Agenda Item	6.
Report No	EDU/26/24

The Highland Council

Committee: Education

Date: **21 November 2024**

Report Title: **Senior Phase Attainment and Scrutiny (Session 2023-24)**

Report By: **Assistant Chief Executive - People**

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1   This report provides an update to Members on the performance of learners in attaining the Senior Phase (S4, S5 and S6) at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. This report complements Item 11 on the National Improvement Framework (NIF). The NIF paper outlines progress with Local Authority Stretch Aims in both ACEL (Primary) and Senior Phase attainment measures and shows progress being made in attainment over and above primary stretch aims.

1.2   The report also indicates the intention to update Highland's raising attainment strategy along with the introduction of attainment boards to monitor outcomes in secondary schools.

1.3   The 2024 exam diet saw a return to the traditional model of assessment. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, alternative methods of assessment were put in place for 2020 and 2021. The 2022 and 2023 diets were also a transitional point back to a traditional model of assessment. As such, caution is needed when making direct comparisons between years that had different assessment approaches.

1,4   Skills Development Scotland are currently tracking school leavers' destinations. The national Insight database is updated in spring and a further report providing information on school leavers' attainment will be submitted to the Education Committee when this data becomes available. This report will provide data on the attainment of all pupils in the senior phase by stage (S4, S5 and S6).

2. Recommendations

2.1   Members are asked to:

     i.   Note Highland's Senior Phase Attainment for session 2023/24.
     ii.   Agree that the Raising Attainment Action Plan will be revised to ensure all secondary schools and partners are working collaboratively to develop improvements and evidence progress and impact.
     iii.   Note that the delivery and impact of the revised Raising Attainment Action Plan will be monitored by a Raising Attainment Board which will provide direction, guidance and governance for the work required.

3.   Implications

3.1   Resource - There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations this report.

3.2   Legal - There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

3.3   Risk - There are no risk implications requiring an addition or amendment to The Highland Council's risk register arising from the recommendations in this report.

3.4   Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) - There are no health and safety implications arising from the recommendations this report.

3.5   Gaelic – There are no specific implications for Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learners Education courses. The Rasing Attainment Strategy and Attainment Boards are relevant to both Gaelic and English medium education.

4.   Impacts

4.1   In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2   Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3   This is a monitoring report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5.   Overview

5.1   The report provides Members with an update on attainment in the senior phase examination diet for session 2023-24. The measures reported are based on SQA attainment at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Literacy and Numeracy are rereported using The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The SCQF measure includes National Qualifications, National Progression Awards and Skills for Work courses.

5.2   **Insight Benchmarking Measures – Local Measures**

The exam results are available to schools in August each year and analysis of these results for cohort groups appear within the Insight Senior Phase Benchmarking toolkit in September. It is possible to profile school performance within the local measures and in the breadth and depth of awards gained by learners on a cohort-by-cohort basis (i.e. of S4, S5 and S6 pupils). This provides a holistic approach to:
- Improving attainment in Literacy and Numeracy
- Improving attainment for all
- Tackling disadvantage by improving the attainment of lower attainers relative to higher attainers.

5.3 **Virtual Comparator**

In each of the measures, performance of Highland schools and learners is compared to national attainment and that of our virtual comparator. The virtual comparator is made up of pupils from schools in other local authorities who have similar characteristics to those in Highland schools in terms of factors including stage, gender, additional support needs, and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

5.4 **Breadth and Depth**

Insight allows us to profile the breadth and depth of qualifications completed by learners in each year in the senior phase. The attainment data presented to Committee within this report is collated from SQA results across the senior phase and will cover the following:

• S4 breadth and depth attainment at SCQF level 5 and National 5
• S5 breadth and depth attainment at SCQF level 6 and Higher
• S6 breadth and depth attainment at SCQF levels 6 and 7 plus, Higher and Advanced Higher

5.5 **Tariff Score Methodology**

In the local measures of Improving Attainment for All, learner performance is measured by the number of tariff points they have accrued during the Senior Phase. The number of tariff points a young person accrues in their school career is currently based on their 'latest and best performance' i.e. if a learner achieves an A pass at National 5 in S4 this would accrue 84 points but would be superseded by their performance at Higher in the same subject in S5 and again by performance at Advanced Higher in S6. The points are not aggregated for an improved performance in a given subject area. The complementary tariff measure is the sum of tariff points accumulated across the latest and best achievement in subjects which a learner has achievement. Complementary tariff points as that gives a truer reflection of a young person's attainment regardless of school curricular models.

5.6 The impact of the different approaches to assessment and certification over the past four years means that care should be taken when making comparisons over time. The Scottish Government has cautioned and advised against comparing 2019/20 attainment data with attainment in other subsequent sessions due to the different attainment patterns seen in 2020. The 2020 data therefore has not been included in this report. Many SQA courses had modifications to the courses and assessments during sessions 21/22 and 22/23 in response to the disruption to learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These modifications helped to reduce the volume of assessment and provide more time for learning and teaching of course content, while maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualifications which was welcomed by school staff and learners. In Session 2023/24, almost all courses have returned to full pre-pandemic assessment procedures with the re-introduction of coursework or projects.

6. **Attainment in the Senior Phase 2023-24 – Local Measures**

6.1 **Improving Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy**

The graphs and tables below show the percentage of leavers attaining literacy and numeracy at SCQF levels 5 and 6, compared to the virtual comparator and National

figures. These show that Highland is in line or ahead of the virtual comparator and in line with National across most awards.

Both S6 and S5 literacy attainment is in line with the virtual comparator. In S4, the literacy awards are above the Virtual Comparator, and this has been the case for 4 of the past 5 years.

S6 numeracy has been above the virtual comparator for the past 2 years and in 2024 the attainment is in line with national. Similarly, in S5, numeracy awards are above the virtual comparator in 2023 and 2024. In S4, level 5 awards have been below the virtual comparator in 2023 and 2024.

