



## CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, No. 4: 2022 Edition

22<sup>nd</sup> February 2022

This annual National Statistics publication:

- Provides information on the **attainment** and **initial destinations** of school leavers in Scotland.
- Reports **initial destinations** for young people approximately **three months** after the end of the school year.
- Includes attainment in **National Qualifications** achieved throughout all stages of a pupil's schooling.
- Covers all **2020/21 school leavers** from publicly funded mainstream schools.

This release is the second to also contain Experimental Statistics on Foundation Apprenticeships, and a wider attainment measure incorporating all Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) qualifications.

The time period covered by these statistics means that the results will be affected by the **coronavirus (COVID-19)** pandemic. In particular, the cancellation of exams and external assessment of coursework in 2020, and the use of the Alternative Certification Model in 2021, will have affected the attainment of many 2020/21 school leavers. It is also likely that the pandemic will have continued to affect the destination choices made by, and opportunities available to, some school leavers in 2020/21. Further details can be found in Chapter 1.

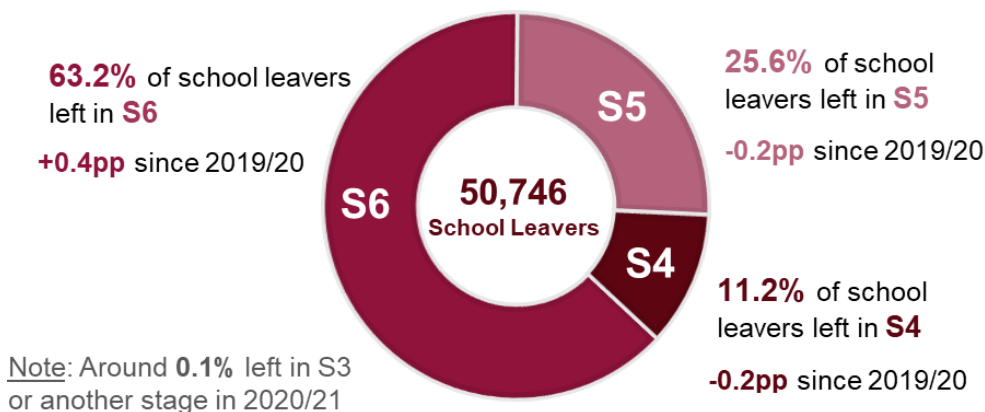
Full results are available from the [supplementary tables](#).



## School Leaver Cohort

The COVID-19 pandemic affects these statistics (see chapter 2)

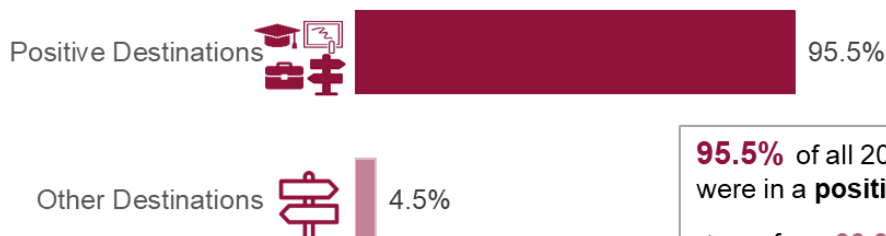
► The percentage of 2020/21 school leavers, by stage of leaving.



## School Leaver Destinations

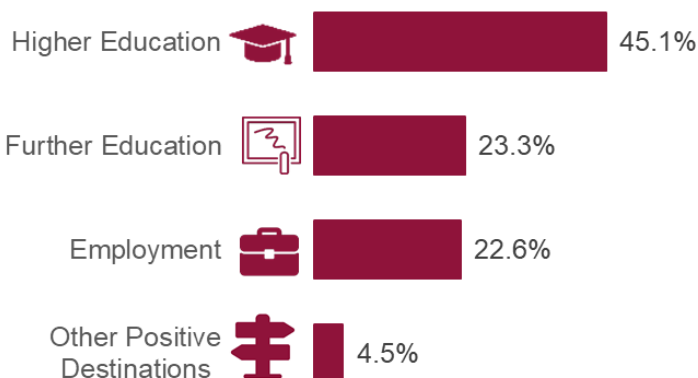
The COVID-19 pandemic affects these statistics (see section 1.1)

► The percentage of school leavers in initial positive destinations and other destinations, three months after the end of the school year.



**95.5%** of all 2020/21 school leavers were in a **positive initial destination**.  
▲ up from **93.3%** in 2019/20

► The percentage of school leavers in each positive destination.



**68.4%** of the 2020/21 leavers were in **Higher or Further Education**.  
▼ down from **72.2%** in 2019/20

**22.6%** of 2020/21 leavers were in **Employment**.  
▲ up from **16.2%** in 2019/20

### Notes:

- percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding
- pp = percentage point

**School Leaver Attainment**

**The COVID-19 pandemic affects these statistics (see section 1.1)**



**96.2%** of leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better** in 2020/21.



**87.7%** of leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better** in 2020/21.



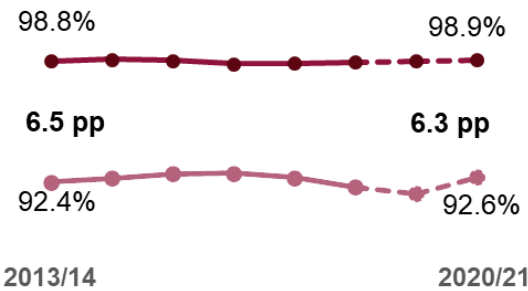
**66.0%** of leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better** in 2020/21.



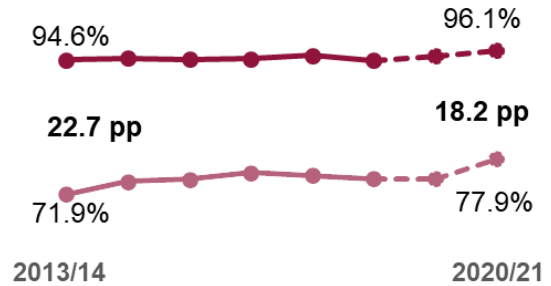
**2.1%** of school leavers attained **no passes at SCQF Level 3 or better** in 2020/21.

► The attainment gap between leavers from the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas, 2013/14 to 2020/21

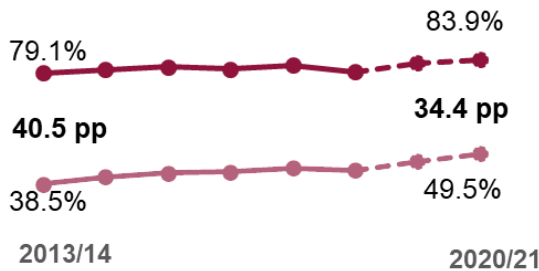
**1 pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better**



**1 pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better**



**1 pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better**



The gap between the **most deprived** and **least deprived** areas in 2020/21 for leavers attaining 1 pass or more at:

- **SCQF Level 4 or better is 6.3 pp**
- **SCQF Level 5 or better is 18.2 pp**
- **SCQF Level 6 or better is 34.4 pp**

(percentage point changes are affected by rounding)

**Notes:**

- **Dashed line** represents break in series due to **change in certification methods in 2020 and 2021**
- **Caution** should be exercised when making **comparisons over time**. See publication section 1.1
- Data from 2009/10 to 2020/21 available in the supplementary tables
- pp = percentage point

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines **data sources**, **concepts** and **methodology** associated with the data used in this report and provides information on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on these statistics.

### 1.1 Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on these statistics

#### 1.1.1 Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on School Leaver Destinations

Initial destinations relate to the activity being undertaken by young people approximately three months after the end of the school year (October 2021). Destinations figures will reflect both choices made by pupils, and the opportunities available to them upon leaving school.

Last year, for 2019/20 school leavers, the start dates for some opportunities were delayed, leading to a direct impact on the destinations recorded for some pupils. The pandemic may also have affected local partnerships' ability to track some school leavers through home visits.

For 2020/21 school leavers these issues are not thought to have affected destinations data. However, it is likely that the pandemic will have continued to affect the choices made by, and opportunities available to, some school leavers.

In addition to possible ongoing direct impacts on the availability of some opportunities, the approaches taken to the certification of SQA qualifications in 2020 and 2021 (see section 1.1.2) will have affected the attainment of some school leavers. Similarly, the pandemic may have influenced pupils' decisions on when to leave school (for example, delaying leaving from 2019/20 to 2020/21). Together these factors could have affected the attainment of some school leavers, which may in turn have affected the choices and opportunities available to them.

The impact of the pandemic on school leaver destinations should be kept in mind when making comparisons between 2020/21 and 2019/20, and when comparing with earlier years.

