AGENDA ITEM
8

Report on Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Attainment in Secondary Schools in 2015/2016

Agenda Item 8

Falkirk Council

Title:	**Report on Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Attainment in Falkirk in 2015-16**
Meeting:	**Education Executive**
Date:	**21 March 2017**
Submitted By:	**Director of Children's Services**

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise on the attainment of young people leaving Falkirk Council's secondary schools in 2015-16. The report therefore focuses on point of exit data.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 The Education Executive is asked to:-

(1) note Falkirk Council secondary schools' attainment results
(2) to agree that Officers will work with the Quality Improvement Team to support and challenge schools in relation to tracking and monitoring of pupils progress, and curriculum design

3. Background

3.1 Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) comprises a broad general education up to the end of S3 followed by a senior phase of learning from S4 to S6.

3.2 During the senior phase a young person builds up a portfolio of qualifications. The senior phase offers flexibility in how a school designs its curriculum in order to meet the particular needs of its own school community.

3.3 This report utilises the INSIGHT data for the first time to report on attainment in Falkirk. Members were notified of this change at the Education Executive on 29th March 2016.

4. Considerations

4.1 The flexibility of approach offered by CfE should be considered when making comparisons in pupil performance. Schools and local authorities vary in the number of courses undertaken by young people during the senior phase.

Schools are currently reassessing their senior phase structures in light of their experience since the introduction of new qualifications in 2014, and Education Scotland advice.

4.2 The performance information for Falkirk Council schools in this report is benchmarked against the national average and a 'Virtual Comparator'. The Virtual Comparator (VC) is made up of pupils from schools in other local authorities who have similar characteristics to the pupils in our schools, based on: gender; Additional Support Needs (ASN); levels of deprivation; and leaving stage. The VC calculation takes no account of characteristics such as Looked After status or Level of English, nor does it take account of varying curriculum structures. The VC benchmark should therefore be viewed with some caution.

4.3 As reported previously, Falkirk Council was one of a small number of local authorities where some schools adopted a policy of early presentation, with pupils gaining SQA qualifications in S3. The impact of this early presentation is still being felt in the performance information reported through Insight (the Scottish Government's benchmarking tool), as any attainment gained in S3 is excluded from the performance figures. This will have an impact on those measures that refer to the Tariff Points gained by pupils at the point of exit. It will also have an impact on the literacy and numeracy measures described below (Sections 4.9 and 4.13 respectively).

4.4 S6 leavers who are part of the cohort being reported on here are the last group of pupils to have gained SQA qualifications in S3. We therefore expect that 2016 will be the last year in which our figures are adversely affected by early presentations.

4.5 The Insight data shown in this report covers a five year period, and therefore includes performance information pre-dating the first diet of CfE qualifications in 2014. The Scottish Government has retrospectively calculated prior performance by aligning old and new qualifications. However, some caution should be used when making comparisons over time, especially in literacy and numeracy measures.

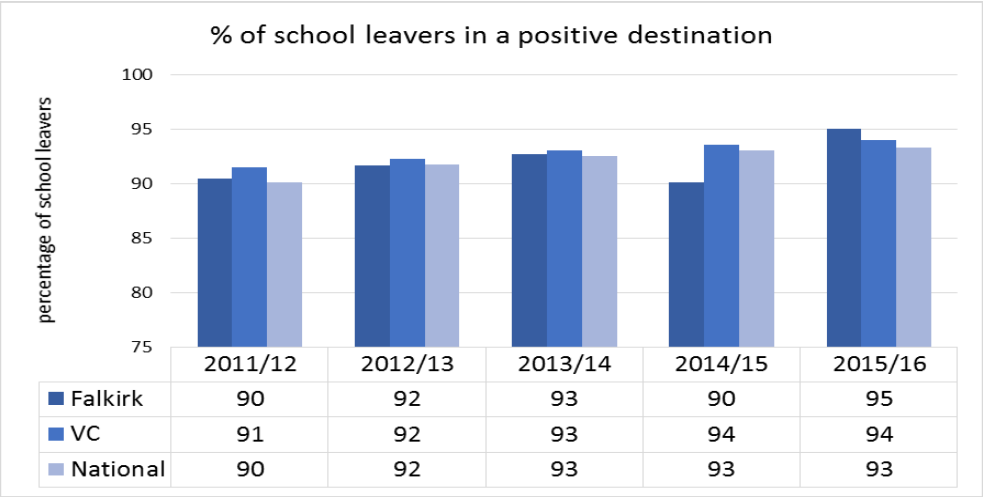
<u>School Leaver Destinations</u>

4.6 The chart below shows the percentage of school leavers entering a positive destination over the past 5 years. It compares Falkirk Council with the Virtual Comparator and with the national average.

