



Agenda Item 9

**Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
Attainment in Falkirk Secondary
Schools (2020)**

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Attainment in Falkirk Secondary Schools (2020)
Meeting: Education, Children and Young People Executive
Date: 27 October 2020
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides information on the initial analysis of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) attainment within Falkirk Council secondary schools in 2020. Appended is the report on the analysis of outcomes for school leavers following Insight publication of February 2020. By February 2021, Insight data will take account of outcomes for school leavers and will include national and comparator authority figures. These will be reported to Committee in the spring of 2021.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Education, Children and Young People Executive is asked to:

- (1) note the SQA attainment of Falkirk Council secondary schools;**
- (2) note the full attainment profile of Falkirk Council school leavers and the recommendations as noted in Appendix 1; and**
- (3) agree that a future report will be presented to the Education, Children and Young People Executive in the spring of 2021 to take account of updated and additional SQA and other attainment data.**

3. Background

- 3.1 At this stage, information on SQA results comes solely from the SEEMIS management information system and reports on passes in National 3 and 4 courses and A - C passes of graded courses within the National Qualifications framework. SEEMIS reports are limited at this stage solely to SQA performance and do not take account of other non-SQA accredited courses.
- 3.2 The figures below do not take account of any pupils gaining awards following referral to the SQA's Post Results service (which replaced Appeals on the introduction of Nationals and New Highers).
- 3.3 Figures will be updated by the Scottish Government's Insight benchmarking system later in the year and this will include results from SQA unit awards, and SQA and non-SQA vocational courses. It will also include:

- HNCs, which pupils from a number of schools study at Forth Valley College as well as within some schools;
- Foundation Apprenticeships;
- ASDAN – e.g. Certificate of Personal Effectiveness;
- Duke of Edinburgh – e.g. Leadership Certificate but not Bronze, Silver or Gold;
- Open University – Young Applicants in Schools (YASS);
- Prince's Trust – e.g. Personal Development and Employment;
- RUTS – e.g. BikeFix Leadership Award;
- Youth Scotland – e.g. Dynamic Youth Awards; and
- SQA Qualifications such as National Progression Awards e.g. Enterprise and Employability, Leaderships Award, Volunteering Skills, Personal Finance, Internet Safety, Cyber Security. (These are being used by schools as an alternative to National 5 and Higher courses and to supplement National 4 courses, particularly in S5.)

3.4 COVID19

- The COVID19 pandemic caused the 2020 SQA exam diet to be cancelled. As a result, the SQA developed an alternative certification model for 2020, with estimated grades as a key element of certification.
- Teachers are best placed to have a strong understanding of how their learners have performed and, based on their experience and the evidence available, what a learner would be expected to achieve in each course. An estimated grade is not just the result of one prelim or one project, but is an overall judgement based on activity across the year.
- Schools provided the SQA with their estimates of the grades, bands and rank order for each learner, for each course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.
- The original methodology for awarding SQA results was to validate and moderate these estimated grades to ensure consistency across schools and with results from previous years. This process caused a large proportion of estimates to be downgraded and a small number of estimates to be upgraded.
- The Scottish Government made the decision to reverse the downgrading of teacher estimates but to retain any upgraded results. The figures shown in this report are the final results awarded after this amendment to the methodology.

4. Considerations

4.1 SQA Attainment in S4

- This report shows comparisons between performance in National Qualifications in 2019/20 and the previous three years.
- The attainment of pupils in S4 is given in the table below expressed as a percentage of the total S4 roll.

	2017	2018	2019	2020
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 3 or better	87	88	88	93
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 4 or better	81	81	81	88
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 5 (A-C) or better	38	41	44	54

- Performance has improved at Level 3, Level 4 and Level 5. All of these S4 measures are now at their highest level to date.
- Whilst the statistic follows the improvement trend of schools' attainment, caution should be applied to the measure to incorporate the implications of SQA moderation and standardisation methodology being applied in the positive only.
- This is a positive picture; and has been achieved by schools supporting and encouraging students to attain at higher levels through an aspirational presentation policy.

4.2. Attainment by the End of S5

- Initial data relating to attainment in 2019/20 by the end of S5 is shown in the table below.
- All figures are quoted as a percentage of the original S4 roll who have achieved the relevant number and level of awards (at A-C) by the end of S5.

	2017	2018	2019	2020
1 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	57	58	56	61
3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	34	35	32	41
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	15	14	16	19

- Performance has improved in all of these S5 measures, which are all now at their highest level to date.
- Whilst the statistic follows the improvement trend of schools' attainment, caution should be applied to the measure to incorporate the implications of SQA moderation and standardisation methodology being applied in the positive only.
- The differential in the Higher qualification statistics for 1 or more awards and 3 or more awards is attributed to a range of strategies including; a broad range of appropriate qualification pathways on offer to pupils in their senior phase. The improvement in the level of qualifications will show through in the second attainment report, which will be presented in the New Year, and will include all qualifications at levels 2-7 on the SCQF Framework including Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression Awards NCs and HNCs.
- As with attainment in S4, this is also a positive picture as students have been supported and encouraged to achieve more awards at level 6.

4.3 Attainment by the End of S6

- All figures are a percentage of the original S4 roll who have achieved the relevant number and level of awards (at A-C) by the end of S6.

	2017	2018	2019	2020
3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	45	45	45	46
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	31	31	30	32
1 or more awards at SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Higher) or better	18	18	16	18

- Performance has improved in all of these S6 measures, which are all now at or equal to their highest level to date.
- Again, whilst the statistic follows the improvement trend of schools' attainment, caution should be applied to the measure to incorporate the implications of SQA moderation and standardisation methodology being applied in the positive only.
- The differential in the Higher and Advanced Higher qualification statistic is again attributed to the wider range of appropriate qualification pathways on offer to pupils in their senior phase. The improvement in the level of qualifications will show through the second attainment report which will be presented in the New Year, and will include all qualifications at levels 2-7 on the SCQF Framework including Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression Awards and HNCs

4.4 School Leavers Attainment (See **Appendix I**)

- Note the following features :
 - continued positive trend in attainment
 - sustained improvement in the school leaver destinations profile
 - evidence of closing the poverty related attainment gap

4.5 Action within the Authority – Senior Phase

- Education officers and head teachers are now engaging in analysis of the detailed results in order to have a clarity of understanding of the outcomes of the 2020 exam diet.
- School staff are experienced in the detailed analysis of SQA examination results. Each faculty head reports to a member of the senior management team in their school to account for attainment in the subjects for which they are responsible. Together they develop an action plan to improve identified areas, such as teachers' planning, teaching strategies and approaches to assessment.
- Each pupil's progress is tracked by the class teacher in conjunction with a member of the school's pastoral team. Pastoral heads have a detailed knowledge of individual pupils' circumstances – their home background, attendance and other factors that might affect progress – and can advise class teachers regarding these so that realistic attainment targets for each young person can be set.
- Schools increasingly identify groups of pupils at risk of not achieving and provide additional support for them. This can take the form of lunchtime or after-school study support clubs. In many of our schools pupils can also access 1 to 1 intervention and peer mentoring and support.
- IT is used to support pupils in their study, with teachers increasingly using IT-based resources to motivate pupils. Pupils are also directed towards IT-based resources they can access at home to support their studies. Heriot Watt University's SCHOLAR programme provides online resources and individual tuition which pupils can access in school and at home.
- Faculty heads from across the authority continue to meet as Curriculum Management Groups (CMGs) to identify strategies for improvement across broad areas of the curriculum and within specific subject areas.
- As teachers' experience of teaching National and new Higher courses continues to grow, confidence in identifying the appropriate standard has also grown resulting in more accurate assessment and prediction of performance. Falkirk Council schools' SQA Nominees and Markers are key to supporting shared knowledge of standards. A number of teachers have taken up roles as SQA Appointees, who lead teams of Nominees from across a number of authorities and who, therefore, have the deeper understanding of SQA standards and knowledge of good practice.

