



AGENDA ITEM

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**Initial Report on Scottish Qualifications
Authority (SQA) Attainment in
Secondary Schools in 2015-16**

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Falkirk Council

Title: Initial Report on Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
Attainment in Secondary Schools in 2015-16

Meeting: Education Executive

Date: 6 September 2016

Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise of an initial publication of Falkirk Council Secondary School attainment in 2015-16.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education Executive is asked to:

(1) note Falkirk Council secondary schools preliminary attainment results; and

(2) request a further report following the publication of updated Insight data in February 2017.

3 Background

3.1 SQA assessments in S4

- 3.1.1 This year was the third in which Scottish schools presented S4 pupils in National Qualifications as part of the Curriculum for Excellence. These replaced Standard Grades, which were phased out at the end of session 2012-13.

- 3.1.2 This report provides comparisons between 2015-16 and performance in sessions 2013-14 and 2014-15, i.e. the first two years of National Qualifications.

3.2 SQA assessments in S5 and S6

- 3.2.1 Session 2015-16 marked the second year of Curriculum for Excellence-related SQA Higher qualifications. The new Highers are based on the same Curriculum for Excellence principles as the National Qualifications and are specifically designed to build on them.

4. Considerations

4.1 Previous reports to the Education Executive took account of pupils who had attained accreditation in SQA courses in S3 (so-called 'Early Presentation'). This practice no longer takes place, in keeping with the Scottish Government's policy of presentation for accredited courses in the Senior Phase (i.e. S4-6). All percentages given in Section 4.5 below, therefore, relate to the S4 role only.

4.2 At this stage of the year, information comes solely from the SEEMIS management information system and reports only on A to C passes. SEEMIS reports are also limited solely to SQA performance and does not take account of other, non-SQA accredited courses.

4.3 Figures will be updated by the Scottish Government Insight information system in spring of 2017 to provide a wider view on attainment.

- (i) include passes at A to D
- (ii) include additional non-SQA attainment data, e.g. awards for non-SQA accredited awards: and
- (iii) take account of changes to SQA attainment following outcomes of referrals to the SQA's Results Service.

4.4 Attainment data based on the updated Insight figures will be reported later in the school session once they are published and will include national and comparator authority figures.

4.5 Attainment in S4

4.5.1 For 2016, preliminary indications suggest that overall in Falkirk Council Schools:

- 38% of candidates in S4 gained five or more passes at grades A-C at National 5 with 36% in 2015.
- 77% of candidates in S4 gained five or more passes at grades A-C at National 4, compared to 76% in 2015.
- 83% of candidates in S4 gained five or more passes at grades A-C at National 3, compared to 79% in 2014.

4.5.2 Pupils taking Nationals 3 and 4 are able to improve their attainment in a subject by completing additional Units of Study up to the April of the academic session following their initial accreditation. The figures above for 2014 and 2015, therefore, take account of such additional accreditation, and an improvement in the 2015-16 figures is expected as the session progresses and pupils attain additional Units. This will be reflected in the Insight-based report to Elected Members later this session.

4.5.3 The outcomes of pupils gaining subsequent awards following referral to the SQA's Post Results service (which replaced Appeals) will also be taken into account in the report to the Education Executive following publication of Insight.

Further gains are likely following referrals to the SQA Post results service. Again these will be captured in Insight.

- 4.5.4 The initial results in 2016, therefore, where all measures at Nationals already show improvement on 2015, even before inclusion of subsequent attainment from additional Units of Study and the outcomes of the post Results service, present a positive picture.

4.6 Attainment in S5 and S6

- 4.6.1 The table below shows only SEEMIS-generated data for 2015-6 along with data for the previous two academic years.
- 4.6.2 Initial data relating to attainment in 2015-16 by the end of S5 show Falkirk Council secondary schools performing as shown below. All figures for 2014 and 2015 take account of changes resulting from referrals to the SQA's Results Service.
- 4.6.3 All figures are quoted as a percentage of the Falkirk Council S4 roll who have achieved the relevant number and level of awards.