#### How can I use School Leaver Destination figures?

Use School Leaver Destination figures	Do not use School Leaver Destination figures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ As an accurate reflection of school leavers' (initial) destinations.</li><li>✓ To compare the destinations of different groups of school leavers.</li><li>✓ To make comparisons over time of the destinations of school leavers - whilst bearing in mind the impact of COVID-19.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ Without considering the impact that COVID-19 may have had on the availability of particular opportunities.</li></ul>

## 1.1.2 Impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on School Leaver Attainment

The attainment data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of this report covers the full range of [National Qualifications](#) that individuals left school with, at [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (SCQF) Level 3 and above.

Grades awarded in National 5 (SCQF Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) National Qualifications are typically assessed externally via examinations and/or coursework. In both 2020 and 2021 the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of exams and alternative approaches were taken to determining grades.

In 2020, National Qualifications were graded based on teacher estimates. More information on this is available in [last year's publication](#).

In 2021 the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) required teachers and lecturers to use their professional judgement of a learner's demonstrated attainment to determine provisional results in line with subject-specific guidance. SQA carried out national quality assurance on selected courses from each school.

As the attainment data in this report considers all of the attainment which a school leaver gains over their time at school, the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20 and 2020/21 may be based on a combination of approaches to certification. This is demonstrated in Table A which shows that, for example:

- The attainment of 2020/21 school leavers will be based on results determined through a combination of the examination and coursework approach, teacher estimates in 2020 and demonstrated attainment in 2021.
- The attainment of those who left school in 2019/20 was based on results determined through a combination of the examination and coursework approach and the teacher estimate based approach of 2020.
- The attainment of those who left school in 2018/19 and before will have been determined based entirely on the usual approach of examinations and coursework.

**Table A: School leaver cohorts and the combination of approaches taken to determining grades in National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher**

Attainment year	School leaver cohort		
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
2019 (exam & coursework)	✓	✓	✓
2020 (teacher estimates)	X	✓	✓
2021 (demonstrated attainment)	X	X	✓

The measures in this report focus on the highest SCQF level achieved. Typically this is gained in the final year before a pupil leaves school. For example, amongst 2020/21 school leavers, 69 per cent achieved their highest level in 2021 and 27 per cent achieved their highest level in 2020. So for many 2020/21 school leavers the demonstrated attainment approach taken in 2021 will have had the biggest impact on the attainment measures in this report. In total, 96 per cent of 2020/21 school leavers achieved their highest level in either 2020 or 2021 meaning that for almost all 2020/21 school leavers the

highest level was attained in a year in which an alternative approach to certification was in place.

The impacts of these different approaches to certification upon school leaver attainment means that care should be taken when making comparisons over time. The attainment data in this report provides an accurate reflection of the attainment with which school leavers in Scotland left school; for this reason attainment data for 2020/21, 2019/20 and previous years are presented together. However, a **dashed line break** in the series has been placed between 2018/19 (and before) and 2019/20 (and after). This indicates that the attainment of school leavers in 2019/20 and 2020/21 has been determined differently to that for 2018/19 and before.

In addition to this, levels of attainment by 2020/21 school leavers are also likely to have been affected by any changes to pupils' decisions on staying on at school related to the pandemic. In last year's report the relative size and make-up of the 2019/20 school leaver cohort indicated that fewer S4 and S5 pupils left school in 2019/20 than might have been expected. These pupils, many of whom are likely to have instead left in 2020/21, will have had opportunities to gain more qualifications, and/or to gain qualifications at a higher level, than had they left at the end of the 2019/20 academic year. This is likely to have affected the total number of passes, and the highest level of qualification, attained by some school leavers in 2020/21.

Care must therefore be taken when comparing the attainment of 2020/21 school leavers with that of 2019/20 school leavers and when comparing these to the attainment of earlier school leaver cohorts. Any changes between the attainment levels of the 2020/21 cohort, the 2019/20 cohort and those of previous years should not be seen as an indication that performance has improved or worsened, without further evidence.

Further information on the impact of the coronavirus on these statistics can be found in section 7.5.

### How can I use School Leaver Attainment figures?

#### Use School Leaver Attainment figures

- ✓ As an accurate reflection of the attainment with which school leavers in Scotland left school in different years.
- ✓ To make factual comparisons of the proportions of school leavers attaining at different SCQF levels over time.
- ✓ To compare the attainment of different groups of school leavers within years.

#### Do not use School Leaver Attainment figures

- ✗ As an indication that performance in 2019/20 or 2020/21 was better or worse than in previous years, without further evidence.
- ✗ Without taking full account of the different approaches to certification in 2020 and 2021 compared to previous years.



## 1.2 School Leavers

A school leaver is defined as a young person of school leaving age, who left during or at the end of the school year. For 2020/21 school leavers, the leaver year is 16th September 2020 to 14th September 2021.

This publication covers school leavers from **all stages** of secondary school. For most young people, S4 (≈15-16 year olds) is the last compulsory year of school, but the majority choose to stay on and complete S5 (≈16-17 year olds) and S6 (≈17-18 year olds)<sup>1</sup>.

Figures in this report are based on pupils in **publicly funded mainstream schools**, in the 32 local authorities and one grant aided school. Figures including school leavers from publicly funded special schools are available in the [supplementary tables](#).

## 1.3 School Leaver Destinations

This publication provides information on the **initial destinations** of **2020/21 school leavers**, relating to outcomes approximately three months after the end of the school year (4th October 2021).

A separate publication - 'Summary Statistics for Follow-up Leaver Destinations' – will follow in June 2022 and will provide information on the follow-up destinations of 2020/21 school leavers, approximately nine months after the end of the school term (1st Monday in April 2022).

School leaver destinations data is based on the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) 'Opportunities for All' shared dataset, matched with pupil census records for the school year 2020/21. More information can be found in section 7.2.1.

Destinations are grouped in the following categories within this statistical bulletin:

### Positive Destinations



### Other Destinations



<sup>1</sup> Pupils ages are based on approximate age ranges, more information is available from [the pupil census](#)



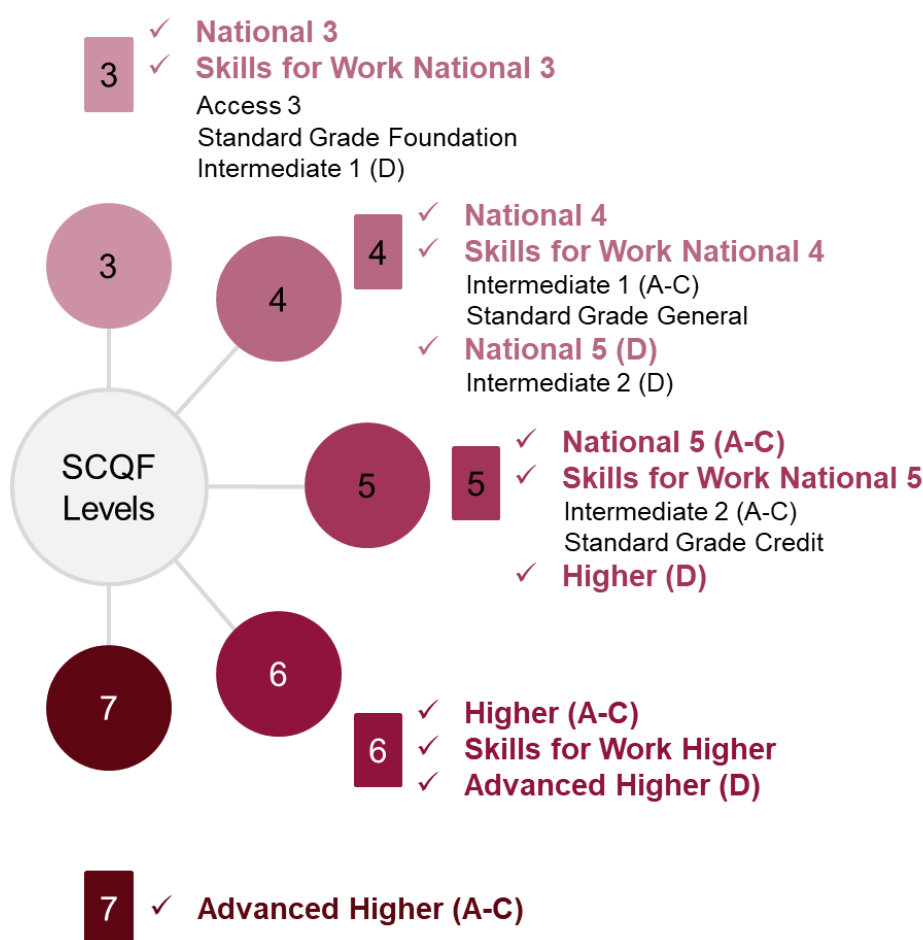
## 1.4 School Leaver Attainment

Within this report, the main school leaver **attainment** data found in Chapters 4 and 5 covers Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) **National Qualifications** achieved throughout **all stages** of a pupil's education at school. The range of qualifications included can be found in the diagram below, and cover National Courses (such as National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) as well as Skills for Work courses. The main statistics on National Qualifications do not include attainment in National Units, Scottish Baccalaureate or National Qualifications below Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 3 (such as National 1 and National 2).