4.7 Falkirk schools have seen an improving trend over the past decade with the exception of 2014/15. The drop in performance in 2014/15 was apparent rather than real and this was rectified in the Follow-Up data on the same group of leavers gathered in March 2016.

4.8 2015/16 saw a resumption of the positive trend and the percentage of young people entering a positive destination on leaving school is now the highest it has ever been for Falkirk Council schools. It is now higher than both the

national average and the VC figure.



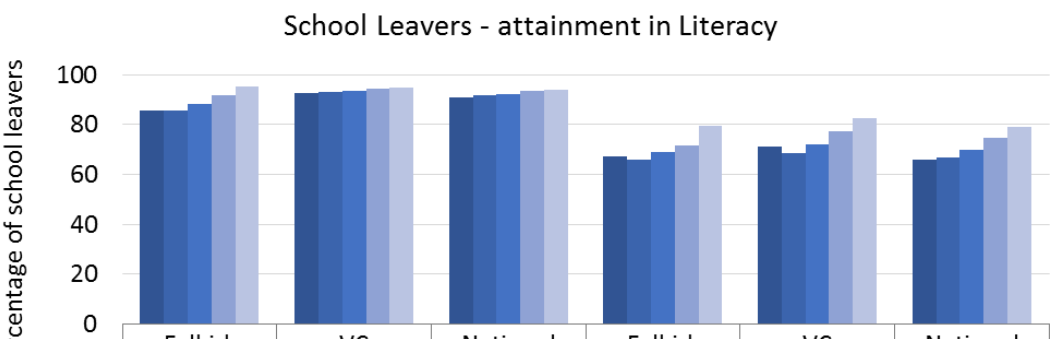
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Falkirk	90	92	93	90	95
VC	91	92	93	94	94
National	90	92	93	93	93

Improving attainment in Literacy

4.9 Raising the literacy attainment of our young people is a priority of Falkirk Council schools. Improved literacy, in turn, allows young people to access the full curriculum and move on to a positive destination.

4.10 Several courses are included in the literacy performance measure in Insight, of which English is one. The key criterion is that the main function of the qualification improves literacy skills.

4.11 The chart below shows that the attainment of school leavers in literacy has been improving steadily in Falkirk Council schools over recent years, and is now higher than the national average at SCQF level 4 and 5. However, in relation to the VC, there is further work to be done in raising literacy attainment at level 5. It should be noted, though, that the figure is still adversely affected by early presentations in English in S3.



	Level 4			Level 5		
	Falkirk	VC	National	Falkirk	VC	National
2012	86	93	91	67	71	66
2013	86	93	92	66	69	67
2014	88	94	92	69	72	70
2015	92	95	94	72	77	75
2016	95	95	94	80	82	79