We will continue to promote appropriate pathways to meet the needs of all young people in literacy and numeracy. We will pay particular attention to reviewing our S4 numeracy pathways to ensure pupils are supported to be on suitable pathways which deliver senior phase qualifications in numeracy.
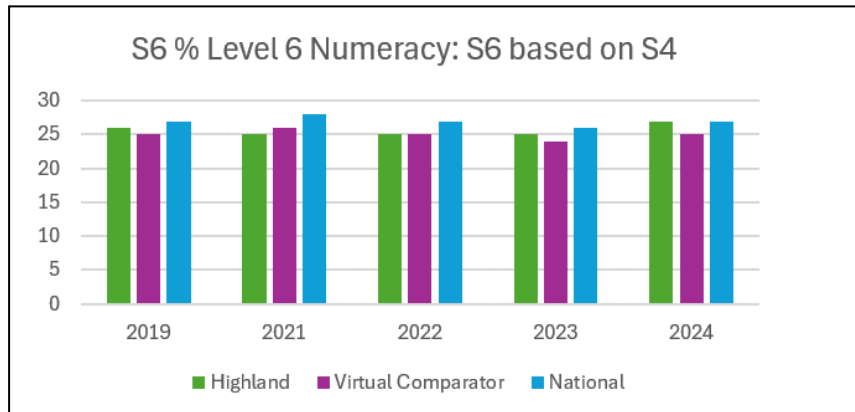
Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Literacy in S6

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	53%	55%	56%	52%	51%
Virtual Comparator	53%	55%	55%	51%	51%
National	54%	56%	57%	54%	53%
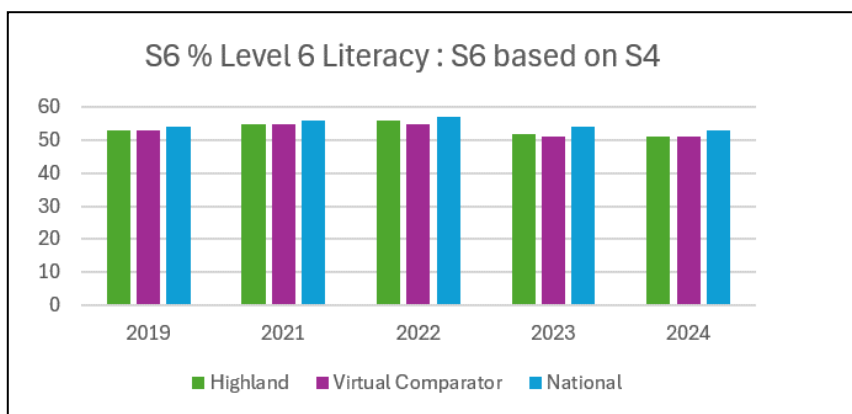
Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Numeracy in S6

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	26%	25%	25%	25%	27%
Virtual Comparator	25%	26%	25%	24%	25%
National	27%	28%	27%	26%	27%

Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Literacy in S5

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	49%	51%	49%	46%	46%
Virtual Comparator	49%	51%	47%	47%	46%
National	51%	52%	50%	49%	48%
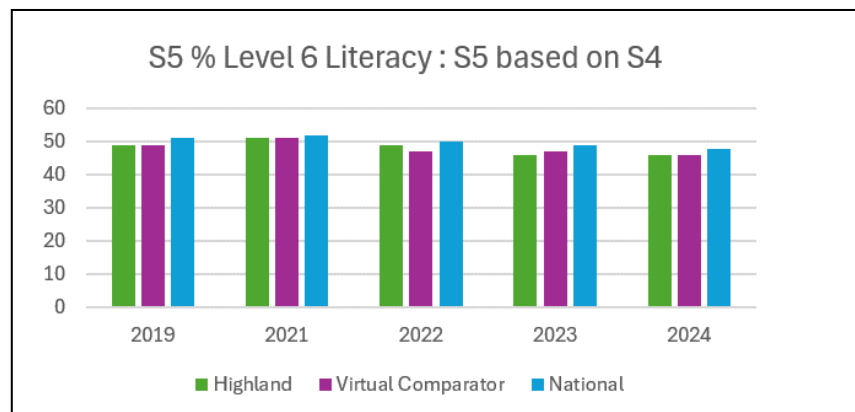
Attainment at SCQF Level 6 Numeracy in S5

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	23%	20%	20%	23%	22%
Virtual Comparator	23%	23%	21%	22%	21%
National	25%	24%	23%	24%	23%
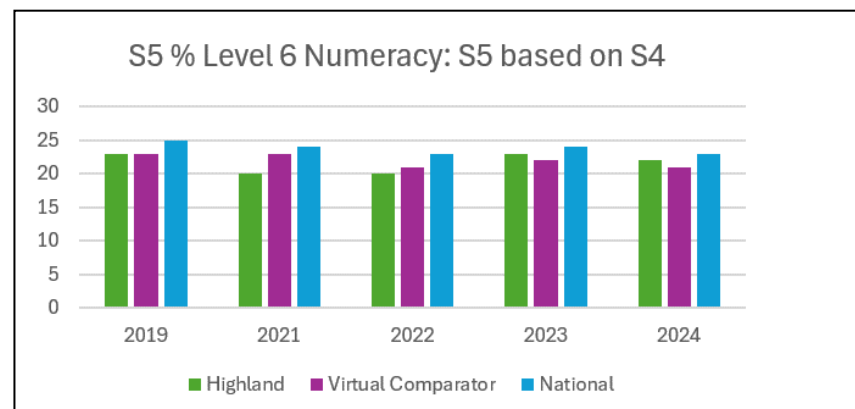
Attainment at SCQF Level 5 Literacy in S4