- Authority officers will hold review meetings in each secondary school early in session 2020/21, at which attainment will be the key focus. School managers will account for:
 - (i) the impact of their tracking and monitoring of performance at individual pupil level;
 - (ii) (ii) the overall effectiveness of this in informing learning and teaching;
 - (iii) steps being taken to improve attainment in subjects where there is apparent underperformance; and
 - (iv) the attainment and achievements of vulnerable groups such as looked after children and those living in areas of relative deprivation.
- Authority officers and school managers will further develop the approaches to quality assurance and moderation to ensure robust, valid and reliable teacher judgement is in place. This will support the teachers in ensuring evidence is in place should a decision be made to postpone or cancel the 2021 exam diet.
- We recognise the impact of COVID 19 on youth unemployment, therefore, authority officers and School Managers will continue to work with partners ie. Skills Development Scotland, Falkirk Council Employment and Training Unit and Forth Valley College, to develop alternative strategies to ensure the impact of COVID 19 on 2020 school leaver destinations is minimised.
- Authority officers will continue to develop the increased support for school leavers through securing resource to deliver the 'Youth Guarantee' in partnership with the Employment and Training Unit.
- We will report on the impact and strategies for school leavers in the follow up attainment report in spring 2021.

5. Consultation

5.1 None.

6. Implications

Financial

6.1 None.

Resources

6.2 None.

Legal

6.3 None.

Risk

6.4 None.

Equalities

6.5 None.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.6 None.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The information provided in this report will be updated for the spring 2021 meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Executive when further and more detailed data is available.

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Director of Children's Services

Date:

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Appendices

Appendix I : Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) – Attainment and Destinations of School Leavers in Falkirk in 2018/19

List of Background Papers

None

**Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) – Attainment and Destinations
of School Leavers in Falkirk in 2018/19**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report was prepared for consideration at the meeting of 24 March 2020 which did not proceed due to COVID 19 pandemic.
- 1.2 This report follows on from the previous report to the Education Executive in September 2019 on the attainment of Falkirk's senior phase pupils in session 2018/19. The purpose of the current report is to advise on the attainment of young people leaving Falkirk Council's secondary schools in 2018/19. The report therefore focuses solely on point of exit data which represents the totality of their attainment data.

2. Recommendations

The Education, Children and Young People Executive is asked to:-

- (1) note Falkirk Council secondary school leavers' results for 2018/19;**
- (2) note the positive progress made by Falkirk Council pupils across a range of attainment measures; and**
- (3) request that the Director of Children's Services will continue to engage with schools on tracking and monitoring pupil's progress, and with partners in planning for positive leaver destinations.**

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 range of qualifications, following a curriculum pathway that best meets their needs and interests. The leavers cohort considered in this report will consist of young people exiting from the senior phase of their education. This comprises of pupils leaving at the end of S4, S5 and S6. The measures within the report tell us how well they have attained at their point of exit from school, and their destination beyond school (captured at a snapshot date on 7th October 2019).
- 3.3 The qualifications gained by our young people, the closing of the poverty related attainment gap and their destinations beyond school are some of the measures of the impact schools are having in the delivery of the Council's priorities contained within our Corporate Plan 2017-2022.

People:

- Raising aspiration and ambition
- Reducing the impact of poverty on children and their families

3.4 The Corporate priorities are translated into the Educational Division Improvement Priorities 2018-19 under:

- Raise attainment for **every** child and young person and enable them to make excellent progress through their learning journey from 3-18 years.
- Closing the poverty related attainment gap.
- Improve positive destinations for Falkirk's young people.

3.5 This report provides an overview of the progress our schools are making to deliver on these priorities by raising attainment for our young people.

4. Considerations

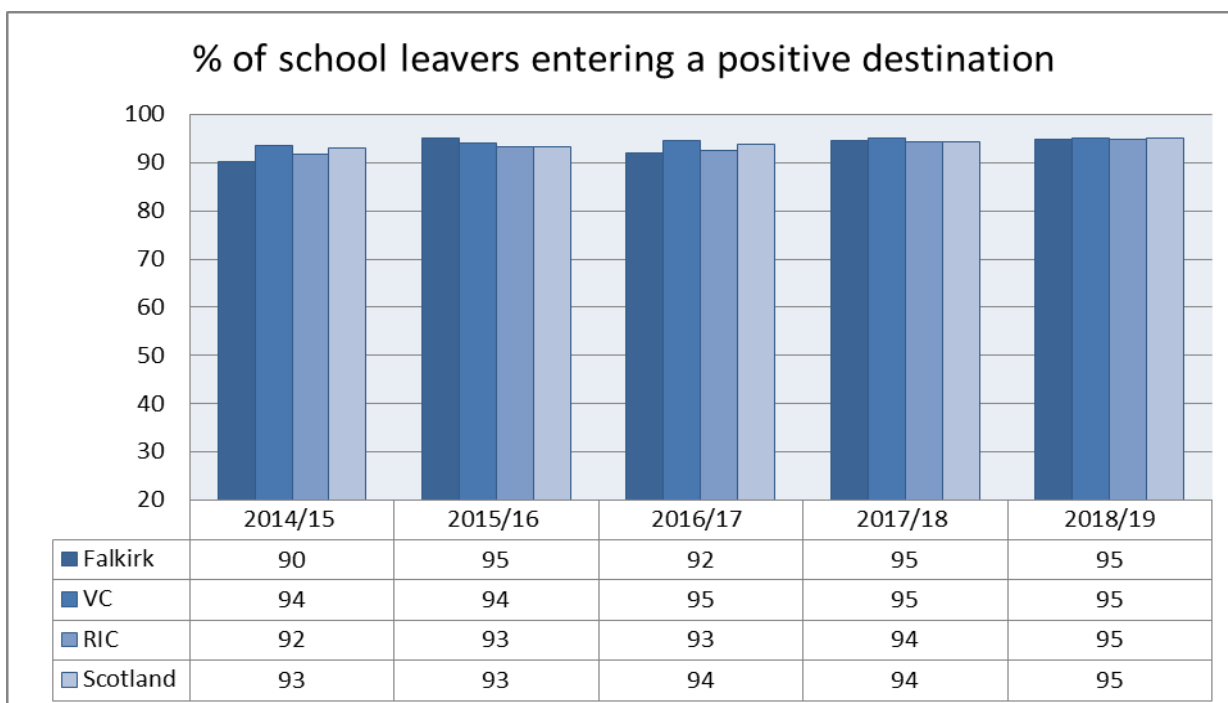
4.1 The performance information for Falkirk Council schools in this report is benchmarked against the national average, 'Virtual Comparator' (VC) and where available, against that of the Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) comprising of Falkirk, Stirling, Clackmannanshire and West Lothian Councils.

4.2 The VC is made up of pupils from schools in other local authorities who have similar characteristics to the pupils in our schools, based on their gender, additional support needs (ASN), level of deprivation (SIMD) 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 in schools.

School Leaver Destinations

4.3 In 2018/19, 1475 young people left Falkirk Council secondary schools – 152 at the end of S4, 422 in S5 and 901 in S6. The chart below shows the percentage of those school leavers entering a positive destination and compares Falkirk Council with the Virtual Comparator (VC), Forth Valley and West Lothian Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) and with the national average.