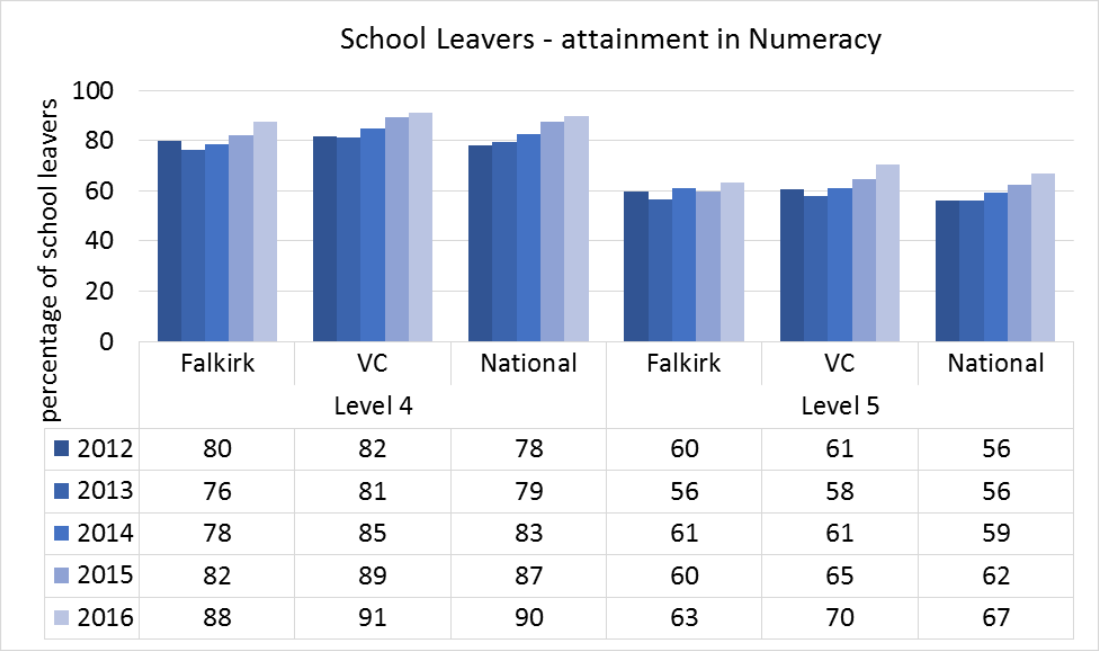
4.12 Schools have achieved this progress in literacy levels over time through a focus on developing literacy across the curriculum led by school-appointed literacy co-ordinators.

<u>Improving attainment in Numeracy</u>

4.13 As with literacy, more than one course or Unit contributes to the numeracy measure in Insight. Numeracy remains a key skill for young people in learning, life and work.

4.14 The chart below shows that, although Falkirk Council schools' performance in numeracy at level 4 has been improving over recent years, it is still slightly behind the national average.

4.15 At level 5, Falkirk Council schools' numeracy performance has fluctuated over recent years and remains lower than the national average.



	Level 4			Level 5		
	Falkirk	VC	National	Falkirk	VC	National
2012	80	82	78	60	61	56
2013	76	81	79	56	58	56
2014	78	85	83	61	61	59
2015	82	89	87	60	65	62
2016	88	91	90	63	70	67

4.16 The Service now requires to take a closer look at curricular arrangements and progression pathways within the senior phase with a view to raising numeracy attainment at the point of exit.

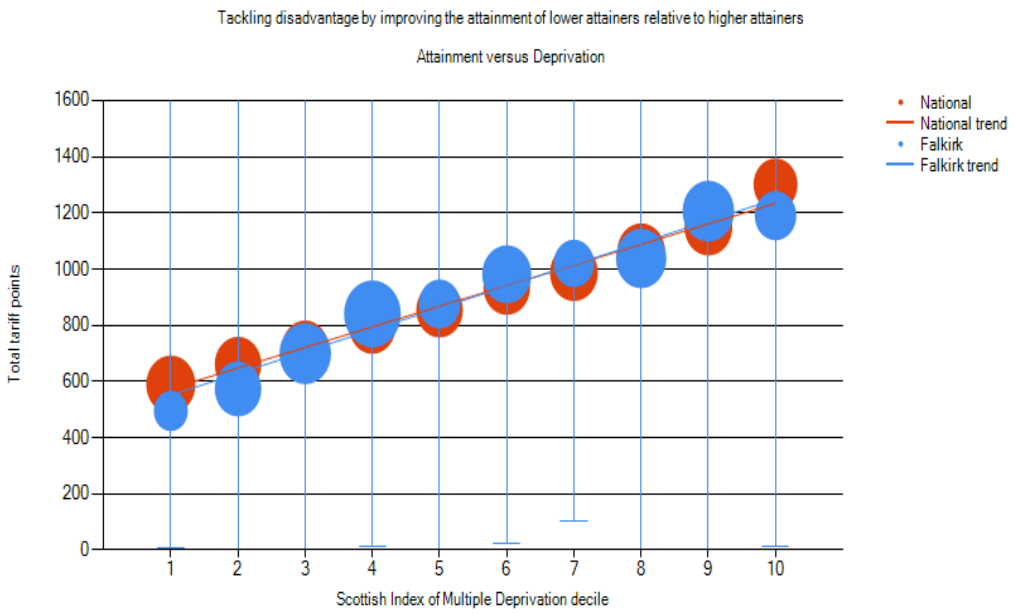
<u>Closing the poverty related attainment gap</u>