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	74%	73%	75%	74%	75%
Virtual Comparator	70%	71%	73%	74%	73%
National	74%	73%	75%	76%	75%

S4 % Level 5 Literacy : S4 based on S4
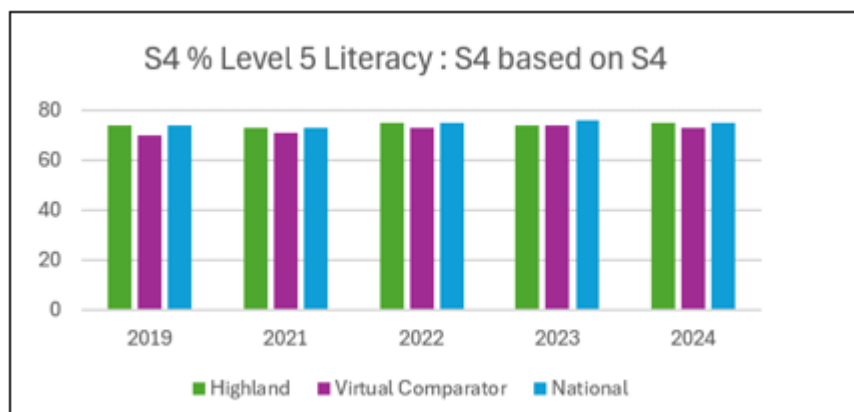
Attainment at SCQF Level 5 Numeracy in S4

|	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	53%	50%	59%	59%	57%
Virtual Comparator	56%	54%	60%	62%	61%
National	64%	64%	62%	56%	61%

S4 % Level 5 Numeracy: S4 based on S4
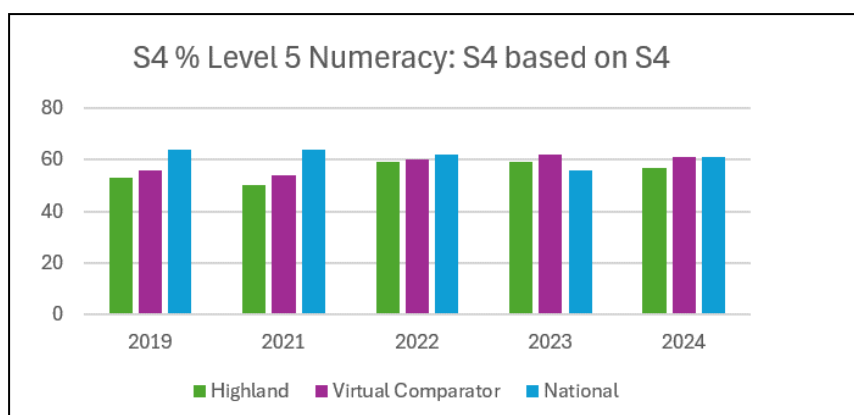
6.2 **Improving attainment for all**

Each qualification on the Scottish Certificate and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is attributed a number of tariff points. The higher level of qualification, the more tariff points are attributed. Each pupil gains a number of points that represents the number and level of qualifications they have gained. This report uses complementary tariff points, which measures a fixed volume of learning. Complementary tariff points allow for fair comparison across Scotland, regardless of differences in curricular models.

The graphs and tables below show the average complementary tariff points for cohorts in 2024, based on the attainment of the lowest 20%, middle 60% and highest 20%.
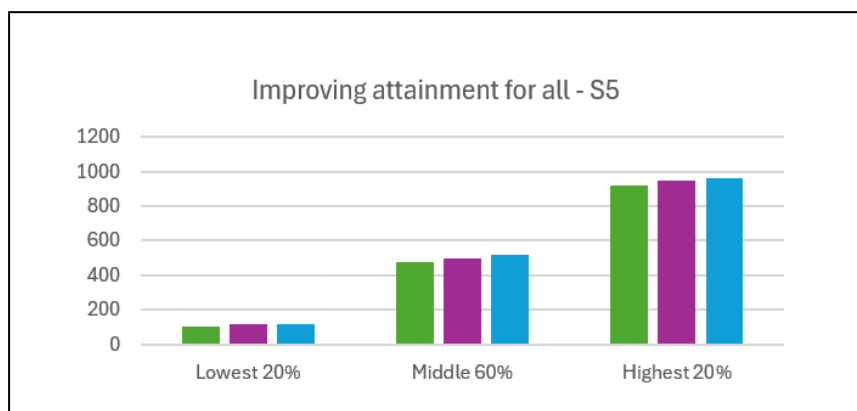
Attainment for all in S6

Improving attainment for all – S6 Average Complementary Tariff Points			
	Highland	Virtual Comparator	National
Lowest 20%	112	123	123
Middle 60%	579	594	613
Highest 20%	1244	1248	1269
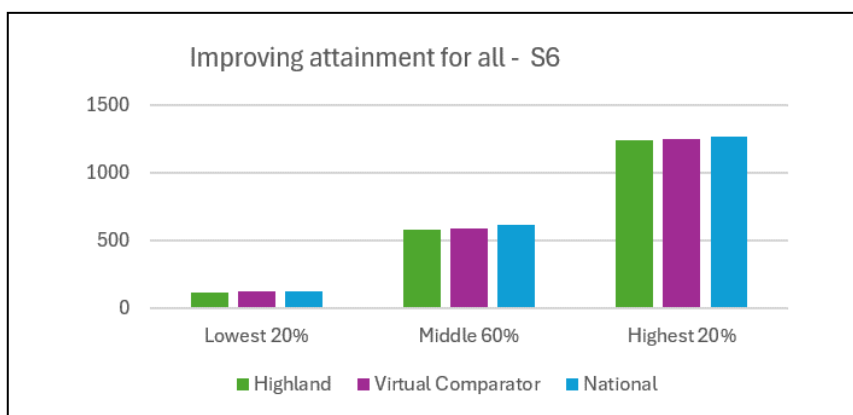
Attainment for all in S5