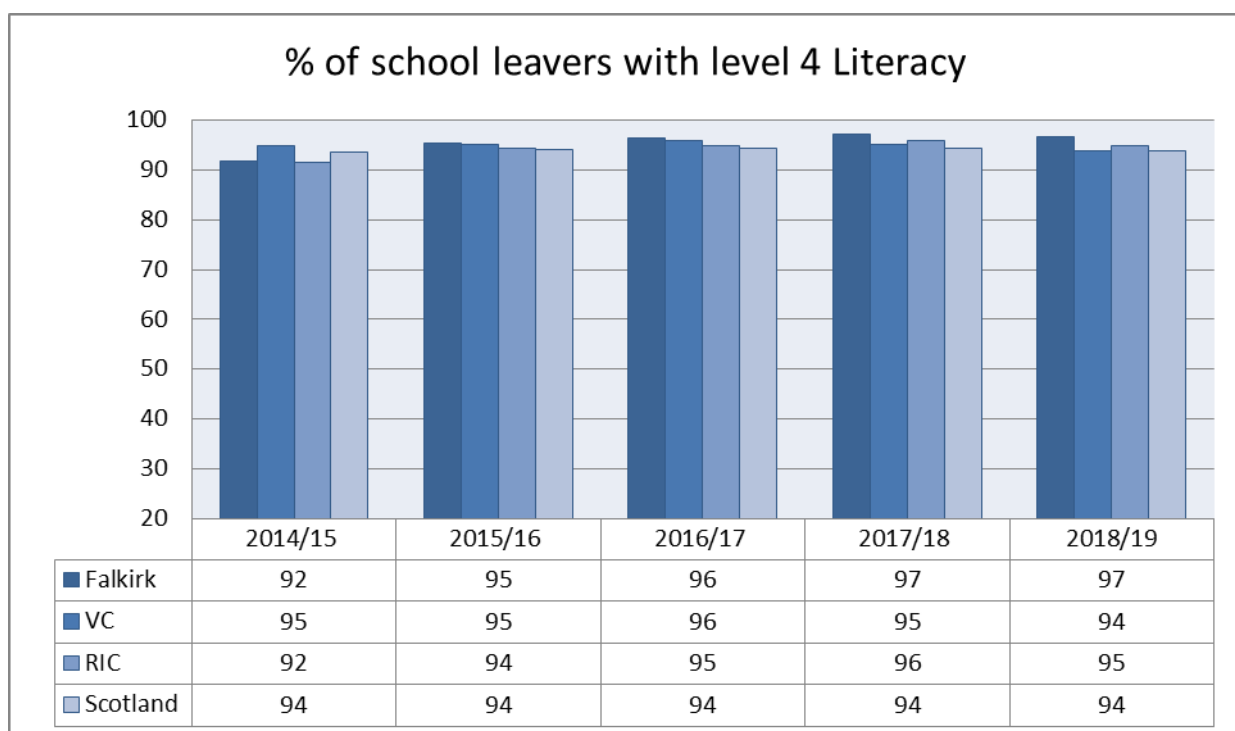
4.4 When ranked against other local authorities in Scotland, Falkirk ranks 14th in Scotland for positive leaver destinations. This places Falkirk in the second quartile in Scotland.



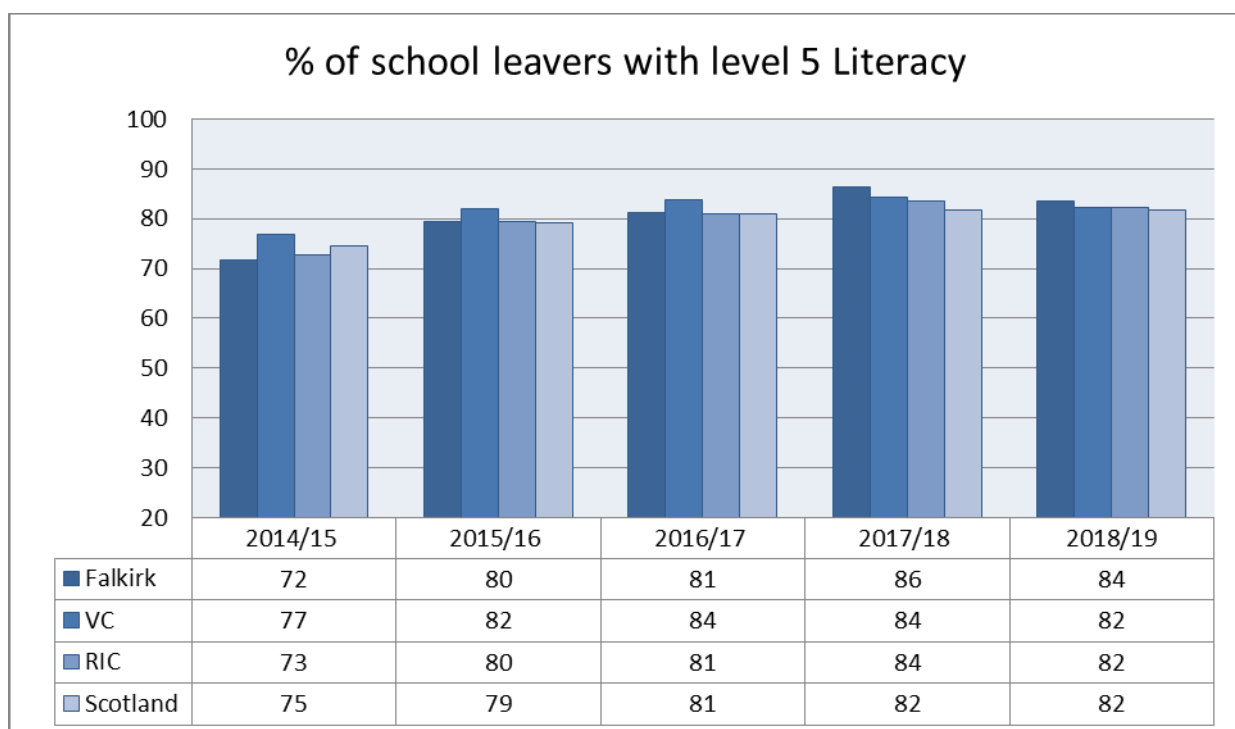
- 4.5 Falkirk schools have seen an improving trend over the past decade and the 2018/09 figure of 95% matches highest figure for Falkirk Council which was achieved in 2015/16 and again last year.
- 4.6 The percentage of Falkirk leavers in a positive destination at the time of the snapshot (7th October 2019) is in line with that of the VC, the RIC and the national average.
- 4.7 Of the 74 leavers not in a positive destination, 11 were *Unemployed Not Seeking*. This can be for a variety of reasons but is usually due to long term physical or mental health problems. Of the remaining 63 young people, 50 were *Unemployed Seeking*, and 13 were of *Not Known* status.
- 4.8 Compared to the previous year, 3% fewer school leavers from the 2018/19 cohort went into Further Education and Higher Education. However, there was a 4% increase in school leavers going straight into employment. This includes those young people who are going into apprenticeships.

Leavers' Attainment in Literacy

- 4.9 Raising attainment in literacy is a priority for Falkirk Council schools. Improved literacy, in turn, allows young people to access the full curriculum and move on to positive destinations.
- 4.10 The charts below show the attainment trend in literacy at Level 4 and Level 5. Level 4 literacy has improved year on year since the Curriculum for Excellence began in 2014. Performance in 2018/19 has equalled the highest level achieved by Falkirk schools, which was reached in 2017/18. The percentage of young people leaving school in Falkirk with at least level 4 Literacy is above the VC, the RIC and national average.



