Agenda Item 9

SQA Attainment in Falkirk Secondary Schools (2017)

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject:	**SQA Attainment in Falkirk Secondary Schools (2017)**
Meeting:	**Education Executive**
Date:	**5 September 2017**
Submitted By:	**Director of Children's Services**

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report provides information on the initial publication of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) attainment within Falkirk Council secondary schools in 2017.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Education Executive is asked to:

(1) Note the SQA attainment of Falkirk Council secondary schools;
(2) Note the probable impact, in 2017-18, of changes to National Qualifications on school presentation policies, and on reported attainment at National 5; and
(3) Agree that a future report will be presented to the November Education Executive 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 A- C passes or A-D awards at various levels of the National Qualifications. SEEMIS reports are limited at this stage solely to SQA performance and do not take account of other non-SQA accredited courses.

3.2 Figures will be updated by the Scottish Government's Insight information system in September of 2017 and this will be further refreshed in February 2018 to take account of the latest school leavers' data.

3.3 By the end of September, Insight will include additional non-SQA attainment data. For this reason, it is proposed to report results in future years to the Education Executive in the autumn instead of September to enable a fuller picture of attainment to be provided. Autumn reports will include results from:

additional SQA Unit awards, Post-Results awards and SQA- and non-SQA vocational courses. They will also include HNCs, for which pupils from a number of schools study at Forth Valley College and which, in Larbert HS for example, have resulted in a 3% improvement in the school's performance.

3.4   By February 2018, Insight data will take account of outcomes for school leavers and will include national and comparator authority figures. These will be reported to the Education Executive in the spring of 2018.

4.   Considerations

4.1   SQA Attainment in S4

4.1.1   This year was the fourth in which Scottish schools presented S4 pupils in National Qualifications, as part of the Curriculum for Excellence. This report shows comparisons between performance in 2016-7 and performance in the first three years of National Qualifications.

4.1.2   The attainment of pupils in S4 is given in the table below expressed as a percentage of the total S4 roll.

By the end of S4:

	2015	**2016**	**2017**
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 3 or better	56%	86%	87%
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 4 or better	56%	79%	81%
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 5 (A-C) or better	38%	38%	38%

4.1.3   Pupils taking Nationals 3 and 4 are able to improve their attainment in a subject by completing additional Units of Study up to April of the academic session following their initial accreditation. The figures above for previous years do not take account of such additional accreditation, nor any pupils gaining subsequent awards following referral to the SQA's Post Results service (which replaced Appeals on the introduction of Nationals and New Highers).

4.1.4   The initial results in 2017 create a positive picture: performance has increased at Level 3 and Level 4, and has been maintained at level 5.

4.2   SQA Attainment in S5 and S6

4.2.1   Session 2016-7 marked the third year of Curriculum for Excellence-related SQA Higher qualifications.

4.2.2   For the sake of comparison, the table below shows only SEEMIS-generated data for 2015, 2016 and 2017.

4.2.3   Initial data relating to attainment in 2016-7 by the end of S5 show Falkirk Council secondary schools performing as shown below. Figures including wider accreditation will be published in due course.

4.3   Attainment By the End of S5

4.3.1 All figures are quoted as a percentage of the Falkirk Council S4 roll who have achieved relevant number and level of awards (at A-C) by the end of S5.

By the end of S5:

	2015	**2016**	**2017**
1 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	52%	58%	57%
3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	30%	34%	34%
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	14%	15%	15%

4.3.2 Attainment in 1 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S5 is 1% lower than last year's figure.

4.3.3 Attainment in 3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S5 is equal to last year's figure.

4.3.4 Attainment in 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S5 is equal to last year's figure.

4.4   Attainment by the End of S6

4.4.1 All figures are quoted as a percentage of the Falkirk Council S4 roll who have achieved the relevant number and level of awards (A-C) by the end of S6.

	2015	**2016**	**2017**
3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	40%	40%	45%
5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better	26%	28%	31%
1 or more awards at SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Higher) or better	17%	17%	18%

4.4.2 Attainment in 3 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S6 is 5% above the figure for 2016.

4.4.3 Attainment in 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) or better by the end of S6 is 3% above the figure for 2016.

4.4.4 Attainment in 1 or more awards at SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Higher) by the end of S6 is 1% above the figure for 2016.

4.5   Future Changes to National Qualifications

4.5.1 The Scottish Government is making changes to the way in which young people are assessed in National Qualifications. The significant change has been the decision to remove mandatory unit assessment from National Qualifications, initially at National 5 level in 2017-18, and in future sessions, at Higher and Advanced Higher level. The purpose of this is to reduce the amount of assessment undertaken by young people studying towards National Qualifications, and to reduce teacher workload in administering these assessments in order for them to focus more on other aspects of teaching and learning.

4.5.2 The removal of units as a mandatory part of the National 5 course has implications for what has previously been termed `Recognising Positive Achievement' (RPA). Up to this point, a pupil who studied a National 5 course, gained the course units, and also passed what was referred to as the Added Value Unit at National 4 level, would have gained an automatic National 4 pass in the subject should they fail the final National 5 examination. This arrangement provided a `safety net' for pupils who failed the National 5 examination in any subject, meaning that they had not studied the subject for a year to gain no qualification at all. With the removal of units, this will no longer be an option as a matter of course.

4.5.3 Recognising the need for some kind of alternative `safety net' for pupils, the Scottish Government has announced two measures to reduce the risk of a pupil failing to achieve any qualification at all.

- Firstly, the threshold to achieve a Grade D award at National 5 has been extended to include candidates who achieve between 40% and 49%. (Currently, a candidate who gains a notional 45% or more will gain an award in the course).

- Secondly, as a further option to help reduce the possibility of pupils failing a National 5 examination and having no accreditation to show for their study, the Depute First Minister has announced that, for an interim period only, schools can continue to present pupils for the units that were formerly part of National 5 courses and also for the National 5 course award. By also completing the Added Value Unit, this means that a small number of identified candidates could still benefit from the RPA process and gain a National 4 award in the subject should they fail the National 5 examination, as pupils have done up to this point.

4.5.4 The Scottish Government has been clear that this fall-back should only be used in a very limited number of exceptional circumstances. Therefore, we would anticipate that the number of pupils in next session's National 5 courses, who are presented for units, as well as the course award, will be very limited in number and be no more than around 10%-15% of any subject cohort.

4.5.5 With the disappearance RPA in its current form, it is likely that schools will present a lower percentage of their S4 roll at National 5 in order to avoid the risk of pupils failing to achieve accreditation. This is likely to impact negatively upon the percentage of S4 pupils achieving National 5 qualifications in future years.

4.5.6 Given the widening of the band for a grade D award to compensate for this, it may be justifiable to report on the percentage of awards (A-D) in future years, as well as than the percentage of passes (A-C)

4.6   Action Within the Authority – Senior Phase

4.6.1 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 2017 exam diet.

4.6.2 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.

4.6.3 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 young person can be set.

4.6.4 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.

4.6.5 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.

4.6.6 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.

4.6.7 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 'wider view' of SQA standards and a wide knowledge of good practice.

4.6.8   Authority officers will hold review meetings in each secondary school early in session 2017-18, 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) the overall effectiveness of this in informing learning and teaching; and (iii) steps being taken to improve attainment in subjects where there is apparent underperformance. The attainment and achievements of vulnerable groups such as looked after children and those living in areas of relative deprivation will also be looked at in these reviews.

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 November meeting of the Education Executive when further and more detailed data is available.

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Date: 16 August 2017
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Appendices

None

List of Background Papers

None