Improving attainment for all – S5 Average Complementary Tariff Points			
	Highland	Virtual Comparator	National
Lowest 20%	105	113	117
Middle 60%	475	496	518
Highest 20%	922	948	959

Attainment for all in S4

Improving attainment for all – S4 Average Complementary Tariff Points			
	Highland	Virtual Comparator	National
Lowest 20%	70	83	89
Middle 60%	309	311	318
Highest 20%	427	426	426
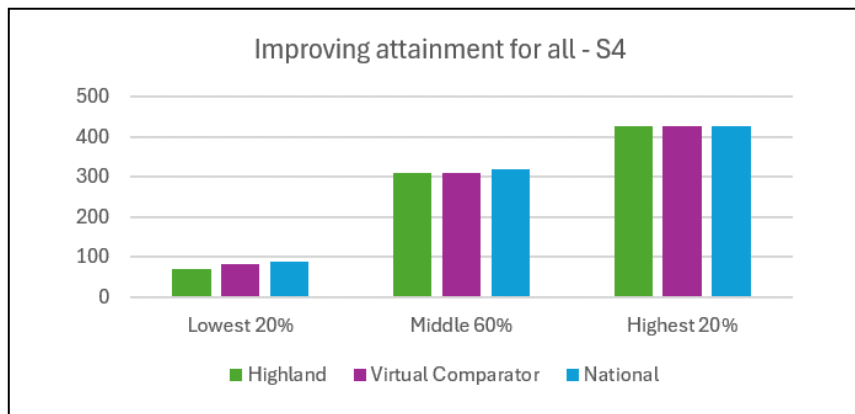
The attainment of the highest 20% is in line with the virtual comparator in S6 and S4, while in S5 it is lower than the virtual comparator. The attainment of the middle 60% is in line with the virtual comparator in S4, while it is below in both S5 and S6, although not identified as statistically significant. Similarly, the attainment of the lowest 20% is lower than the virtual comparator, although again not identified as statistically significant.

In the coming session, we will be working with schools to ensure presentation policies are enabling young people to have appropriate pathways to allow all their attainments and achievements to be recognised. We will also continue our focus on delivering the highest quality learning and teaching experiences for all young people through the implementation of our learning & teaching standard.

6.3 **Breadth and Depth Attainment data for Year Stage based measures for 2023-24.**

In addition to the key measures available in Insight, the service also looks at the percentage of the cohort who achieved any number of awards at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. These are known as 'breadth and depth' measures. This data is looked at in conjunction with the Insight measures to gain a broader understanding of attainment.

<u>Attainment at SQA Level 7 in S6</u>

Over the period 2020 to 2024, the percentage of learners attaining 1+ Awards at Advanced Higher in S6 has decreased and is 1%. below that our Virtual comparator. The percentage reduction in Highland from 2020 to 2024 is in line with that seen in both the National and the Virtual comparator.

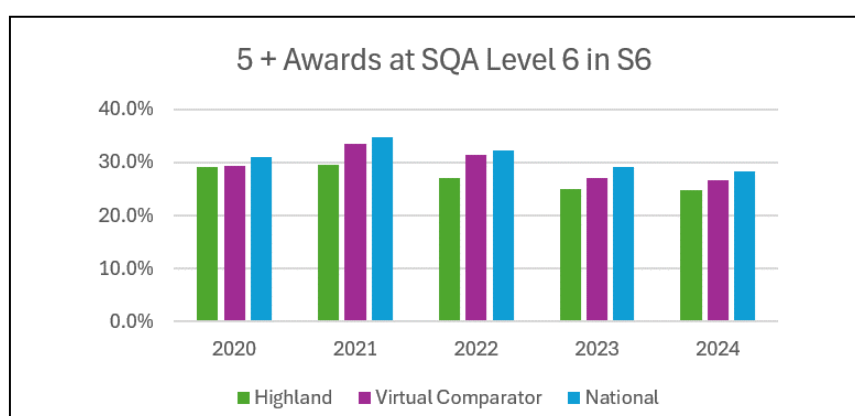|	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	19.2%	20.9%	19.0%	18.9%	17.2%
Virtual Comparator	21.1%	23.2%	22.0%	18.8%	18.3%
National	22.0%	23.8%	22.5%	20.6%	19.4%

1+ Awards at SQA Level 7 in S6
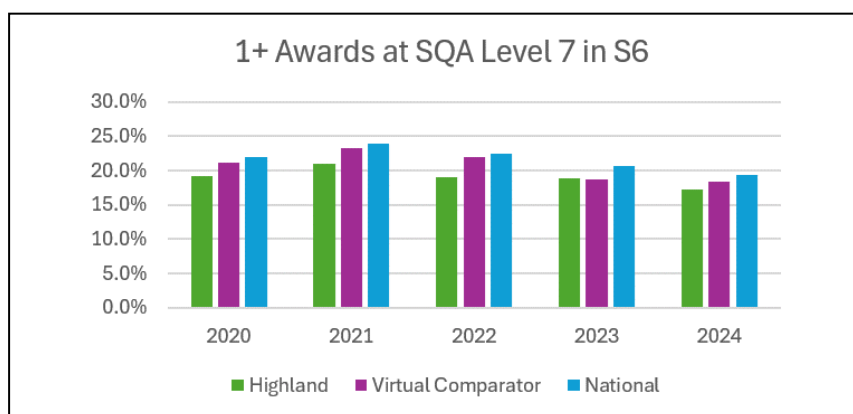
6.2 Attainment at SQA Level 6 in S6