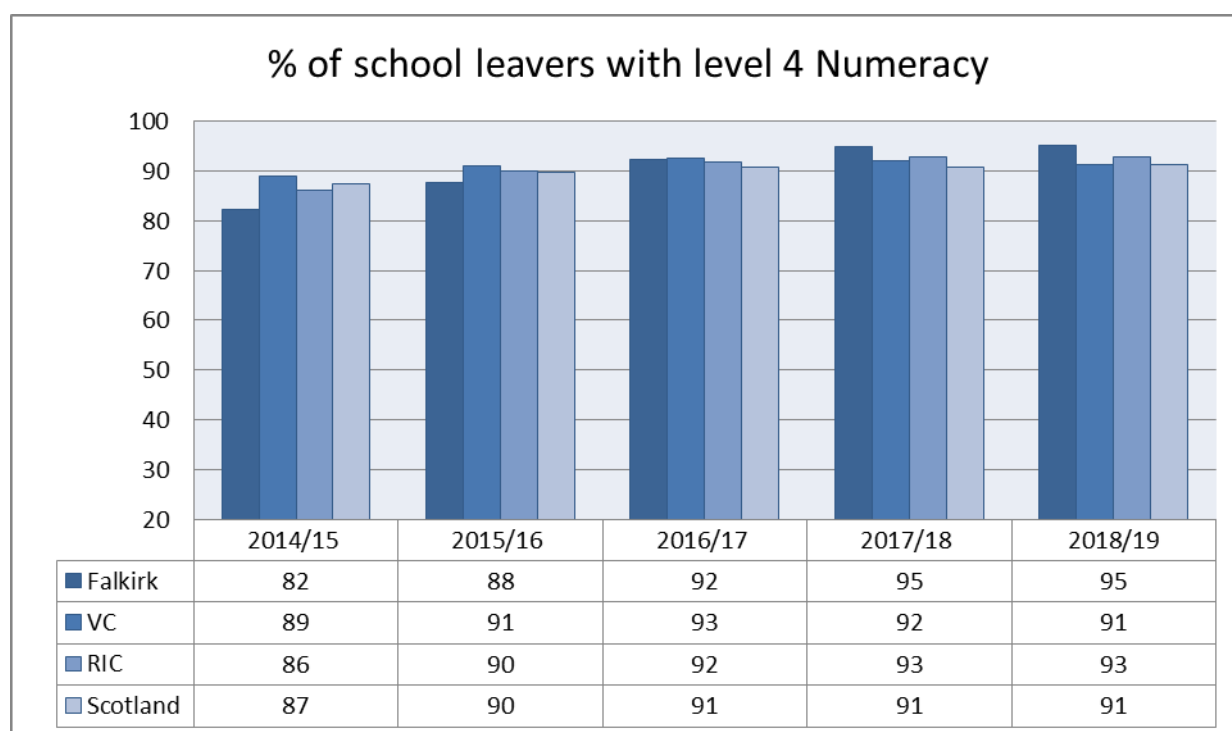
- 4.11 Level 5 literacy has shown a similar improving trend up to 2017/18 where there was a large increase on the year before. Although the 2018/19 figure shows a slight fall compared with 2017/18, the percentage of young people leaving school in Falkirk with Level 5 Literacy remains higher than it has been in any year previous to 2017/18 and is higher than the VC, the RIC and the national average.

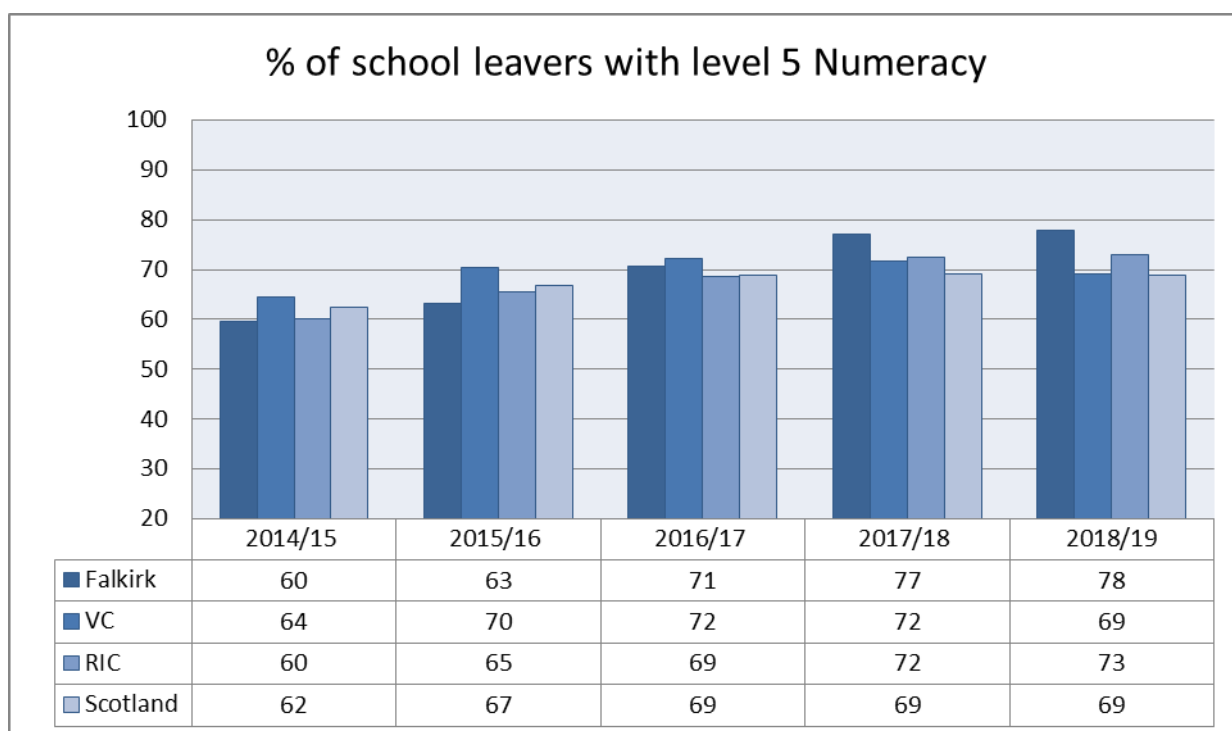


- 4.12 When ranked against other local authorities in Scotland, Falkirk is in 3rd place for attainment of L4 literacy. This places Falkirk in the top quartile of all local authorities in Scotland for these measures.
- 4.13 For level 5 literacy, Falkirk ranks 9th in Scotland, placing us in the second quartile of local authorities in Scotland.
- 4.14 Schools have achieved this improvement in literacy through a focus on developing literacy across the curriculum led by school appointed literacy coordinators. There is a continued focus on literacy through the Service support and challenge visits. Improvements in tracking and monitoring of pupil progress and cluster approaches to developing literacy has also contributed to this area of improvement.

