive challenge within top decision-making processes. [Professor Muir's recent report](#) stated—

“The process of advising the Scottish Government on curriculum and assessment policy needs to take place much closer to school leaders, teachers, and practitioners than it does just now. Ultimately, it is Scottish Government and Ministers who are responsible for all aspects of education policy. However, how those policies are arrived at and what they should contain are felt by many in the system to be something that is closed off to them, lying almost exclusively in the domain of civil servants, many of whom have little or no direct experience of education.”

Ned Sharratt, Senior Researcher (Education, Culture), SPICe Research

5 May 2022

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

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