Scottish Attainment Challenge Submission from Education Scotland

Education Scotland is Scotland’s national agency for quality improvement in education. We promote improvement in all sectors of education and at all stages of the learning journey, from the early years to adult and continuing education. ES was created in July 2011 through merger of the former inspection (HMIE) and curriculum development (LTS) agencies to form a new integrated improvement agency for the education sector. It sits within the DG Learning & Justice portfolio, responsible to Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and works closely with SG Directorates for Learning, ESLL and Children & Families. The agency also provides direct policy support for Ministers in a few areas, specifically Community Learning and Development, Youth Strategy and Adult Learning.

Education Scotland has a key role to in supporting schools and local authorities to narrow the educational attainment gap. The Scottish education system works well for most children who make good progress in their learning. However, a child’s circumstances – where they live, their family’s circumstances – still have a disproportionate impact on their chances of success. For example, despite some progress over the last decade, a pupil from the 20 per cent least deprived areas of Scotland is almost twice as likely as one from the 20 per cent most deprived areas to leave school with a qualification at SCQF 6 or better (Higher equivalent or above) which impact on their choices they are able to make both immediately on leaving school and beyond.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge has a clear focus to help achieve equity and address the priority to close the attainment gap between children and young people living in the communities with greatest and least levels of socio-economic deprivation in Scotland. It aims to bring a focus and accelerate targeted improvements in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. The First Minister launched the Scottish Attainment Challenge in February 2015 to bring a greater sense of urgency and priority to this issue. It is underpinned by the National Improvement Framework, Curriculum for Excellence and Getting it Right for Every Child. It is a national programme led jointly by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland. The programme supports and complements a broader range of national initiatives and approaches, building on number of existing programmes that are focused on raising attainment and tackling educational inequity. The overarching approach to the Scottish Attainment Challenge is to focus on driving improvement from the ground up, supporting and empowering local partners in authorities and schools to develop their own approaches to addressing the poverty related attainment gap in their contexts, but drawing on evidence-based practice.

The Scottish Attainment Challenge is supported financially by the Attainment Scotland Fund which was initially set at £100m over 4 years but now stands at £750m over the course of this parliamentary term. Initially this supported the seven local authorities with the highest concentration of primary school aged children living in the 20 per cent most deprived communities identified using SIMD data. In recognition that children are experiencing poverty related disadvantage outside these areas, this was supplemented by support for all primary schools with over 70% of pupils in such communities (57) and by an Innovation Fund open to all schools not otherwise supported.
The Scottish Government have extended the funding available through the Attainment Scotland Fund to include two new Challenge Authorities and 133 secondary schools from August 2016. The enhanced Attainment Scotland Funding from 2017/18 will include £100m per annum raised each year from our local tax reforms allocated directly to schools based on the numbers of children in primary and S1-3 in secondary who meet the eligibility criteria for free school meals, giving headteachers the freedom to use it where it will have the greatest impact on attainment. This new funding will reach around 95 per cent of schools in Scotland. A new framework of fully evidenced educational interventions and strategies to improve attainment will be launched in December 2016. This Framework is intended to inform the decisions schools make on spending the additional funds and on monitoring the impact on improving individual children’s progress.

Education Scotland introduced a national team Attainment Advisors into the Scottish education system in November 2015 to support the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Attainment Advisors work alongside local authority staff, including practitioners, on agreed priorities and provide both support and challenge on closing the poverty-related attainment gap through the key areas of learning and teaching; and leadership to impact on literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Working with schools and local authorities Attainment Advisors are gathering information and data on what is working and where teachers and headteachers are beginning to see early improvements. This is shared via the National Improvement Hub.

Attainment Advisors promote a strong culture of collaborative learning and enquiry, whereby practitioners engaged in learning from each other about effective practice to raise attainment. As well as working with individual schools and local authorities, the Attainment Advisors facilitate collaboration across schools and local authority boundaries as evidence suggests that this leads to greater improvement in attainment. The team help to build the capacity of leaders and practitioners to undertake self-evaluation, and to plan effectively to support continuous improvement.

Education Scotland has recently developed a National Improvement Hub for education. The hub provides practitioners with access to: self evaluation and improvement tools, knowledge and research, teaching and assessment resources, exemplars of practice and support for on line collaboration and networks. The work of the Scottish Attainment Challenge features prominently as part of the National Improvement Hub (NIH). As well as providing up-to-date information about the Challenge, it draws on information and learning from Attainment Advisors to enable practitioners to share exemplars of practice and evidence of what works.

The absence of nationally consistent measures of attainment for the primary sector has presented a challenge to the programme in the early years of its development. The National Improvement Framework will provide new evidence, across a wide range of measures and drivers, to tell us what is working and where further action is needed. The first set of new assessment data, based on teacher professional judgement of Curriculum for Excellence levels in Literacy and Numeracy will be published at the end of 2016. Data will be available at child, school, local authority and national level for improvement purposes and will also be published by school and local authority. We will use new data that will become available through the
National Improvement Framework to identify the attainment gap in P1, P4, P7 and S3 and at school and local authority level – and agree targets to reduce this. We will focus our collective efforts where they are needed most.