Leavers' Attainment in Numeracy

- 4.15 As with literacy, numeracy remains a key skill for young people in learning, life and work and in combination with literacy, is linked to positive outcomes for young people.
- 4.16 The charts below show school leavers' performance in Level 4 and Level 5 numeracy. Again, there has been improvement across both measures and Falkirk is clearly ahead of the VC, RIC and national average.
- 4.17 At Level 4, Falkirk has equalled last year's figure of 95% which was the highest reached so far by Falkirk schools

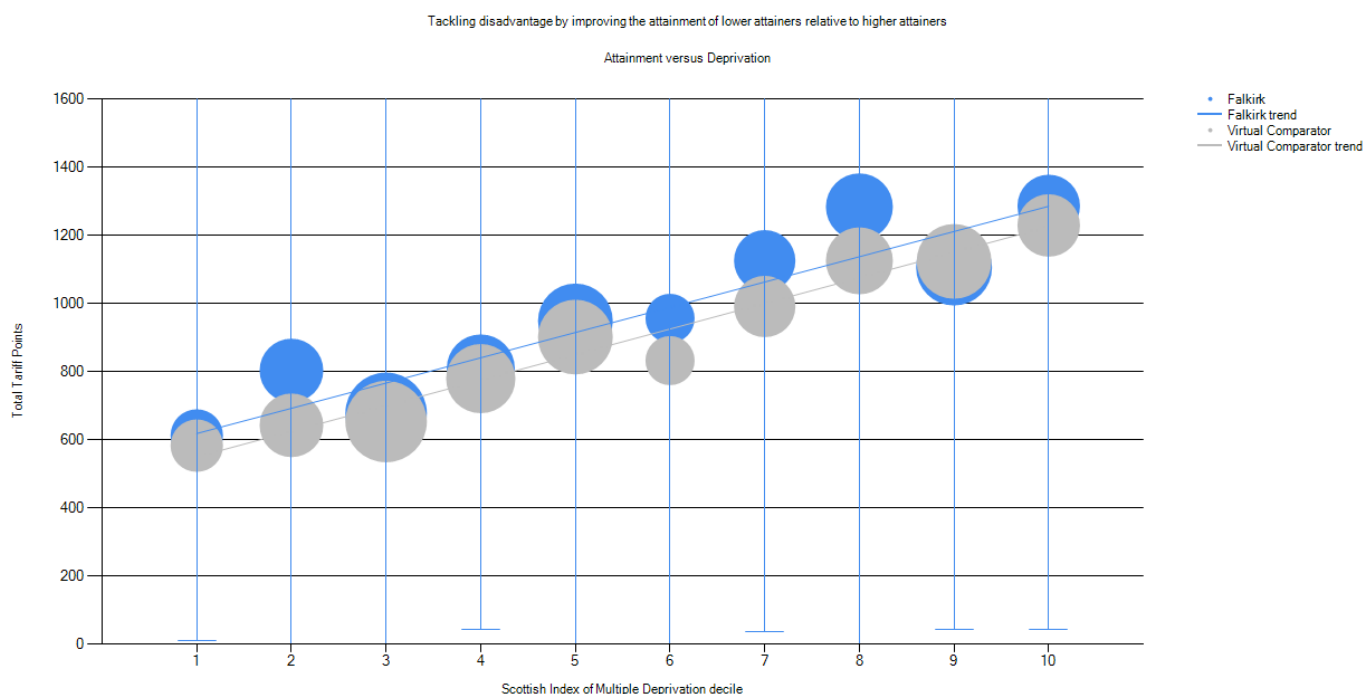




- 4.18 When ranked against other local authorities in Scotland, Falkirk is in 4th place for attainment of level 4 numeracy and in 5th place for level 5 numeracy. This places Falkirk in the top quartile of all local authorities in Scotland for both of these measures.
- 4.19 The Service has a dedicated numeracy QAMSO team who are working with schools to increase staff understanding of progression in mathematics and numeracy across the early years, primary and secondary sectors. There is a continued focus on numeracy through the Service support and challenge visits. This will continue to support pupil progress in numeracy, from the early years through to the point of exit from school.

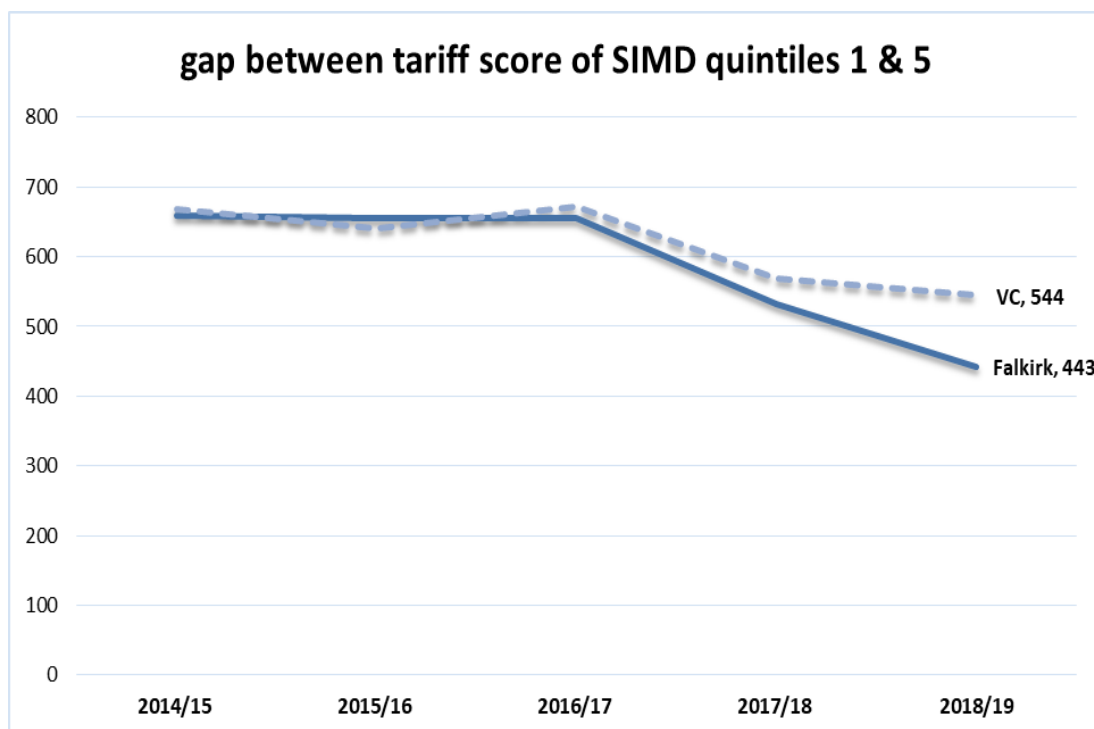
Closing the Poverty Related Attainment Gap

- 4.20 Tackling disadvantage and 'closing the gap' are key priorities both nationally and for Falkirk Council schools. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) allows local authorities to analyse attainment in relation to deprivation. By doing so, schools can more clearly identify where intervention is required.
- 4.21 The chart below shows the total tariff points of Falkirk Council's school leavers in 2018/19 compared with the national average. Every qualification gained by a young person attracts tariff points and these have been totalled and averaged for each decile. The size of the 'bubbles' in the chart relates to the number of leavers who reside in that decile.