The **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)** is used as the basis for reporting attainment. The SCQF is Scotland's national qualifications framework which allows broad comparisons to be made between qualifications at a similar level of difficulty. The SCQF level indicates the level of difficulty of a particular qualification. It allows learners, employers and the public in general, to understand the range of skills and learning that should be achieved at each level.

This publication reports the **number of passes** at a given SCQF level or better and the **highest** SCQF level achieved at **SCQF Levels 3 to 7**, incorporating the **National Qualifications** shown in the following diagram.

### Qualifications included in the main measures within this publication:



(Current qualifications are marked with a tick ✓)

The publication uses the 'latest and best' approach for attainment data. This means that only the best result within a subject is counted. For example, if a pupil passes Higher Mathematics one year and Advanced Higher Mathematics the following year, only the Advanced Higher qualification will be counted when looking at how many qualifications at any level that leaver has achieved, by the time they left school.

In this publication, grade A to C (or ungraded pass) is considered a pass; if a pupil attains a D at any of these levels, this is counted as equivalent to a pass at the level below.

Highers (SCQF Level 6) are generally taken in S5 or S6 and Advanced Highers (SCQF Level 7), are generally taken in S6. Highers, sometimes along with Advanced Highers, are typically the Scottish qualifications required for entry into Higher Education.

School leavers from 2020/21 are the sixth cohort to have experienced the **Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)** throughout the entirety of the **senior phase** (S4-S6) of their school education. School leavers from 2013/14 and 2014/15 will have taken a range of awards and qualifications, including both current qualifications and older qualifications that have now been phased out (such as Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2). Using SCQF levels to measure attainment in National Qualifications allows for broad comparisons between qualifications to be made consistently over time.

More information can be found in section 7.2.2.

## 1.5 Additional Qualifications

Whilst the main measures in this report focus on National Qualifications, Chapter 6 covers other qualifications that pupils may leave school with. Chapter 6 covers:

- Attainment statistics relating to vocational qualifications associated with Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (section 6.1).
- Experimental Statistics on Foundation Apprenticeships (section 6.2).
- Experimental Statistics covering a wider attainment measure incorporating all SQA qualifications (section 6.3).

Experimental Statistics are new Official Statistics that are undergoing evaluation. Further information on the reasons for publishing these new figures under this status are presented in sections 6.2 and 6.3.

## Chapter 2: School Leaver Cohort

- **50,746** pupils left school in 2020/21 - an increase from 47,454 school leavers in 2019/20, and the largest school leaver cohort since 2016/17.
- **63.2 per cent** of the 2020/21 school leaver cohort were in **S6**, up from 62.8 per cent in 2019/20.
- **25.6 per cent** were **S5** leavers (down from 25.8 per cent in 2019/20) and **11.2 per cent** were **S4** leavers (down from 11.4 per cent).

The 2020/21 school leaver cohort comprised 50,746 pupils. This is higher (by 3,292 pupils) than the 47,454 school leavers in 2019/20 - which was the smallest school leaver cohort on record (since 2009/10).

The biggest increase between 2019/20 and 2020/21 (in both absolute and percentage terms) was in the number of S6 leavers, which rose from 29,793 in 2019/20 to 32,065 in 2020/21 - an increase of 2,272 pupils. S5 leaver numbers increased by 755 pupils (from 12,240 in 2019/20 to 12,995 in 2020/21) and S4 leaver numbers increased by 263 (from 5,396 in 2019/20 to 5,659 in 2020/21).

As Chart 1a shows, the size of the school leaver cohort fluctuates each year. It is affected by both the number of pupils starting the relevant stages (e.g. S4, S5 and S6) each year, and also the decisions then made by pupils on whether to leave school that year, or to continue on to the next school year. Almost all S6 pupils in any academic year will leave school during or at the end of that year.

As stated in [last year's publication](#) the relatively small size of the 2019/20 school leaver cohort indicated that fewer S4 or S5 pupils had left school in 2019/20 than might have been expected. The increased size of the 2020/21 school leaver cohort – and particularly the S6 cohort - compared to 2019/20 may therefore be due, at least in part, to some of these pupils who decided not to leave school in 2019/20 now doing so in 2020/21.

**Chart 1a: Number of leavers by stage of leaving, 2009/10 to 2020/21**

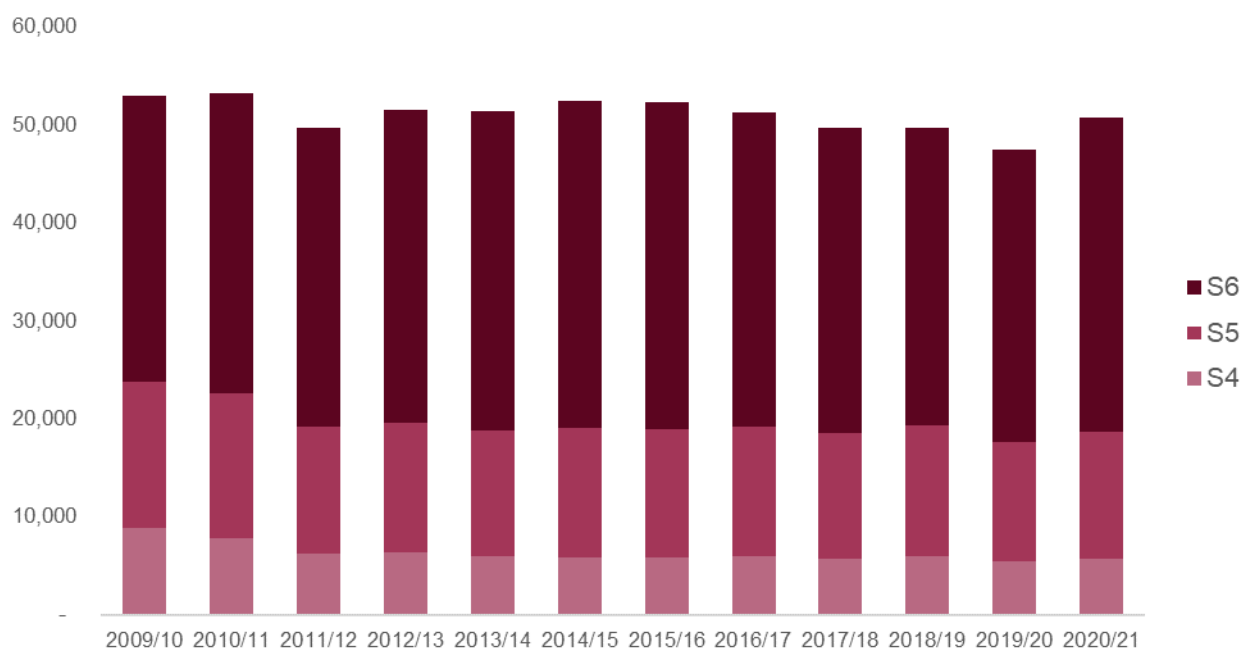
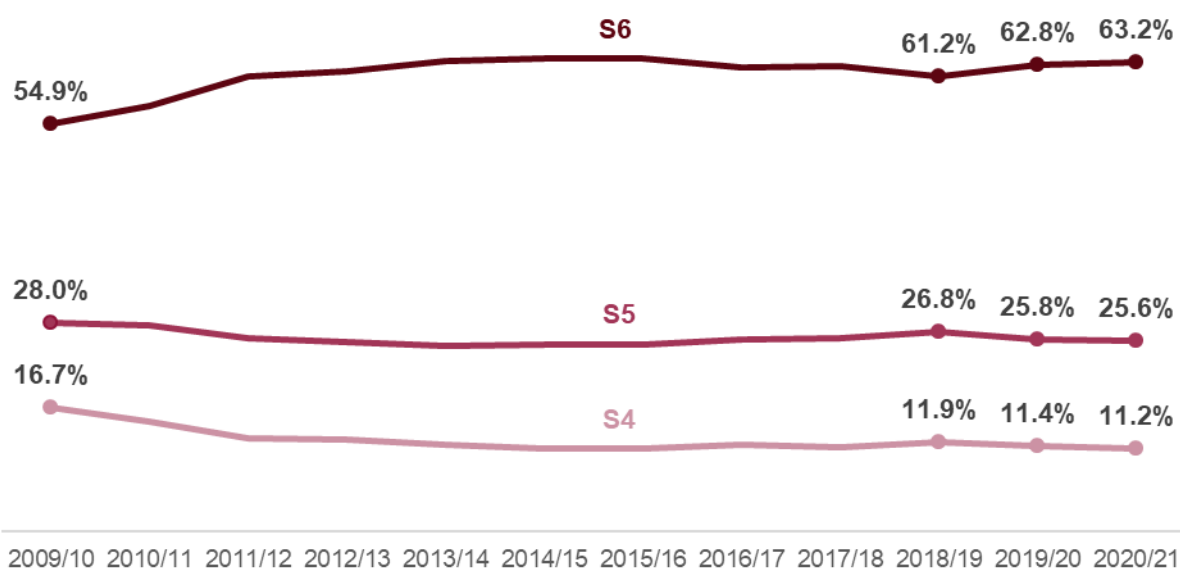