Over the period 2022 to 2024, the percentage of learners attaining 5+, 3+ and 1+ Awards at SQA Higher in S6 has decreased or remained unchanged. This is in line with a similar decrease of both the Virtual comparator and the National cohort. Highland's attainment for 5+ awards at Higher in S6 remained unchanged in 2023 and 2024 with a decreasing gap to both the Virtual comparator and National cohort. A similar trend is noted in the 1+ Higher awards in S6 which remained unchanged from 2023. The 3+ awards has declined over the period 2022 to 2024 but to a lesser extent than the decline in the Virtual comparator and National cohort.
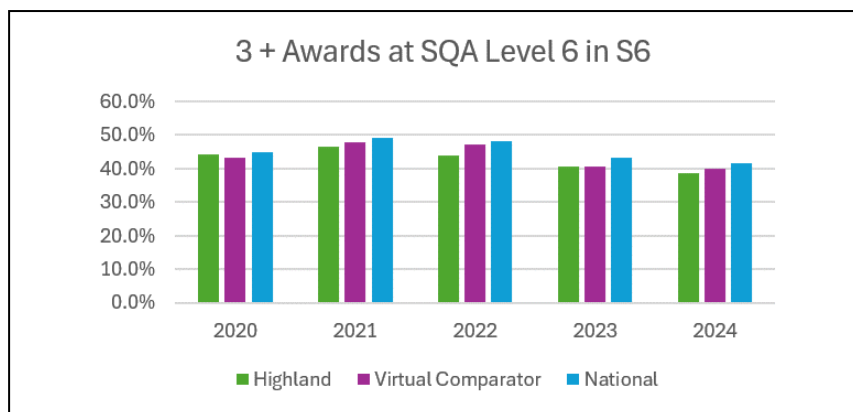
5 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S6

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	29.0%	29.5%	26.9%	24.8%	24.8%
Virtual Comparator	29.3%	33.5%	31.4%	27.0%	26.5%
National	31.0%	34.6%	32.2%	29.1%	28.3%

5 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S6

3 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S6

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	44.2%	46.6%	43.9%	40.5%	38.7%
Virtual Comparator	43.3%	48.0%	47.3%	40.7%	39.9%
National	44.9%	49.3%	48.1%	43.4%	41.7%

3 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S6

1 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S6

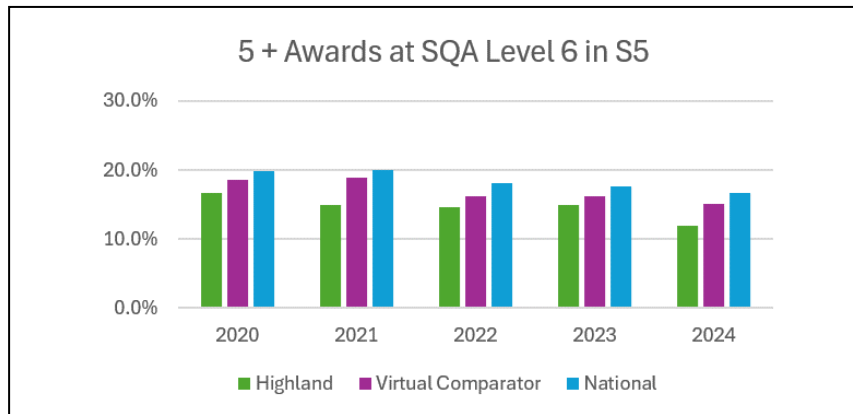|	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	59.3%	62.2%	62.4%	57.2%	57.3%
Virtual Comparator	59.1%	62.6%	62.9%	57.2%	56.3%
National	60.9%	63.9%	64.1%	60.0%	58.1%

1 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S6
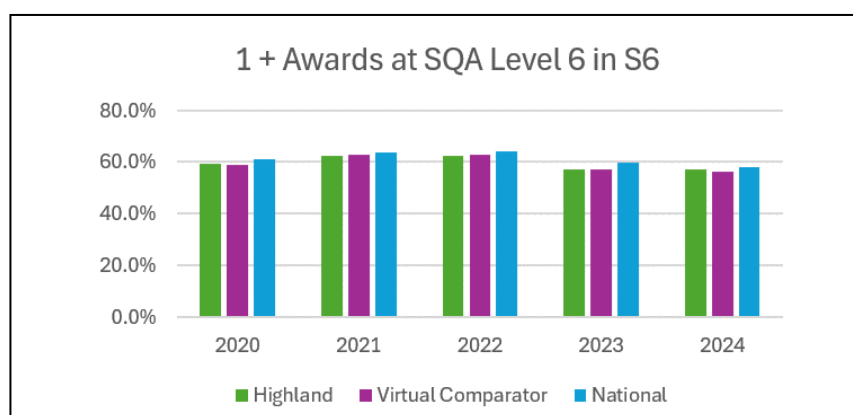
6.3 **Attainment at SQA Level 6 in S5**

Over the period 2022 to 2024, the percentage of learners attaining 5+, 3+ and 1+ Awards at SQA Higher in S6 has decreased as has both the virtual comparator and the National cohort.