2018/19	SIMD 1	SIMD 2	SIMD 3	SIMD 4	SIMD 5	SIMD 6	SIMD 7	SIMD 8	SIMD 9	SIMD 10
Number of leavers - Falkirk	78	131	245	160	196	65	118	151	204	127
average total tariff points of school leavers										
Falkirk	613	804	678	810	949	957	1126	1284	1106	1287
VC	583	643	654	780	902	833	992	1126	1124	1230
RIC	559	689	740	795	884	947	1066	1185	1160	1287
National	608	655	720	769	835	904	976	1061	1131	1262

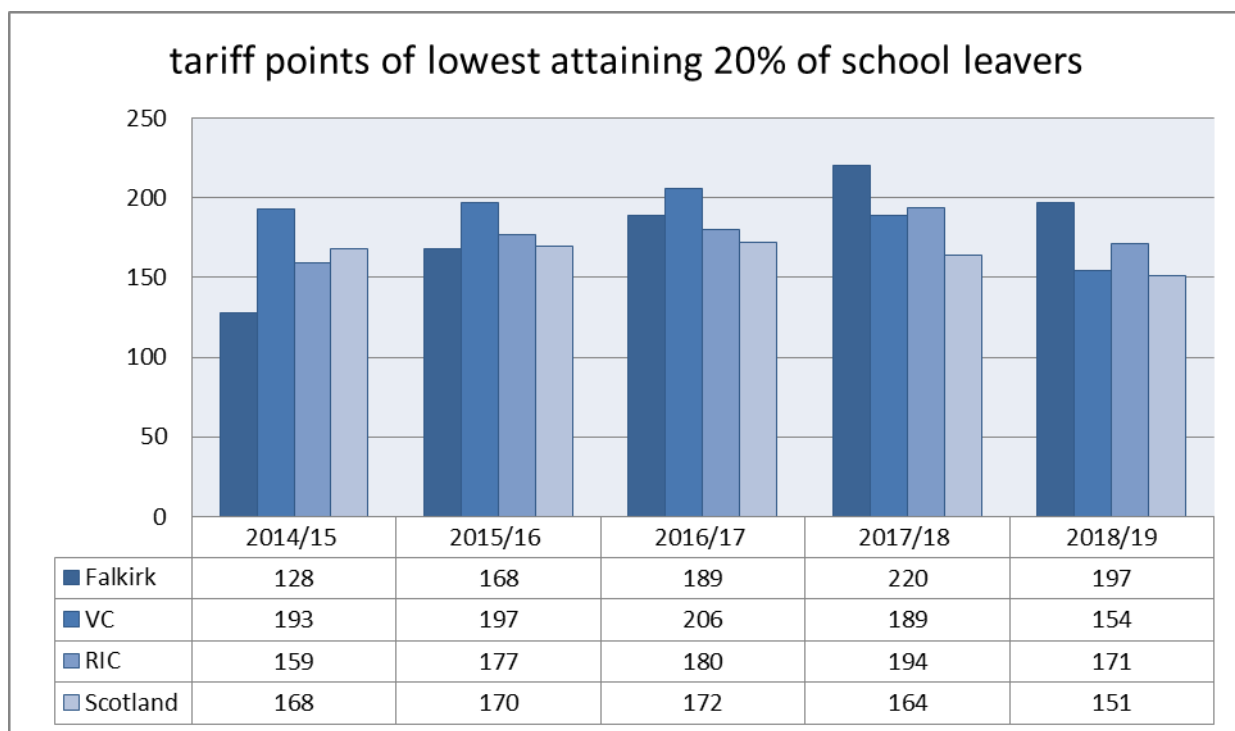
4.22 The chart below shows the poverty related attainment gap between pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland (quintile 1) and pupils living in the 20% least deprived areas of Scotland (quintile 5). Although the data shows that there is a gap between the most and least deprived leavers, which is also the national pattern, it clearly shows that the gap in Falkirk has narrowed. In four of the five years shown. For the poverty related attainment gap in Falkirk is lower than for the VC. In real terms the improvement in this area for Falkirk schools equates to the equivalent additionality of 1 Higher and 1 National 5.



- 4.23 These improvements can be attributed to a number of factors including developments in tracking and monitoring of pupil progress; changes in curriculum structures allowing pupils to progress on different pathways; targeted interventions and greater partnership working to deliver a more pupil centred curriculum.

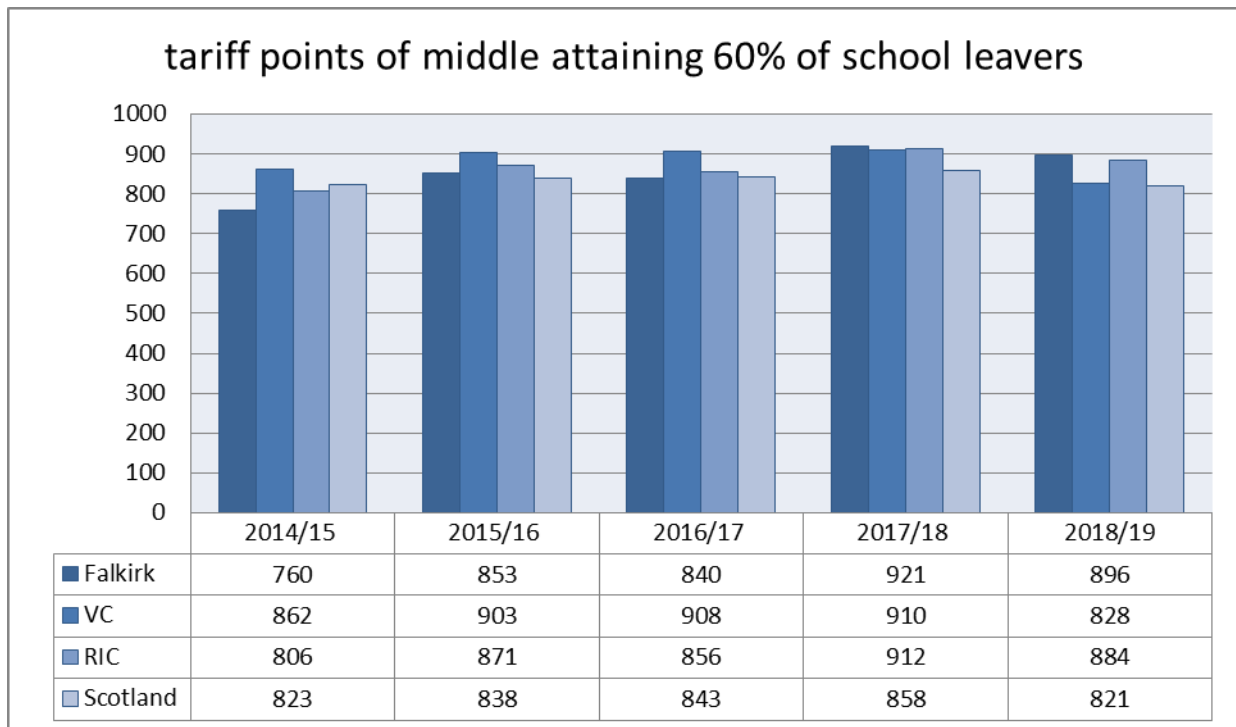
Improving Attainment for All

- 4.24 This is a national benchmarking measure which examines the 'spread' of attainment across the leaver cohort. It compares the performance of the lowest attaining 20% of pupils with the middle 60% and highest 20% of attaining pupils - with a view to improving the attainment for all pupils.
- 4.25 The chart below shows the average tariff points for Falkirk's lowest attaining 20% of school leavers, compared with the VC, RIC and the national average. Although the 2018/19 figure is slightly lower than 2017/18, it is higher than previous years and remains above the VC, RIC and national average. It should be noted that difference in variation between cohorts can be expected as this measure is influenced by the number and balance of S4, 5 and 6 leavers. The difference between 2017/18 and 2018/19, of 23 tariff points represents 2 units of work at National 4 level. For comparison : A full National 4 course award attracts 33 points. The 5 year trend shows a significant gap reversal between Falkirk schools and the national and our virtual comparators.
- 4.26 Falkirk is ranked 4th nationally for performance in this measure, which places the council in the top quartile in Scotland.