Chart 1b shows the percentage of school leavers by stage, between 2009/10 and 2020/21. It shows that over three-fifths (63.2 per cent) of 2020/21 school leavers left in S6, an increase from 62.8 per cent in 2019/20. Around a quarter (25.6 per cent) of 2020/21 school leavers left in S5 (a small decrease from 25.8 per cent in 2019/20), and 11.2 per cent left in S4 (also a small decrease, from 11.4 per cent in 2019/20). Around 0.1 per cent of 2020/21 school leavers left in S3 or another stage (the same as in 2019/20).

**Chart 1b: Percentage of leavers by stage of leaving, 2009/10 to 2020/21**



## Chapter 3: School Leaver Destinations

- **95.5 per cent** of 2020/21 school leavers were in a **positive initial destination** (93.3 per cent for 2019/20). This is the highest since consistent records began in 2009/10.
- **45.1 per cent** of school leavers were in **Higher Education** (the highest proportion of all categories, and the highest percentage since consistent records began in 2009/10).
- The percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination has increased in 2020/21 for leavers from both the (20%) most deprived and (20%) least deprived areas compared to 2019/20.
- The gap between the two groups has decreased from 6.3 percentage points in 2019/20 to **4.8 percentage points in 2020/21** (the lowest it has been since consistent records began in 2009/10).

As described in section 1.1.1, the 2019/20 and 2020/21 figures on school leavers' initial destinations will reflect the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) on choices made by, and opportunities available to, leavers in these years.

Particular care should therefore be taken when interpreting changes between 2019/20, 2020/21, and other years. The pandemic will have been at least partly responsible for the relatively low proportion of 2019/20 school leavers in a positive destination compared to surrounding years and the size of the latest increase in 2020/21 should be interpreted with this in mind.

### 3.1 Destinations of School Leavers

Table 1 shows that 95.5 per cent of all 2020/21 school leavers were in a positive initial destination. This was higher than in 2019/20 (93.3 per cent) and the highest since consistent records began in 2009/10.

In 2020/21, 68.4 per cent of school leavers were in Higher or Further Education approximately 3 months after leaving school. This was lower than in 2019/20 (72.2 per cent) but higher than in 2018/19 (67.6 per cent). This drop between 2019/20 and 2020/21 was driven by a drop in the proportion of school leavers in Further Education. Between 2019/20 and 2020/21 the proportion of school leavers in Further Education decreased from 28.1 per cent to 23.3 per cent – the lowest on record. Over the same period (2019/20 to 2020/21) the proportion of leavers in Higher Education increased from 44.2 per cent to 45.1 per cent – the highest proportion since 2009/10.

The percentage of school leavers in Employment has increased from 16.2 per cent in 2019/20 to 22.6 per cent in 2020/21. This increase follows a large drop from 22.9 per cent in 2018/19 to the record low figure of 16.2 per cent in 2019/20, reflecting the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) on school leavers' choices and opportunities. The subsequent increase in 2020/21 brings the proportion of school leavers entering employment back into line with pre-pandemic figures.

The percentage of school leavers who were Unemployed has decreased from 6.0 per cent for 2019/20 to 4.2 per cent for 2020/21 school leavers.

**Table 1: Percentage of school leavers by initial destination category, 2015/16 to 2020/21 [note 1] [note 2] [note 3] [note 4] [note 5]**

<b>Destination Category</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
Higher Education	40.3	40.7	41.1	40.3	44.2	45.1
Further Education	26.6	26.8	26.5	27.3	28.1	23.3
Training	2.3	2.2	1.9	3.5	3.7	3.7
Employment	22.3	22.0	22.7	22.9	16.2	22.6
Voluntary Work	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.4
Activity Agreement	1.0	1.2	1.2	[z]	[z]	[z]
Personal Skills Development	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.8	0.5
<b>Positive Destinations</b>	<b>93.5</b>	<b>93.9</b>	<b>94.6</b>	<b>95.0</b>	<b>93.3</b>	<b>95.5</b>
Unemployed Seeking	5.0	4.4	3.7	3.1	4.1	2.5
Unemployed Not Seeking	1.2	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.8	1.7
Unknown	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.7	0.3
<b>Other Destinations</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>4.5</b>
Number of Leavers	52,305	51,300	49,748	49,760	47,454	50,746

Note 1: From 2018/19, support previously recorded as Activity Agreements is recorded in the Training category. As a result, the proportion of school leavers recorded in the Training category is not directly comparable prior to and post 2018/19. For more information see section 7.3.1.

Note 2: The 'Unknown' status in 2019/20 may be affected by local partnerships' ability to track school leavers through home visits during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Note 3: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Note 4: Data from 2009/10 to 2020/21 are available in the [supplementary tables](#).

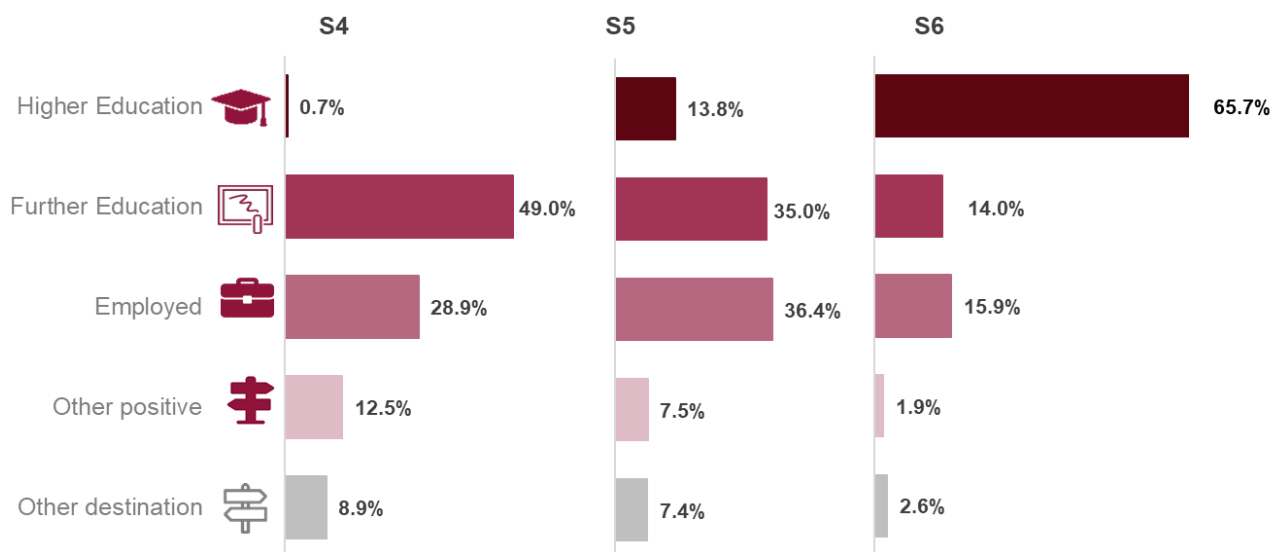
Note 5: [z] = not applicable (see section 7.3.2 for full list of symbols used in tables).

## 3.2 Destinations by Stage

Chart 2 shows the initial destinations of 2020/21 school leavers by stage of leaving. It shows that:

- the majority of **S6 leavers** entered Higher Education (65.7 per cent);
- the most common initial destination for **S5 leavers** was Employment (36.4 per cent) followed by Further Education (35.0 per cent);
- **S4 leavers** were most likely to enter Further Education (49.0 per cent).

**Chart 2: Initial destinations of school leavers by stage of leaving, 2020/21**  
[note 6] [note 7]



Note 6: 'Other positive' includes Personal Skills Development, Training and Voluntary Work.