By the end of S5:

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better | 50 | 52 | 57 |
| 3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better | 29 | 30 | 33 |
| 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better | 14 | 14 | 15 |

- Attainment in 1 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S5 is 5% higher than last year's post-Results Service figure.
- Attainment in 3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S5 is 3% higher than last year's post-Results Service figure.
- Attainment in 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S5 is 1% higher than last year's post-Results Service figure.

4.7 By the end of S6

- 4.7.1 Again, all figures are quoted as a percentage of the Falkirk Council S4 roll.

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better | 38 | 41 | 40 |
| 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better | 26 | 28 | 29 |
| 1 or more awards at SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Higher) or better | 16 | 17 | 17 |

- 4.7.2 Attainment in 3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S6 is 1% below the post-Results Service figure for 2015 but is expected to improve following this year's Post Results outcomes.
- 4.7.3 Attainment in 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S6 is 1% higher than the post-Results Service figure for 2015.
- 4.7.4 Attainment in 1 or more awards at SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Higher) by the end of S6 is the same as the post-Results Service figure for 2015.

4.8 Action within the authority

- 4.8.1 Education officers and head teachers are now reviewing the detailed results for the Council's secondary schools in order to make a fuller analysis of the outcomes of the 2016 exam diet.
- 4.8.2 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.
- 4.8.3 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 child can be set.
- 4.8.4. 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.
- 4.8.5 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. Use of SCHOLAR in 2015-6 was the highest to date and was, for the first time, ahead of the national average.
- 4.8.6 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. Subject Development Groups (SDGs) continue to promote improvement in individual subjects. Development work across all CMGs and SDGs is co-ordinated by a Curriculum Support Officer with responsibility for secondary education.
- 4.8.7 As teachers' experience of teaching National and new Higher courses grows, confidence in identifying the appropriate standard has 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 'wider view' of SQA standards and a wide knowledge of good practice.

- 4.8.8 Accompanied by the Education Executive Convener and/or the Education portfolio holder authority officers held review meetings in each secondary school early in session 2015-6, at which attainment was the key focus. Senior managers were required to account for: (i) the impact of their tracking and monitoring of performance at individual pupil level; (ii) the overall effectiveness of this in informing learning and teaching; and (iii) steps being taken to improve attainment in subjects where there was underperformance. The attainment and achievements of vulnerable groups such as looked after children and pupils otherwise at risk of underperforming were also scrutinised. Annual Improvement meetings take place between schools, Education Executive Convener and/or Portfolio holder, authority officers and SMT.

5. Implications

Financial

- 5.1 There are no financial implications to Falkirk Council

Resources

- 5.2 There are no resource implications

Risk

- 5.3 The work outlined in para 4.8.8 is designed to mitigate risk of attainment levels falling and instead drive up examination performance.

Equalities

- 5.4 Details will be raised in the next report, once the Insight data has been published.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 Falkirk Council's secondary schools have again shown improvement overall in all measures in 2015-6.
- 6.2 These improvements are in part a result of increased confidence in teachers in delivering the new SQA Curriculum for Excellence-based assessments.
- 6.3 Schools are now better able to develop pathways in learning that ensure appropriate progression and challenge.

- 6.4 Based on their enhanced knowledge of each pupil as an individual through increasingly effective tracking procedures, staff are able to advise pupils on course pathways that best suit their needs and abilities.
- 6.5 A further report will follow in Spring 2017 to reflect Insight data, showing a fuller account of attainment beyond SQA courses and taking account of Post Results outcomes and delayed attainment of Units in Nationals 3 and 4.
- 6.6 Key information regarding National performance virtual comparators will be presented in a future report following the data publication of the Insight Data.

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Appendices

None

List of Background Papers:

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- **None**