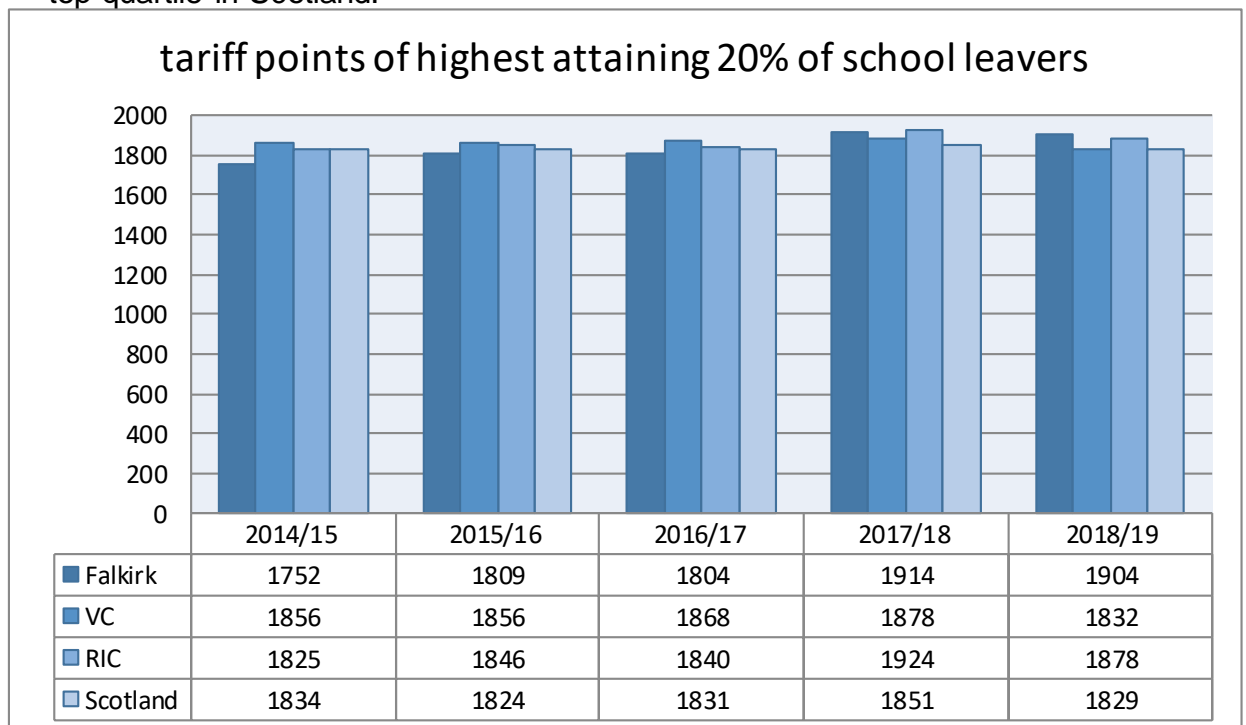
4.27 The chart below shows the average tariff points for the middle attaining 60% of school leavers. Again the 2018/19 figure is slightly lower than 2017/18, and is higher than previous years. It also remains above the VC, RIC and national average. The difference between 2017/18 and 2018/19, of 23 tariff points represents 2 units of work at National 4 level. For comparison : A full National 4 course award attracts 33 points. The 5 year trend shows a significant gap reversal between Falkirk schools and the national and our virtual comparators.

4.28 When ranked against other local authorities in Scotland, Falkirk is in 6th place overall for this measure and in the top quartile.



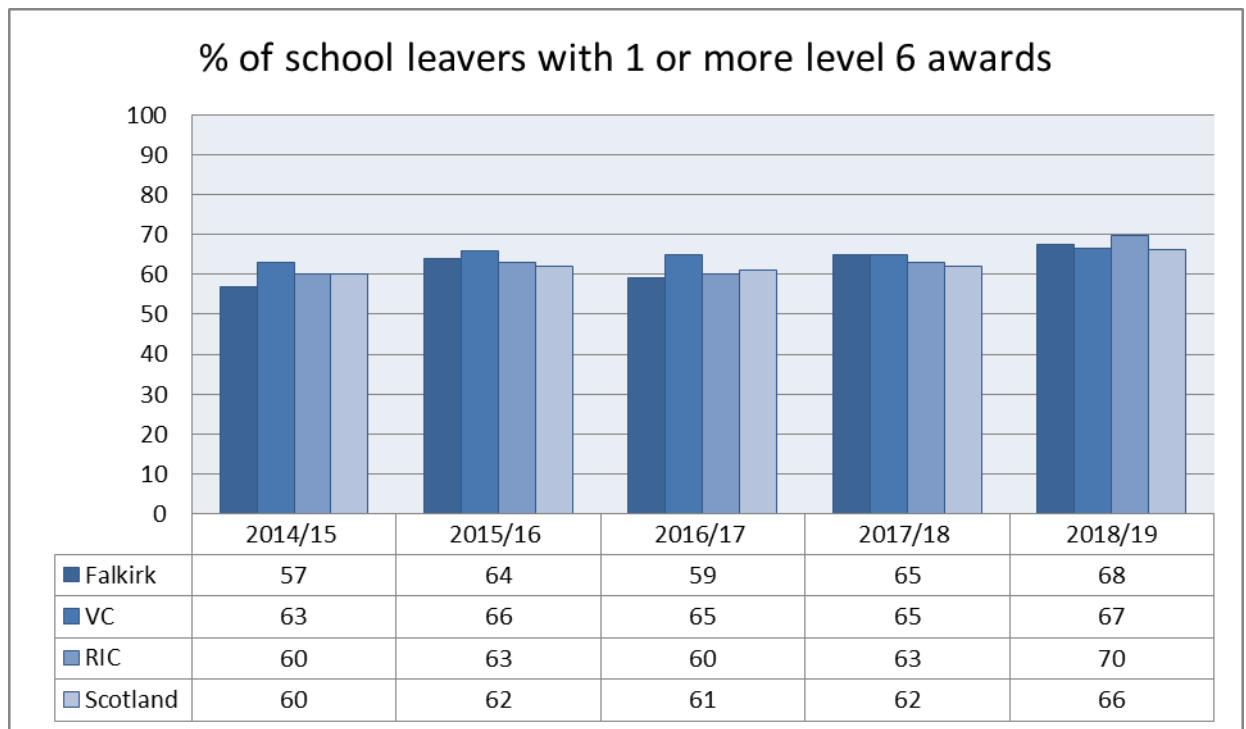
4.29 The chart below shows the average tariff points for the highest attaining 20% of school leavers. Performance in 2018/19 is in line with last years figure and is higher than the VC, RIC and the national average. The 5 year trend shows a significant gap reversal between Falkirk schools and the national and our virtual comparators.