Note 7: 'Other destination' includes Unemployed Seeking, Unemployed Not Seeking and Unknown.

## 3.3 Destinations by Deprivation

Chart 3 shows that the percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination has increased in 2020/21 compared to 2019/20, for leavers from both the (20%) **most deprived** and (20%) **least deprived areas**, based on the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\)](#) (see section 7.2.4).

Between 2019/20 and 2020/21 the proportion of school leavers in a positive initial destination has increased by more amongst leavers from the most deprived areas than it has amongst those from the least deprived areas. This has led to a decrease in the deprivation gap, from 6.3 percentage points in 2019/20 to 4.8 percentage points in 2020/21 – the smallest gap on record. It should be noted that the size of the 2019/20 deprivation gap was likely affected by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). Interpretation of the change between 2019/20 and 2020/21 should bear this in mind.

Time series data of destinations by deprivation (available in Table 2 in the [supplementary tables](#)) suggests that the narrowing of the gap between 2019/20 and 2020/21 is largely due to the proportions of school leavers entering employment. Section 3.1 showed that the proportion of all school leavers entering employment increased by 6.4 percentage points



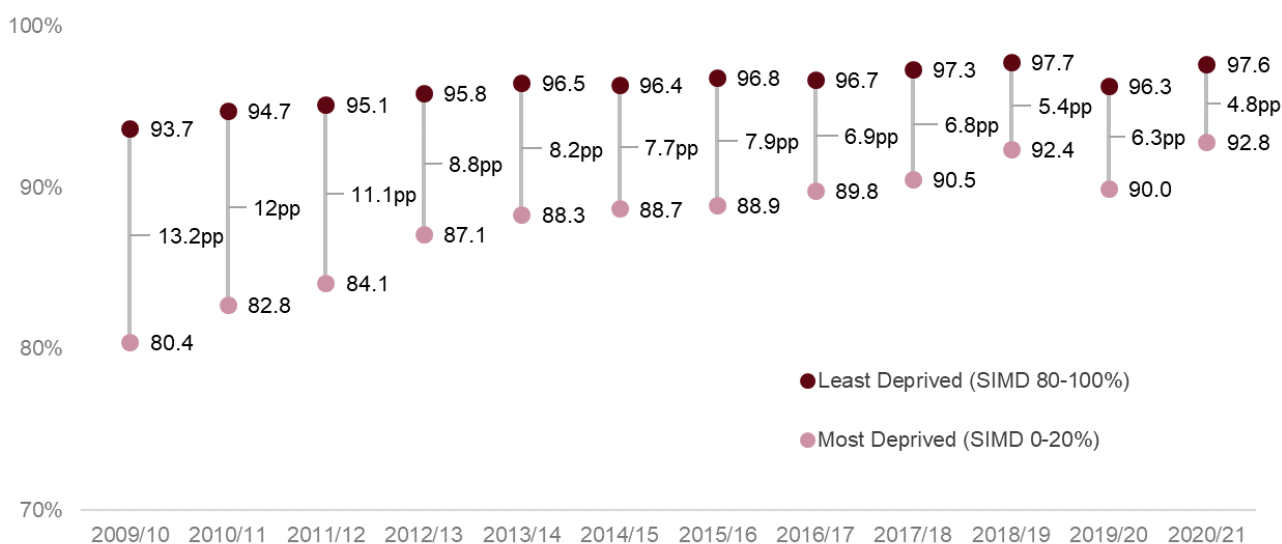
between 2019/20 and 2020/21. Whilst the proportion of school leavers entering employment increased across all SIMD groups between 2019/20 and 2020/21, the size of the increase was greater amongst school leavers from the most deprived areas (6.6 percentage points) than amongst those from the least deprived areas (4.4 percentage points).

Table 2 provides a breakdown of initial school leaver destinations by SIMD for 2020/21. It shows, for example, that pupils from the most deprived areas continue to be less likely to enter Higher Education than those from the least deprived areas.

In 2020/21, the most common destination for leavers from the most deprived areas was Further Education at 33.8 per cent.

In 2020/21, 6.6 per cent of leavers from the most deprived areas were unemployed, compared to 2.3 per cent of leavers from the least deprived areas.

**Chart 3: Percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination, by SIMD, 2009/10 to 2020/21 [note 8] [note 9]**



Note 8: pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived SIMD quintile

Note 9: Based on SIMD 2009 for 2009/10 and 2010/11, SIMD 2012 for 2011/12 to 2015/16, SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2019/20 and SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information can be found on the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#)

**Table 2: Percentage of school leavers by initial destination category by SIMD, 2020/21 [note 10] [note 11] [note 12] [note 13]**

2020/21 Initial Destination	0-20% (Most Deprived)	20-40%	40-60%	60-80%	80-100% (Least Deprived)	Percentage point gap	Total
Higher Education	29.2	36.5	43.9	52.1	65.1	35.9	45.1
Further Education	33.8	27.8	22.5	18.4	13.0	-20.8	23.3
Training	6.9	5.0	2.7	2.2	1.3	-5.5	3.7
Employment	21.4	24.3	26.1	23.5	17.7	-3.7	22.6
Voluntary Work	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	[low]	0.4
Personal Skills Development	1.0	0.5	0.3	0.2	0.1	-0.9	0.5
<b>Positive Destinations</b>	<b>92.8</b>	<b>94.5</b>	<b>95.9</b>	<b>96.8</b>	<b>97.6</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>95.5</b>
Unemployed Seeking	4.3	3.0	2.4	1.7	1.1	-3.1	2.5
Unemployed Not Seeking	2.4	2.1	1.5	1.3	1.1	-1.3	1.7
Unknown	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.1	-0.4	0.3
<b>Other Destinations</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>-4.8</b>	<b>4.5</b>
Number of Leavers	10,916	9,888	9,744	10,312	9,886		50,746

Note 10: Based on [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020](#).

Note 11: The percentage point gap measures the difference between the most and least deprived pupils.

Note 12: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Note 13: [low] = value less than 0.05%. (See section 7.3.2 for full list of symbols used in tables.)

### 3.4 Destinations by Pupil Characteristics

Table 3 shows the percentage of school leavers who entered a positive initial destination by various characteristics.

The percentage of 2020/21 school leavers in positive initial destinations has increased for almost all groups, compared to 2019/20.

School leavers in 2020/21 with an Additional Support Need (ASN) were less likely to go on to a positive initial destination, compared to leavers without a recorded ASN (92.8 per cent compared to 97.0 per cent) – a result consistent with previous years. These statistics relate to leavers from mainstream schools only; similar statistics relating to destinations of mainstream and special school leavers combined are available in [Supplementary Table L3.1](#).

The proportions of school leavers in a positive destination increased for most ethnic groups between 2019/20 and 2020/21. The highest proportion of school leavers in a positive destination in 2020/21 was amongst the African / Black / Caribbean group.

Females continue to be more likely to enter positive destinations than males: 96.2 per cent of females and 94.7 per cent of males entered a positive destination in 2020/21. This result is consistent with previous years.

Remote Rural areas had the highest proportion of leavers in positive destinations in 2020/21 (96.7 per cent), whilst Remote Small Towns had the lowest (94.7 per cent).

More information on destinations by pupil characteristics is available in the [supplementary tables](#).

**Table 3: Percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination, by pupil characteristic, 2015/16 to 2020/21 [note 14] [note 15] [note 16] [note 17] [note 18]**

<b>Pupil Characteristic</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	92.6	92.9	93.5	94.2	92.1	94.7
Female	94.4	94.9	95.6	95.9	94.6	96.2
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
White - Scottish	93.4	93.7	94.4	94.9	93.2	95.5
White - non-Scottish	94.0	94.7	95.1	95.8	93.3	95.1
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	92.8	94.9	95.5	93.8	92.3	96.5
Asian - Indian	[c]	[c]	97.2	97.2	[c]	[c]
Asian - Pakistani	93.6	96.5	95.8	97.1	97.2	96.7
Asian - Chinese	[c]	[c]	98.0	[c]	[c]	[c]
Asian - Other	95.9	96.4	97.0	[c]	95.0	97.0
African/ Black/ Caribbean	93.8	95.3	96.9	96.4	94.7	97.5
All other categories	93.1	93.7	91.7	93.7	93.4	94.9
Not Disclosed/Not known	92.3	92.7	91.5	92.8	91.2	92.7
<b>Urban/Rural</b>						
Large Urban Areas	92.4	93.0	93.6	95.0	93.1	95.6
Other Urban Areas	93.8	93.4	94.4	94.5	92.7	94.9
Accessible Small Towns	94.1	94.5	94.8	95.7	94.2	95.7
Remote Small Towns	94.6	94.7	95.0	94.9	92.9	94.7
Accessible Rural	94.2	95.5	95.9	96.1	94.7	96.5
Remote Rural	94.7	96.0	96.7	95.8	94.5	96.7
<b>Additional Support Needs</b>						
ASN	89.1	89.8	90.9	91.9	89.6	92.8
No ASN	94.8	95.3	96.0	96.5	95.4	97.0
<b>All Leavers</b>	<b>93.5</b>	<b>93.9</b>	<b>94.6</b>	<b>95.0</b>	<b>93.3</b>	<b>95.5</b>

Note 14: Some categories have been grouped together due to small numbers. Some categories (typically 'Asian – Indian', 'Asian – Chinese' contain between 100-200 leavers and due to relatively small numbers may be subject to fluctuation. Comparisons between groups should take this into account.