5 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S5

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	16.6%	14.9%	14.6%	14.9%	11.9%
Virtual Comparator	18.5%	18.9%	16.2%	16.2%	15.0%
National	19.8%	20.0%	18.1%	17.6%	16.7%

3 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S5

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	38.5%	36.0%	34.7%	32.5%	28.7%
Virtual Comparator	39.1%	40.8%	35.1%	33.5%	31.1%
National	40.6%	41.7%	37.7%	35.5%	33.5%
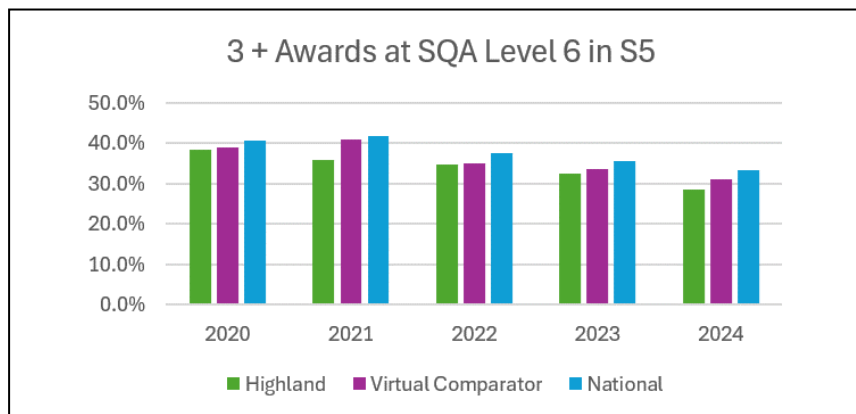
1 + Awards at SQA Level 6 in S5

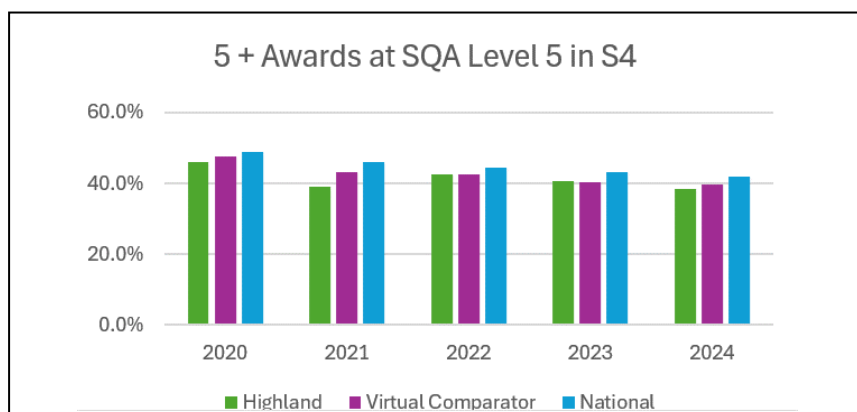|	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	58.5%	58.8%	54.6%	53.9%	49.6%
Virtual Comparator	58.8%	60.4%	54.6%	53.8%	51.3%
National	60.0%	61.6%	57.4%	55.3%	53.5%
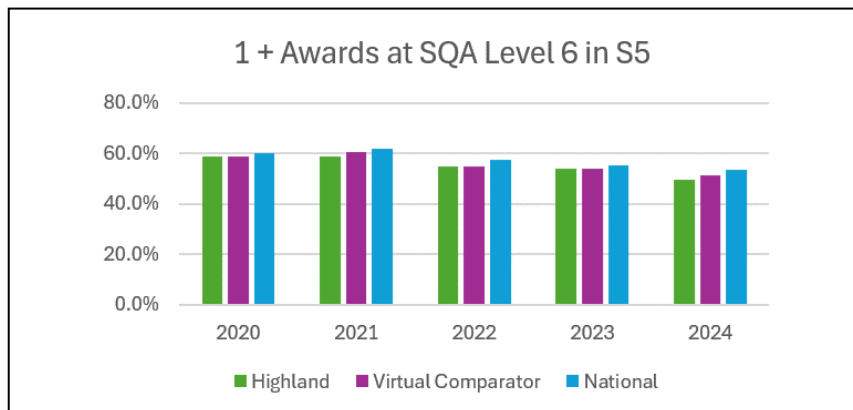
6.4 **Attainment at SQA Level 5 in S4**

Highland, National and Comparator results all show a reduction from the previous year. For 1 + Awards at SQA National 5 in S4, Highland's performance is better than both

the National cohort and Virtual comparator, while the 3+ Awards are in line with the Virtual comparator.

5 + Awards at SQA Level 5 in S4

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	46.0%	39.0%	42.4%	40.4%	38.4%
Virtual Comparator	47.4%	43.1%	42.5%	40.4%	39.7%
National	48.8%	45.9%	44.4%	42.9%	41.8%

3 + Awards at SQA Level 5 in S4

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	66.5%	61.9%	61.3%	58.6%	57.5%
Virtual Comparator	64.7%	61.8%	60.5%	58.5%	57.7%
National	65.8%	64.4%	61.9%	60.7%	59.6%
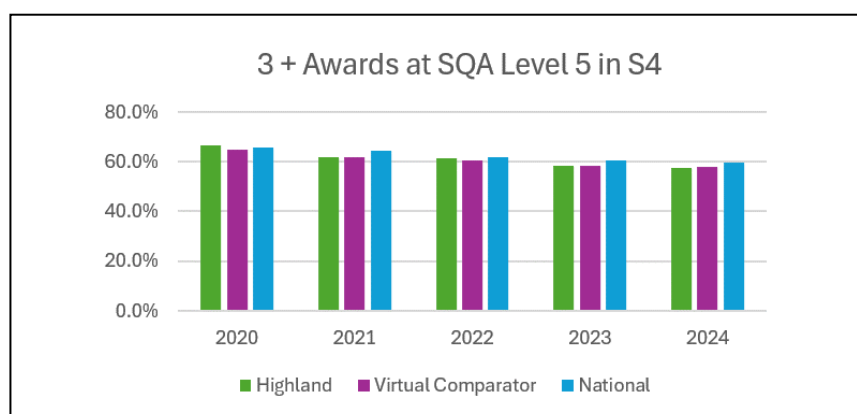
1 + Awards at SQA Level 5 in S4

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Highland	85.0%	82.5%	81.4%	80.4%	79.5%
Virtual Comparator	81.9%	80.9%	80.7%	79.2%	77.9%
National	82.8%	82.4%	81.3%	80.6%	79.3%