4.30 When ranked against other local authorities Falkirk is in 7th place and in the top quartile in Scotland.

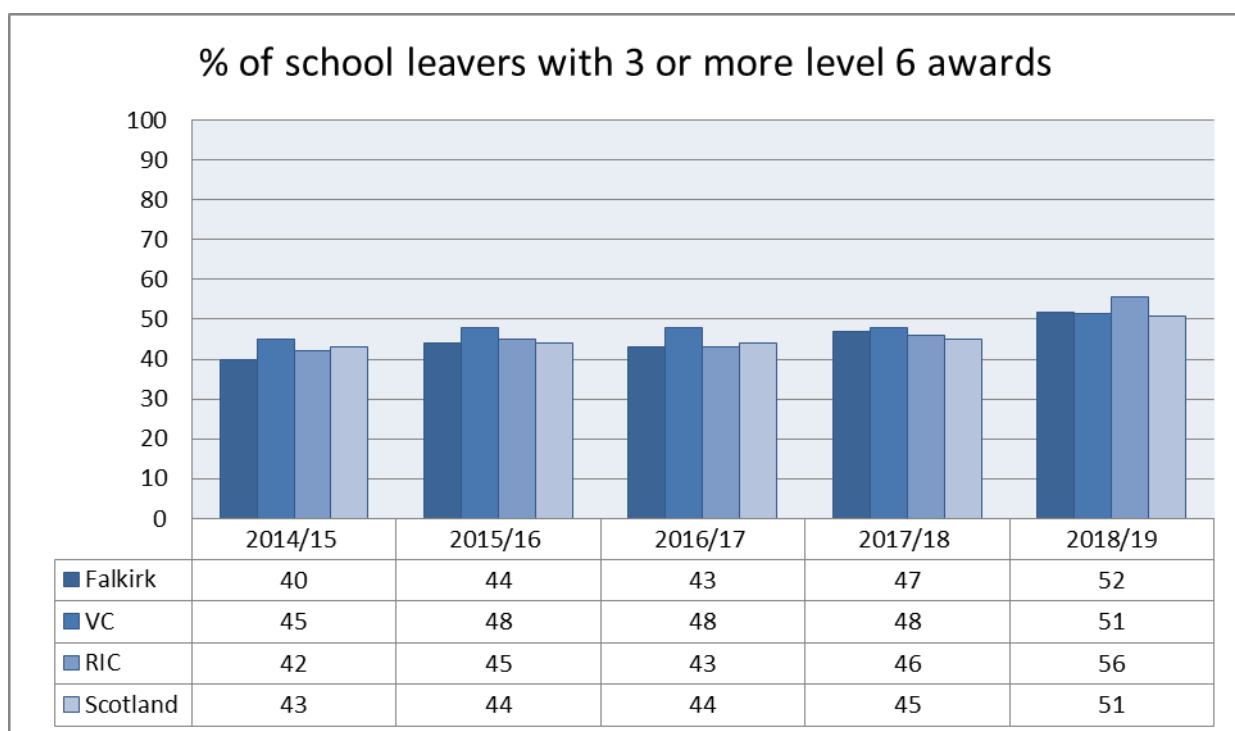


Attainment at SCQF Level 6 (Higher and equivalent qualifications e.g. Foundation Apprenticeships, National Progression Awards)

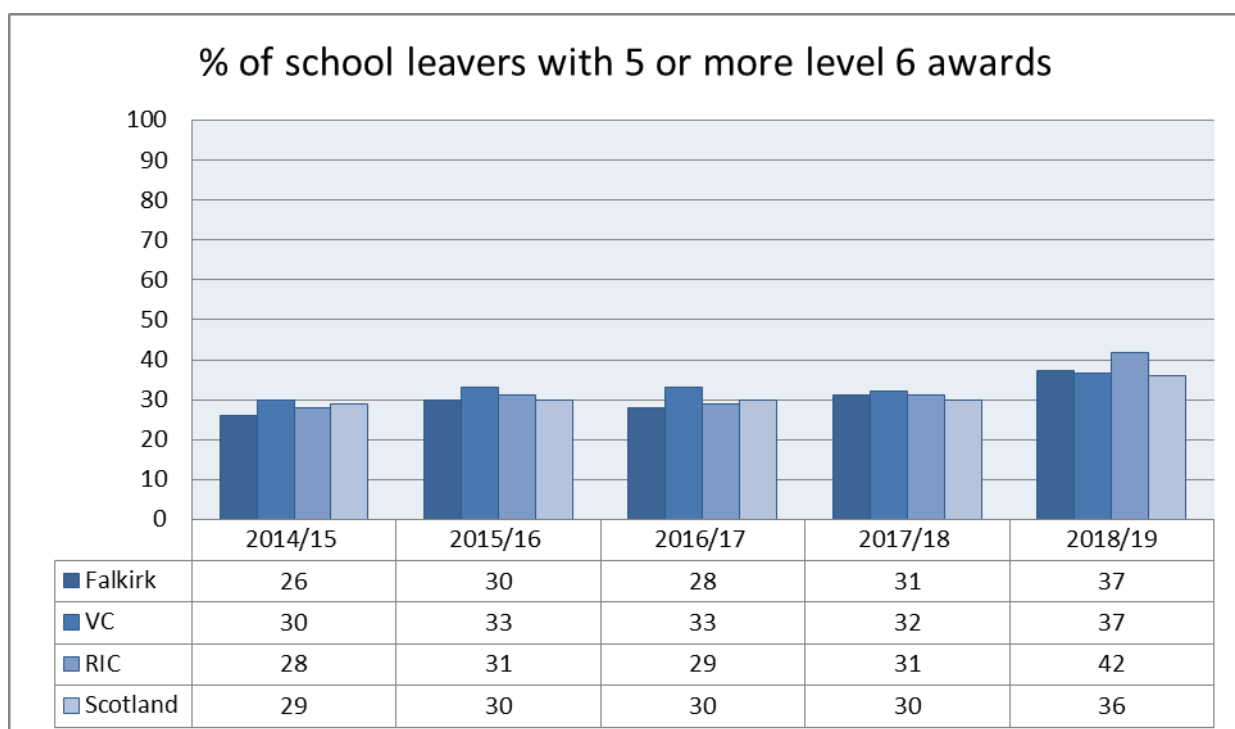
- 4.31 As attainment at SCQF level 6 level remains crucial to accessing further and higher education, it is important that we continue to monitor performance in these measures.
- 4.32 The chart below shows the percentage of young people leaving Falkirk Council schools with 1 or more level 6 passes, compared with the VC, RIC and the national average. This measure has shown an upward trend and is now the highest to date at 68%. This is higher than the VC and the national average and only slightly lower than the RIC.
- 4.33 Falkirk ranks 13th in Scotland for school leavers with 1 or more level 6 course awards. This puts Falkirk in the 2nd quartile nationally.



- 4.34 The chart below shows the percentage of young people leaving Falkirk Council schools with 3 or more level 6 course awards compared with the VC, RIC and the national average. This measure has shown continuous improvement over the last 5 years with a 5% improvement on last year's figure. This is higher than the VC and the national average and slightly lower than the RIC



- 4.35 The chart below shows the percentage of young people leaving Falkirk Council schools with 5 or more level 6 course awards. This measure has shown an improving trend over the last 5 years with a 6% improvement on last year's figure. This figure equals the VC, is higher than the national average and slightly lower than the RIC



- 4.36 Improvements in performance can be attributed to a number of factors including developments in tracking and monitoring of pupil progress;

changes in curriculum structures allowing pupils to progress on different pathways; targeted interventions and greater partnership working. Falkirk Council secondary schools offer a range of HNCs and other level 7 certificated courses which are not included in this indicator. This approach to deeper learning better suits the needs of our young people which is evident in the School Leaver Destination figures.

Vocational Qualifications

- 4.37 Vocational Qualifications include National Certificates, Higher National Qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, National Progression Awards, and Skills for Work. The figures therefore include young people who have taken Foundation Apprenticeships, which provide, work-based learning opportunities with industry recognised qualifications in the senior phase of secondary education. Foundation Apprenticeships comprise several of the qualifications listed.
- 4.38 28% of Falkirk school leavers gained at least one level 5 vocational qualification. This was the 3rd highest in Scotland when compared with other local authorities and places Falkirk in the top quartile.
- 4.39 9% of Falkirk school leavers gained at least one level 6 vocational qualification (equivalent to a Higher). This was the 2nd highest in Scotland when compared with other local authorities and places Falkirk in the top quartile
- 4.40 The increased range and depth of qualifications our young people are attaining is attributed to the greater recognition of the relevance of industry specific skills which will prepare our young people for the future world of work.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 None.

6. Implications

Financial

- 6.1 None.

Resources

- 6.2 None.

Legal

- 6.3 None.

Risk

6.4 None.

Equalities

6.5 None.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.6 None.

7. Conclusion

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.

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Director of Children's Services

Date: 27 February 2020

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Appendices

None

List of Background Papers

None