Note 15: The 'African/ Black/ Caribbean' category includes 'African', 'African - Other', and the 'Caribbean or Black' categories.

Note 16: 'All other categories' includes 'Other - other' and 'Other - Arab'.

Note 17: Pupils who have a Coordinated Support Plan (CSP), Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) or Child's Plan are assessed or declared disabled or have another need.

Note 18: [c] = value suppressed to protect against the risk of disclosure of personal information. (See section 7.3.2 for full list of symbols used in tables.)

## Chapter 4: School Leaver Attainment

- **66.0 per cent** of school leavers left with **one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better** in 2020/21.
- **2.1 per cent** of school leavers attained **no passes** at SCQF Level 3 or better in 2020/21.
- **96.5 per cent** of leavers attained **literacy** at SCQF Level 3 or better in 2020/21.
- Similarly, **96.1 per cent** of leavers attained **numeracy** at this level in 2020/21.

### 4.1 Attainment Data

Attainment data in this section accounts for **National Qualifications** achieved throughout **all stages** of a pupil's education at school. The range of qualifications included in the main measures in this publication can be found in the diagram in section 1.4.

The **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)** is used as the basis for reporting attainment. This publication reports the **number of passes** at a given SCQF level or better and **highest** SCQF level achieved at **SCQF Levels 3 to 7**. SCQF levels, in ascending order, indicate the **level of difficulty** of a particular qualification, and allow for broad comparisons to be made between qualifications. For more information, see sections 1.4 and 7.2.2.

As outlined in section 1.1.2, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of 2020 and 2021 National 5 (SCQF Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) exams and alternative approaches were taken to determining grades. This will have affected the attainment of many 2020/21 and 2019/20 school leavers presented in this report.

A **dashed line break** in the series has been placed between 2018/19 and 2019/20. This indicates that care must be taken when comparing attainment of school leavers in 2018/19 and before, with that of school leavers in 2019/20 and beyond. In addition, care should also be taken when comparing the attainment of 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers. Interpretation of changes must take full account of the different certification methods used in different years, and changes in the attainment levels in 2019/20 and 2020/21 should not be seen as an indication that performance has improved or worsened, without further evidence.

In addition, as outlined in chapter 2, the relative size and make-up of last year's (2019/20) school leaver cohort indicated that it is likely some S4 and S5 pupils who might have otherwise left school in 2019/20 decided instead to stay at school, possibly for reasons related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Pupils in this position, many of whom will have left school in 2020/21, will have had opportunities to gain additional qualifications and/or higher levels of qualifications, than if had they left in 2019/20. This should also be kept in mind when comparing attainment over time.

## 4.2 Attainment of School Leavers

Table 4 shows that 32.0 per cent of 2020/21 school leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Levels 3 to 5 as their highest qualification (1.8 per cent at SCQF Level 3, 8.5 per cent at SCQF Level 4 and 21.7 per cent at SCQF Level 5). 66.0 per cent left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or 7 (41.8 per cent at SCQF Level 6 and 24.2 per cent at SCQF Level 7) - the highest level since 2009/10. This should be interpreted with care given the change in assessment methods in 2020 and 2021, as outlined above and in section 1.1.2.

A small proportion (2.1 per cent) of school leavers attained no passes in National Qualifications at SCQF Level 3 or better in 2020/21. Some of these school leavers have attainment either in courses at SCQF Levels 1 or 2, or in courses/units not covered in these statistics (such as National Progression Awards, National Certificates and Awards). These data can be found in [supplementary tables](#) A1.4a and A1.4b.

**Table 4: Percentage of school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved, 2015/16 to 2020/21 [note 19]**

SCQF Level	Percentage					
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
No passes at SCQF 3 or better	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.2	2.0	2.1
SCQF Level 3	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.9	2.2	1.8
SCQF Level 4	10.7	10.2	10.3	10.9	10.1	8.5
SCQF Level 5	23.9	24.9	23.8	24.5	21.8	21.7
SCQF Level 6	42.6	41.9	42.0	41.4	40.6	41.8
SCQF Level 7	19.1	19.3	20.2	19.1	23.2	24.2
<b>Number of leavers</b>	<b>52,305</b>	<b>51,300</b>	<b>49,748</b>	<b>49,760</b>	<b>47,454</b>	<b>50,746</b>

Note 19: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. Further information can be found in section 1.1.2.

Table 5 provides information on the number of passes achieved by school leavers at each SCQF Level or better.

A time series from 2009/10 to 2020/21 is presented in Table 5 in the [supplementary tables](#).

**Table 5: Leaver attainment by SCQF Level or better and number of passes achieved, percentage of leavers, 2018/19 to 2020/21 [note 20]**

2020/21							Percentage
SCQF Level	1 pass or more	2 passes or more	3 passes or more	4 passes or more	5 passes or more	6 passes or more	7 passes or more
3 or better	97.9	96.5	94.6	92.4	89.1	82.9	70.6
4 or better	96.2	93.9	91.8	89.2	85.5	79.3	67.6
5 or better	87.7	81.9	76.3	69.9	62.6	54.1	43.6
6 or better	66.0	57.7	50.5	43.4	35.3	23.6	12.2
7	24.2	11.0	3.7	0.4	[low]	0.0	0.0

2019/20							Percentage
SCQF Level	1 pass or more	2 passes or more	3 passes or more	4 passes or more	5 passes or more	6 passes or more	7 passes or more
3 or better	98.0	96.3	94.1	91.8	88.1	81.2	67.9
4 or better	95.8	93.3	90.9	88.1	84.1	77.6	64.9
5 or better	85.7	79.2	73.0	66.4	59.2	51.0	40.5
6 or better	63.9	55.2	47.9	40.9	32.9	21.5	10.7
7	23.2	10.4	3.5	0.3	[c]	[c]	0.0

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2018/19							Percentage
SCQF Level	1 pass or more	2 passes or more	3 passes or more	4 passes or more	5 passes or more	6 passes or more	7 passes or more
3 or better	97.8	96.1	94.0	91.6	87.7	80.5	66.3
4 or better	95.9	93.6	91.2	88.2	84.0	77.1	63.5
5 or better	85.1	77.6	70.5	63.4	55.8	47.8	37.6
6 or better	60.5	50.6	43.0	36.1	28.7	18.5	8.9
7	19.1	8.0	2.7	0.3	[c]	[c]	0.0

Note 20: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. Further information can be found in section 1.1.2.

### 4.3 Attainment by Deprivation

In 2017, the Scottish Government consulted on proposals for measuring the poverty related attainment gap and milestones towards closing it; focusing on the impact of the education system as a whole and using a range of measures that reflect key stages of the learner journey and the breadth of issues that can impact on attainment.

The outcome was a basket of 11 key measures (supported by 15 sub-measures) of the attainment gap, three of which are based on school leaver attainment by deprivation, namely:

- The proportion of leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF Level 4 or better
- The proportion of leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF Level 5 or better
- The proportion of leavers attaining one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better

Chart 4 shows the proportions of school leavers from the most and least deprived areas who attained 1 pass or more at SCQF Levels 4 or better, 5 or better and 6 or better. As described in Section 1.1.2, care should be taken when making comparisons between 2020/21 and earlier years and any increase or decrease should not be interpreted as indicating improving or worsening performance without further evidence.

**At SCQF Level 4 or better**, the gap between the proportion of school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas attaining 1 pass or more was 6.3 percentage points. This is down from 7.1 percentage points in 2019/20, due to an increase in the proportion of leavers from the most deprived areas who attained a pass at this level.

Following a steady reduction in the gap from 2009/10 (11.3 percentage points) to 2016/17 (5.9 percentage points), the gap then widened each year until 2019/20, when it was the widest it had been since 2012/13 (7.1 percentage points). In 2020/21 the gap has narrowed, and is now similar to levels from the years 2014/15 and 2015/16.