4.17 Tackling disadvantage and ‘closing the gap’ are key priorities both nationally and for Falkirk Council schools. This is reflected in the Pupil Equity Funding which is about to be allocated to schools on the basis of their deprivation profiles.

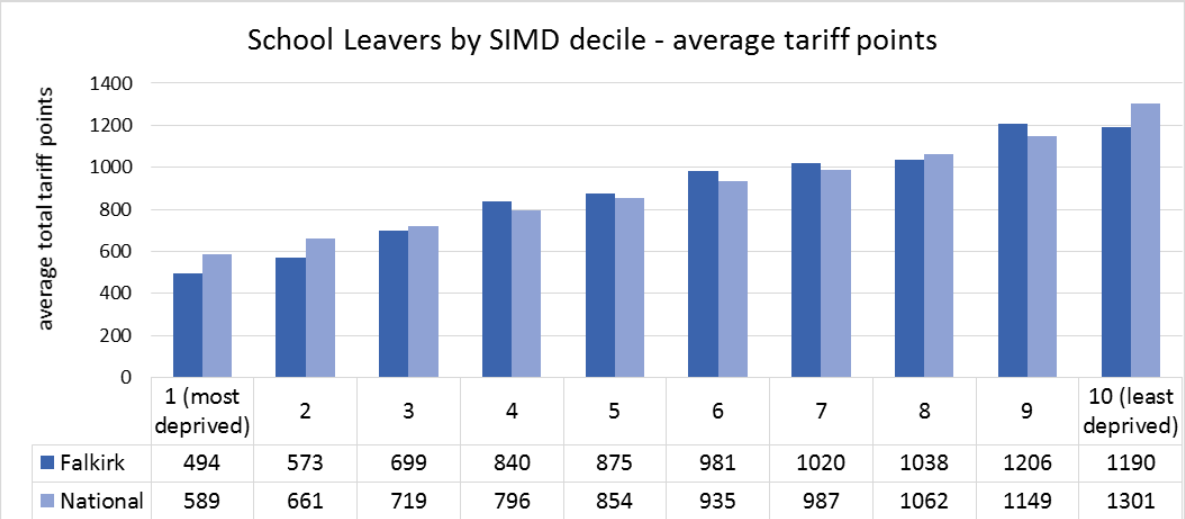
4.18 The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) allows local authorities to access pupil level deprivation information to help in analysing attainment. Showing attainment by SIMD decile allows schools to identify where targeted intervention is required.

4.19 The chart below shows the average tariff points of Falkirk Council’s school leavers compared with the national average, broken down by the SIMD decile in which they live.

4.20 The size of the ‘bubbles’ in the chart is proportional to the percentage of the cohort who are in that SIMD decile. It clearly shows an ‘attainment gap’, with pupils living in more deprived areas having significantly lower attainment than pupils living in less deprived areas. This is a local and a national pattern.



4.21 The chart shows that, for 2016, there is an expected relationship between deprivation and attainment. However, in that year Falkirk Council schools' performance in decile 1 and 2 (the most deprived) was lower than the national average, whilst performance in decile 9 was above the national average. Alternatively, this can be illustrated in the chart below.



	1 (most deprived)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (least deprived)
Falkirk	494	573	699	840	875	981	1020	1038	1206	1190
National	589	661	719	796	854	935	987	1062	1149	1301

4.22 Through the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) agenda, schools are already offering young people wider opportunities to develop skills for learning, life and work. It should be noted that some of these wider achievements and awards will not be captured within this tariff data.

4.23 Schools are currently in the process of planning targeted work in 2017-18 to close the gap with the support of Pupil Equity Funding.