1+ Awards at SQA Level 5 in S4

■ Highland ■ Virtual Comparator ■ National
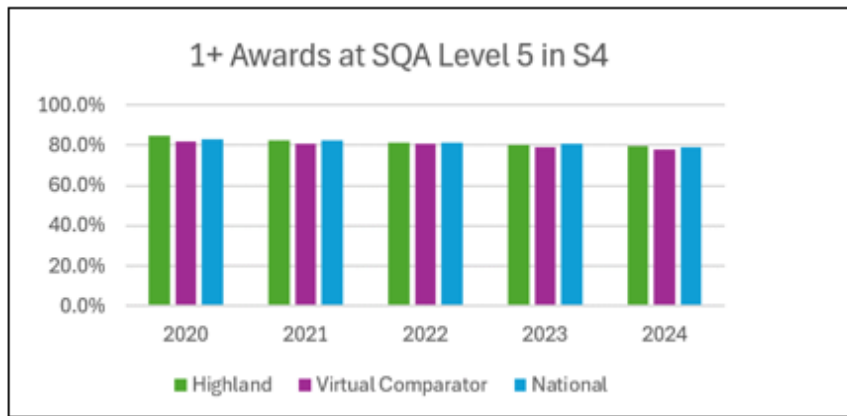
6.5 <u>Attainment versus deprivation</u>

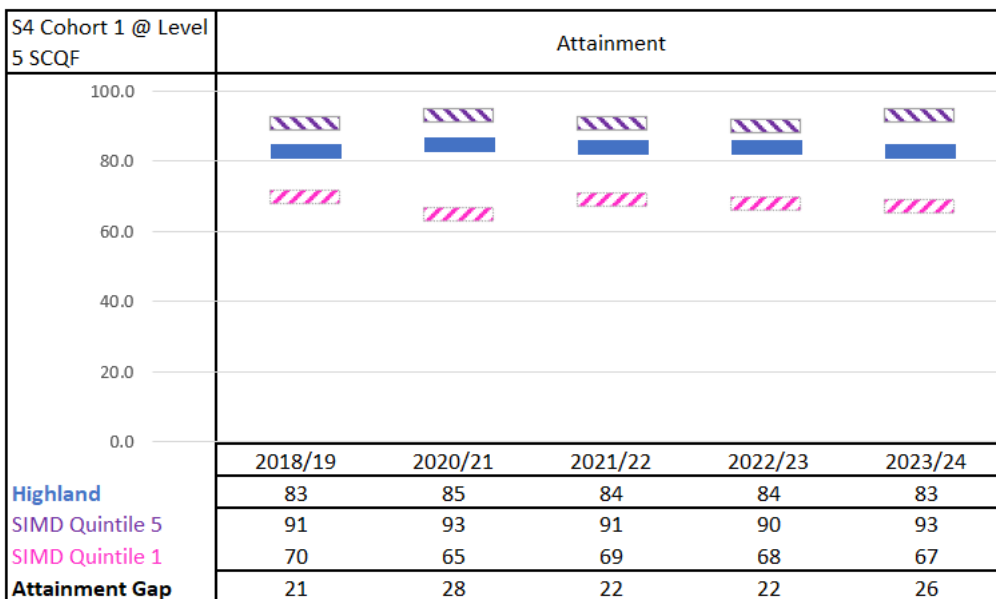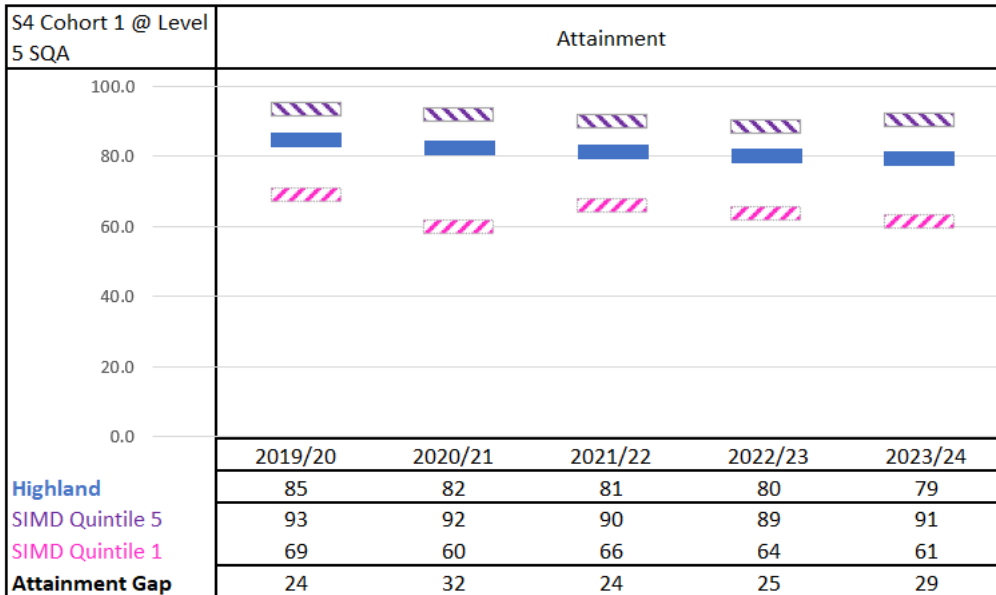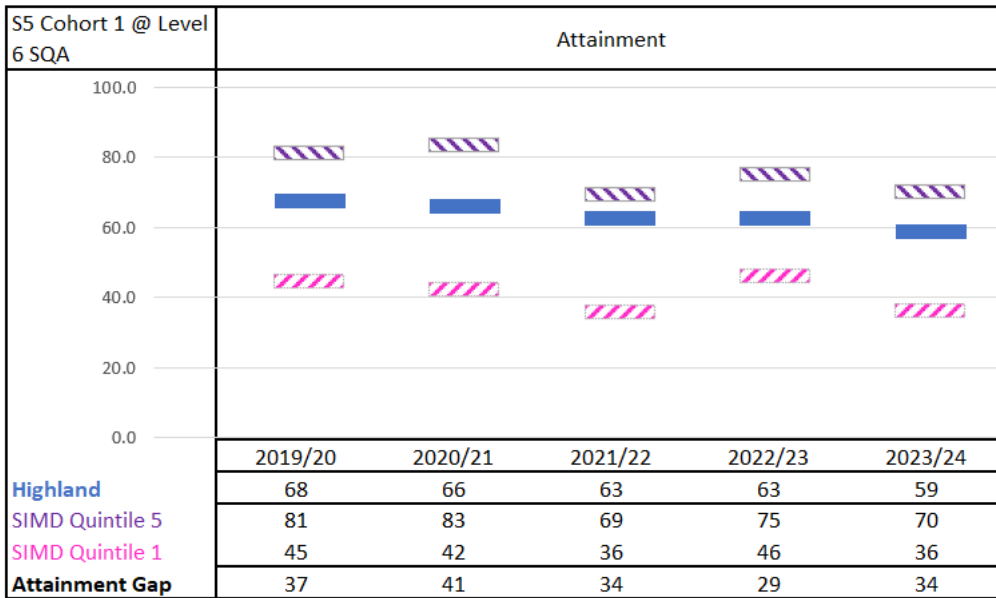The attainment of learners in quintiles 1 and 5, compared to the Highland average is shown in the following graphs. The difference between quintile 1 and quintile 5 is the attainment gap.