**At SCQF Level 5 or better**, the gap was 18.2 percentage points in 2020/21. This is down from 20.8 percentage points in 2019/20. Between 2019/20 and 2020/21 the proportion attaining 1 pass or more has increased for school leavers from both the most and the least deprived areas, but increased by more for those from the most deprived areas, which has led to the gap narrowing.

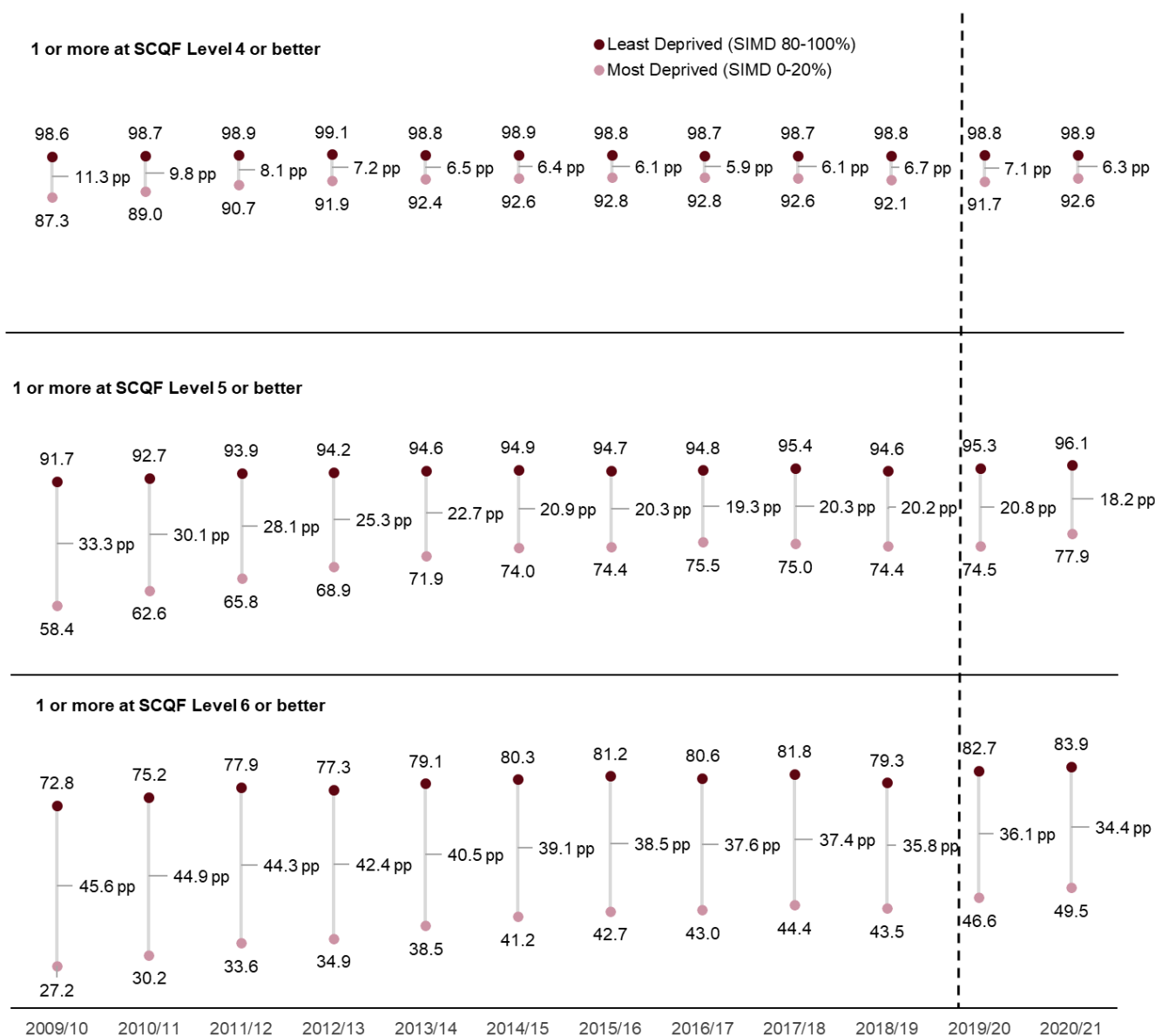
Between 2009/10 and 2016/17 the attainment gap at SCQF Level 5 or better reduced steadily from 33.3 percentage points to 19.3 percentage points. Between 2017/18 and 2018/19 it remained broadly stable at just over 20 percentage points and increased to 20.8 percentage points in 2019/20 before the drop to 18.2 percentage points in 2020/21.

**At SCQF Level 6 or better**, the gap was 34.4 percentage points in 2020/21. This is down from 36.1 percentage points in 2019/20. The proportion attaining 1 pass or more has increased for school leavers from both the most and least deprived areas, but has increased by more for those from the most deprived areas, which has led to the gap narrowing.

Over the longer term, the gap has reduced from 45.6 percentage points in 2009/10.



**Chart 4: Percentage of school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 4 to 6 or better, by SIMD quintile, 2009/10 to 2020/21 [note 21] [note 22] [note 23]**



Note 21: pp = percentage point difference between most and least deprived quintile

Note 22: Based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) 2009 for 2009/10 and 2010/11, SIMD 2012 for 2011/12 to 2015/16, SIMD 2016 for 2016/17 to 2019/20, and SIMD 2020 for 2020/21. More information on the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#).

Note 23: A dashed line break has been placed between the attainment figures for 2018/19 and 2019/20 school leavers reflecting the impact of the change to the assessment approach in 2020 and 2021 on 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leaver attainment. Further information can be found in section 1.1.2.

## 4.4 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics

Table 6 shows school leaver attainment by pupil characteristic, such as sex and ethnicity. It shows that females are continuing to outperform males at SCQF Levels 4 to 6 or better, with the gap being wider at higher SCQF levels.

Pupils recorded as Asian-Chinese continue to have high levels of attainment compared to other groups, with 94.7 per cent achieving one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better.

Pupils with a recorded Additional Support Need (ASN) are less likely to achieve SCQF Levels 4 to 6 or better, than pupils without an ASN.

In 2020/21 pupils living in Accessible Rural and Remote Rural areas are the most likely to achieve at SCQF Levels 4 or better and 5 or better whilst at SCQF level 6 or better pupils living in Accessible Rural areas and Large Urban areas have the highest levels of attainment.

Broad patterns in attainment by pupil characteristic are typically stable year on year, although small numbers in some characteristic groups mean fluctuations do occur. Table 6 shows that, compared to 2019/20, a higher percentage of 2020/21 school leavers achieved one pass or more at SCQF Level 4, 5 and 6 or better across almost all characteristic breakdowns.

**Table 6: Percentage of school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 4 to 6 or better, by pupil characteristic, 2019/20 and 2020/21 [note 24] [note 25] [note 26] [note 27]**

Pupil Characteristic	2019/20			2020/21		
	1 or more at SCQF Level 4 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 5 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 6 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 4 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 5 or better	1 or more at SCQF Level 6 or better
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	95.0	83.2	57.8	95.6	85.8	60.6
Female	96.6	88.3	70.1	96.8	89.5	71.5
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
White - Scottish	95.7	85.2	62.7	96.1	87.3	64.9
White - non-Scottish	95.5	86.1	65.3	95.6	87.9	66.4
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	95.5	89.7	70.2	97.1	91.3	76.2
Asian - Indian	[c]	[c]	82.3	[c]	[c]	84.9
Asian - Pakistani	99.0	94.0	80.4	99.2	93.6	79.8
Asian - Chinese	[c]	[c]	92.5	100.0	[c]	94.7
Asian - Other	97.0	92.6	79.9	[c]	91.4	81.4
African/ Black/ Caribbean	97.1	93.8	78.2	98.2	93.9	83.7
All other categories	93.7	85.4	65.4	96.0	88.4	63.9
Not Disclosed/Not known	92.8	79.7	61.7	93.1	83.2	61.5
<b>Urban/Rural</b>						
Large Urban Areas	95.7	85.9	65.9	96.0	87.8	67.8
Other Urban Areas	95.4	83.9	61.0	96.0	86.2	63.8
Accessible Small Towns	96.3	86.8	65.8	96.4	89.1	67.2
Remote Small Towns	95.1	85.0	59.1	95.3	85.5	62.4
Accessible Rural	96.6	88.6	66.9	97.1	90.0	68.6
Remote Rural	97.0	89.8	67.0	97.0	90.8	67.1
<b>Additional Support Needs</b>						
ASN	90.8	71.4	43.3	92.1	75.4	47.1
No ASN	98.5	93.5	75.1	98.6	94.8	77.0
<b>All Leavers</b>	<b>95.8</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>63.9</b>	<b>96.2</b>	<b>87.7</b>	<b>66.0</b>

Note 24: Some categories have been grouped together due to small numbers. Some categories (typically 'Asian – Indian' and 'Asian – Chinese') contain between 100-200 leavers and due to relatively small numbers may be subject to fluctuation. Comparisons between groups should take this into account.