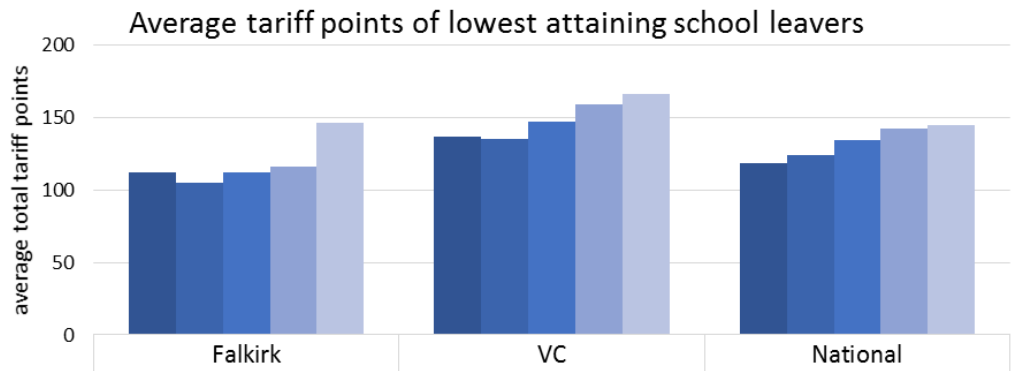
<u>Improving attainment for all</u>

4.24 This is a national benchmarking measure which examines the 'spread' of attainment across the cohort. It compares the performance of the lowest

attaining pupils with the middle and highest attaining pupils, with a view to improving attainment for all pupils.

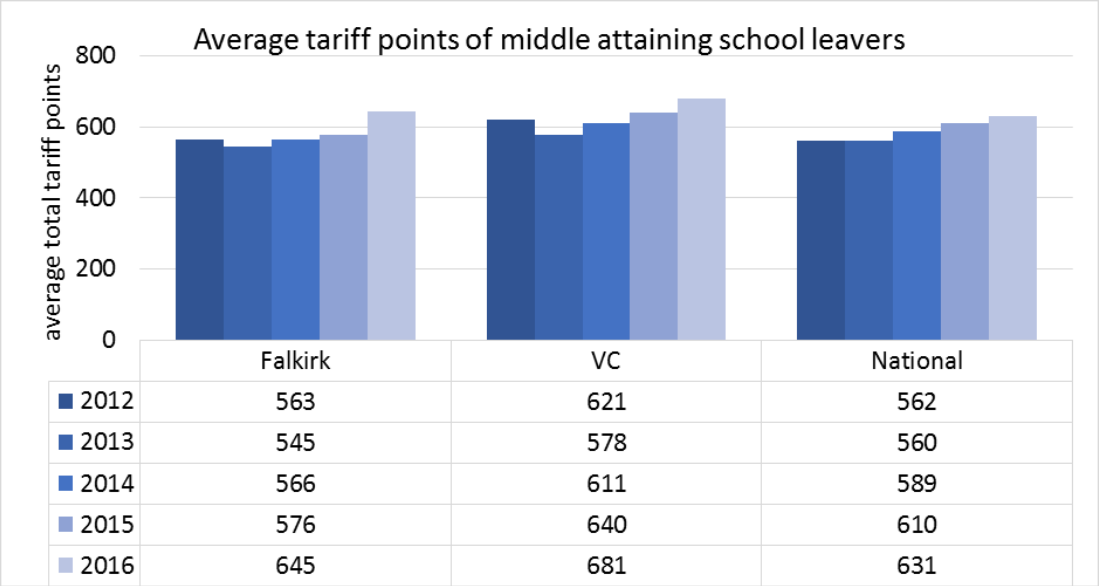
4.25 As with some of the other measures, Falkirk Council schools' performance will have been partly affected by excluding S3 attainment. This will particularly be the case for the lowest attaining pupils many of whom will not progress to higher levels of qualification.

4.26 The chart below shows the average tariff points for Falkirk's lowest attaining 20% of school leavers, compared with the VC and the national average. 2016 saw a significant improvement in Falkirk Council schools' performance which is now marginally higher than the national average.