Last year a concerning decline in S6 attainment for Quintile 1 learners was highlighted to Members. During session 2023-24, meetings took place with schools specifically focusing on S6 attainment, to agree next steps in improving the attainment of this cohort.

The attainment in 2024 for the S6 Quintile 1 cohort has shown an increase with 64% of the cohort gaining a National 5 award compared to 57% in 2023. This has resulted in a corresponding decrease in the attainment gap. The attainment gap for the S5 cohort decreased in session 2023. However, the gap has again widened in 2024. Secondary schools with quintile 1 learners have been asked to closely monitor the attainment of this cohort during this session and focus tailored support for individuals as needed. A similar focus will be placed on the attainment of the S4 cohort where the gap has again widened. Schools will be asked to ensure resources are directed to the young people when the tracking of their attainment is indicating they are requiring additional inputs to succeed at National 5.

S6 Cohort 1 @ Level 6 SQA	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Highland	84	87	83	81	83
SIMD Quintile 5	90	96	93	88	91
SIMD Quintile 1	69	76	65	57	64
Attainment Gap	22	20	27	30	26

S5 Cohort 1 @ Level 6 SQA

Attainment

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Highland	68	66	63	63	59
SIMD Quintile 5	81	83	69	75	70
SIMD Quintile 1	45	42	36	46	36
Attainment Gap	37	41	34	29	34

S4 Cohort 1 @ Level 5 SQA

Attainment

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Highland	85	82	81	80	79
SIMD Quintile 5	93	92	90	89	91
SIMD Quintile 1	69	60	66	64	61
Attainment Gap	24	32	24	25	29

S4 Cohort 1 @ Level 5 SCQF

Attainment

	2018/19	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Highland	83	85	84	84	83
SIMD Quintile 5	91	93	91	90	93
SIMD Quintile 1	70	65	69	68	67
Attainment Gap	21	28	22	22	26

7. **Next Steps /actions which will support improvement.**

Raising attainment across all schools and all stages is a priority for the service. With Members' approval, the Raising Attainment Action Plan created in 2022 will be reviewed and refreshed to ensure everyone in the system is clear on their role in raising attainment and improving outcomes for young people, including shared clarity about the measures of success.

The updated Highland Raising Attainment Strategy will include the introduction of Raising Attainment Boards, chaired by the Chief Officer for Secondary Education and reporting to the Assistant Chief Executive. The Raising Attainment Boards will be used to ensure focused and rigorous application of the strategy. The National Improvement Framework (NIF) Improvement Plan and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy will also be used to drive improvement in performance.

The Service has also undertaken a survey of schools asking what support they believe they need to assist them in improving attainment. The results of this will be analysed and further engagement events organised with head teachers which will feed into the review of the service structure. This will focus on establishing clear lines of responsibility running through the Service for raising attainment; and an area structure that provides a focus for support and challenge. Coupled with this will be a strong emphasis throughout the service on strengthening data analysis for improvement and self-evaluation.

School attendance is also a key area of focus as outlined in the NIF plan for 2024-25. Highland's secondary school attendance data over the last five years is showing a decline, albeit there has been some improvement across some year groups more recently.

Highland Secondary School Attendance

	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
S1	91.0%	88.0%	80.0%	89.0%	92.0%
S2	89.0%	85.0%	86.0%	86.0%	88.0%
S3	88.0%	85.0%	85.0%	83.0%	86.0%
S4	88.0%	85.0%	86.0%	86.0%	84.0%
S5	88.0%	85.0%	88.0%	86.0%	86.0%
S6	88.0%	86.0%	86.0%	87.0%	87.0%

There is a national concern about reduced levels of attendance since the COVID-19 pandemic. Progress, attainment, and achievements can be impacted by any absence and the higher the absence rate, the greater the impact.

A strategic plan for improving attendance will be developed, along with effective approaches to the tracking and monitoring of attendance and interventions. A focused programme, supported by Education Scotland, is already underway. This work will be supported by the refreshed GIRFEC procedures where partnership with families and other services will be used to ensure effective communication and support are in place to remove barriers that impact on attendance.

Members will have the opportunity to scrutinise individual Associate School Group performance data at area committees in the new year.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 8 November 2024

Author: Fiona Grant, Chief Officer Secondary Education