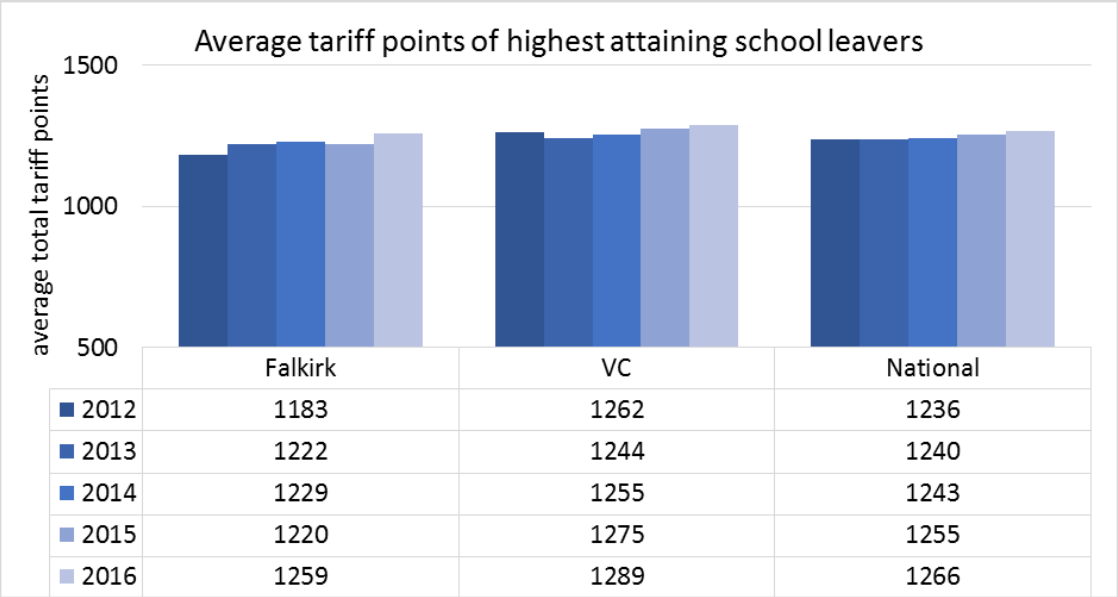


	Falkirk	VC	National
2012	112	137	118
2013	105	135	124
2014	112	147	134
2015	116	159	142
2016	146	166	145

4.27 The chart below shows the average tariff points for the middle attaining groups of school leavers. Again, 2016 saw a significant improvement in Falkirk Council schools' performance which is now slightly higher than the national average.



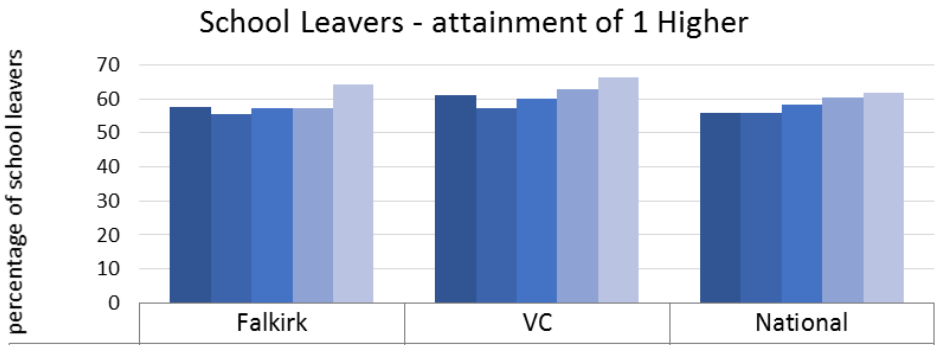
4.28 The chart below shows the average tariff points for the highest attaining 20% of school leavers, comparing Falkirk Council schools with the VC and the national average. Although 2016 saw an improvement in Falkirk Council schools' performance, it is still slightly below the national average.



Attainment at SCQF Level 6 (Higher)

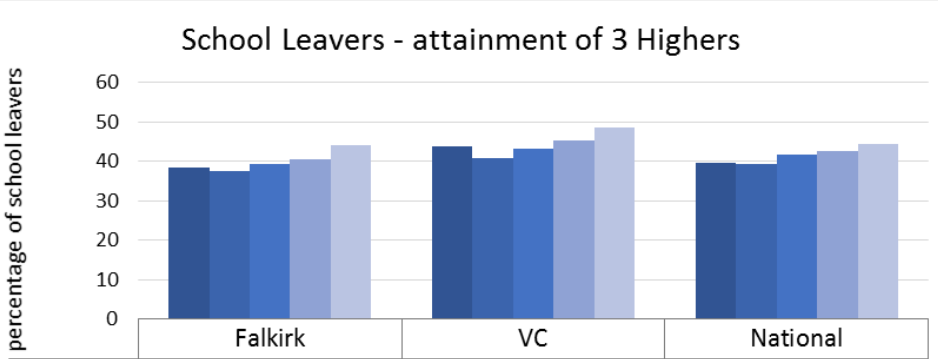
4.29 As attainment at Higher level remains the key to accessing further and higher education, it is important that we continue to monitor performance in these measures.

4.30 The chart below shows the percentage of young people leaving Falkirk Council schools with 1 or more Highers (A-C), compared with the VC and the national average. Falkirk Council schools' performance has remained fairly static in recent years, however a significant increase in 2016 has taken us above the national average.



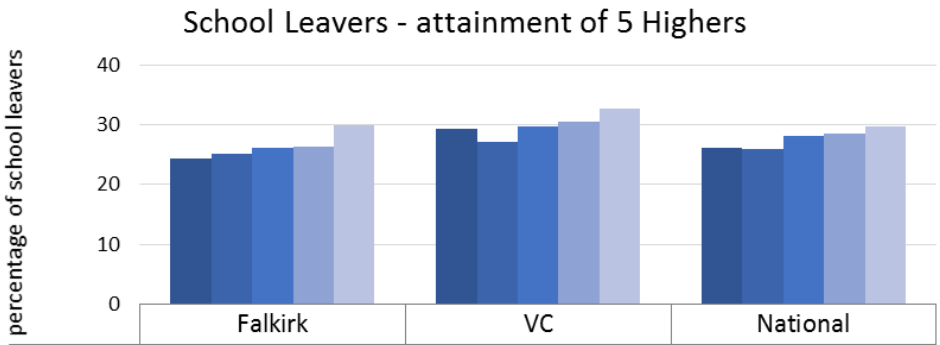
	Falkirk	VC	National
2011/12	58	61	56
2012/13	56	57	56
2013/14	57	60	58
2014/15	57	63	60
2015/16	64	66	62

4.31 The chart below shows the percentage of young people leaving Falkirk Council schools with 3 or more Highers (A-C), compared with the VC and the national average. Falkirk Council schools' performance has been improving in recent years. The increase in 2016 means our performance now equals the national average.



	Falkirk	VC	National
2011/12	38	44	40
2012/13	37	41	39
2013/14	39	43	42
2014/15	40	45	43
2015/16	44	48	44

4.32 The chart below shows the percentage of young people leaving Falkirk Council schools with 5 or more Highers at grades A to C, compared with the VC and the national average. Falkirk Council schools' performance has been improving over recent years. The increase in 2016 means our performance now equals the national average.



	Falkirk	VC	National
2011/12	24	29	26
2012/13	25	27	26
2013/14	26	30	28
2014/15	26	31	29
2015/16	30	33	30

5. Consultation

5.1 Nil.

6. Implications

Financial

6.1 Nil.

Resources

6.2 Nil.

Legal

6.3 Nil.

Risk

6.4 Nil.

Equalities

6.5 Nil.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.6 Nil.

7. Conclusions

7.1 This report provides an update on a range of measures within the Insight tool relating to the latest cohort of school leavers. Analysis of these measures reinforces the Service's identification of strengths and development needs.

7.2 This report will be further developed to account for the revised data set from Insight to provide Members with more granular information. A report will be brought to the Education Executive in September.

_____

Director of Children's Services

Author – Tony Bragg, Team Manager Senior Phase 01324 506600,
tony.bragg@falkirk.gov.uk
Date: 1st March 2017

Appendices

None

List of Background Papers:

None