Note 25: The 'African/Black/Caribbean' category includes 'African', 'African - Other' and 'Caribbean or Black' categories

Note 26: 'All other categories' includes 'Other - other' and 'Other - Arab'.

Note 27: Pupils who have a Coordinated Support Plan (CSP), Individualised Educational Programme (IEP) or Child's Plan are assessed or declared disabled or have another need.

## 4.5 Literacy and Numeracy

Literacy and numeracy are key skills for any school leaver. **Literacy** is taken to be the ability to communicate by reading, writing and listening and talking. **Numeracy** is defined as the ability to use numbers in order to solve problems by counting, doing calculations, measuring, and understanding graphs and charts.

A range of courses are included in the literacy and numeracy measures, as set out in background note 7.2.2. These courses are selected based upon the outcomes and assessment standards for **SQA's literacy and numeracy units at National 3, 4 and 5**, with the key criterion being that the main purpose of the qualification or award is to improve literacy and/or numeracy skills.

When looking at achievement in literacy and numeracy, a pass in relevant units (rather than full qualifications, for example) can count as achieving literacy or numeracy at that level. With unit based courses, a pupil who did not pass the full course, but did achieve the relevant units, would be counted as achieving literacy or numeracy at that level.

Mandatory unit assessments were removed from National 5s in 2017/18 and from Highers in 2018/19. This means that it is no longer mandatory for a pupil to complete unit assessments in order to achieve National 5 and Higher qualifications. This change is likely to have an effect on the literacy and numeracy attainment figures over time.

Table 7 shows the percentage of school leavers attaining literacy and numeracy at SCQF Levels 3 to 5 or better. At each level, more leavers attained literacy skills than numeracy skills, and this was more marked at higher SCQF levels.

At SCQF Level 3 or better, 96.5 per cent of 2020/21 school leavers attained literacy and 96.1 per cent attained numeracy. At SCQF Level 4 or better, 94.6 per cent of school leavers attained literacy and 91.6 per cent attained numeracy. At SCQF Level 5 or better, 83.4 per cent of school leavers attained literacy and 72.4 per cent attained this level in numeracy.

**Table 7: Leaver attainment in literacy and numeracy by SCQF Level, percentage of leavers, 2017/18 to 2020/21 [note 28]**

SCQF Level	Literacy				Numeracy			
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<b>3 or better</b>	96.3	96.1	96.2	96.5	95.8	95.8	96.1	96.1
<b>4 or better</b>	94.3	93.9	93.9	94.6	90.8	91.4	91.6	91.6
<b>5 or better</b>	81.6	81.7	81.7	83.4	69.1	68.7	71.0	72.4

Note 28: As described above caution should be exercised if making comparisons over time.

## Chapter 5: School Leaver Attainment and Destinations

- School leavers with **higher attainment levels** are **more likely** to go on to a **positive destination**.
- **71.9 per cent** of school leavers who **did not achieve a pass at SCQF Level 3 or better** entered a positive destination
- **99.1 per cent** of leavers who achieved **one pass or more at SCQF Level 7** entered a positive destination.

Table 8 shows that for 2020/21, the majority of school leavers with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or Level 7 entered Higher Education (55.2 per cent and 88.3 per cent respectively). For all other leavers, the most common destination was Further Education: 46.6 per cent of leavers whose highest qualification was at SCQF Level 5 entered Further Education. This compares to 42.5 per cent of those whose highest qualification was at SCQF Level 4 and 33.2 per cent of those whose highest qualification was at SCQF Level 3. Amongst those with no passes at SCQF Level 3, 27.3 per cent entered Further Education.

Leavers with no passes at SCQF Level 3 or better were the most likely to be in Other Destinations (28.1 per cent), and leavers with one pass or more at SCQF Level 7 were the least likely to be in Other Destinations (0.9 per cent).

**Table 8: Percentage of school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved and initial destinations category, 2020/21 [note 29]**

Initial Destination	No passes at SCQF 3 or better	SCQF Level 3	SCQF Level 4	SCQF Level 5	SCQF Level 6	SCQF Level 7	Total
Higher Education	[c]	[c]	0.7	2.6	55.2	88.3	45.1
Further Education	27.3	33.2	42.5	46.6	18.1	3.5	23.3
Training	18.4	24.2	14.5	5.1	1.2	0.2	3.7
Employment	19.0	17.2	26.3	38.7	23.0	6.7	22.6
Voluntary Work	[c]	[c]	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4
Personal Skills Development	5.2	4.9	1.4	0.4	0.1	[low]	0.5
<b>Positive Destinations</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>80.5</b>	<b>86.0</b>	<b>93.8</b>	<b>97.9</b>	<b>99.1</b>	<b>95.5</b>
Unemployed Seeking	10.4	10.0	7.4	3.8	1.4	0.5	2.5
Unemployed Not Seeking	15.5	[c]	5.7	1.9	0.5	[c]	1.7
Unknown	2.2	[c]	0.8	0.5	0.1	[c]	0.3
<b>Other Destinations</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>4.5</b>
<b>Number of Leavers</b>	<b>1,045</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>4,322</b>	<b>11,004</b>	<b>21,194</b>	<b>12,292</b>	<b>50,746</b>

Note 29: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

## Chapter 6: Additional qualifications

Attainment data in previous sections relate to National Qualifications (including Skills for Work), as detailed in section 1.4. This section covers a range of other qualifications that may be undertaken by school pupils.

### 6.1 Developing Scotland's Young Workforce

The Scottish Government established the independent Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce, led by Sir Ian Wood, in January 2013. Its remit was to explore the development of a modern, responsive and valued system for vocational training and to emulate the labour markets of the best performing European countries. More information on the [Developing Scotland's Young Workforce strategy](#).

Tables A1.3a and A1.3b in the [supplementary tables](#) show attainment in vocational qualifications at SCQF Levels 2 to 7, by local authority. These vocational qualifications include National Certificates, Higher National Qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, National Progression Awards and Skills for Work. Note that attainment in most of these qualifications is not included in the attainment statistics presented in previous sections, which cover National Qualifications only. The exception is the Skills for Work courses, which contribute to both measures.

Unlike the National Qualifications - National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher - the qualifications which make up the Developing the Young Workforce measure are typically assessed internally. This approach to assessment was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to the same extent as for National Qualifications therefore it is not necessary to have a break in the data series between 2018/19 and 2019/20 for this measure. Further information on the changes to SQA assessment methods in 2020 and 2021 is available in Section 7.5.2.

Table A1.3b in the [supplementary tables](#) shows that 26.1 per cent of 2020/21 mainstream and special school leavers achieved one or more vocational qualifications at SCQF Level 5 or better. This compares to 22.5 per cent in 2019/20, and to 7.3 per cent in 2013/14.

### 6.2 Foundation Apprenticeships (Experimental Statistics)

[Foundation Apprenticeships](#) have been designed and developed with Skills Development Scotland, industry and SQA, and are aligned to key sectors of the economy with current skills shortages and projected future jobs growth. They provide work-based learning opportunities with industry-recognised qualifications in the senior phase.

[Supplementary table](#) A1.5 covers the number of school leavers in 2019/20 and 2020/21 who have achieved a Foundation Apprenticeship by subject. The statistics in this table have been labelled as Experimental Statistics reflecting the fact that work to ensure and improve their accuracy is ongoing. Note that attainment in Foundation Apprenticeships is not included in attainment statistics presented in Chapters 4 and 5, which cover National Qualifications only. The National Certificate and National Progression Award components of Foundation Apprenticeships do however contribute to the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce measure outlined in section 6.1 above, and to the 'All SQA qualifications' measure outlined in section 6.3 below.

The data in table A1.5 is provided by SQA and includes Foundation Apprenticeship attainment which had either (i) been certified by the date which the data was taken for this publication (12 August 2021) and has a result date between 22 August 2020 and 31 July 2021 or (ii) for which a Letter of Recognition was issued.

Foundation Apprenticeships have been available since 2016. They generally last for two years and so the first set of school leavers to attain Foundation Apprenticeships would have left school in 2018. However, table A1.5 presents data for 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers only.

Skills Development Scotland have been working with SQA, the Scottish Government and others to improve the data recording of Foundation Apprenticeships in school attainment data. The data in this table, designated as **Experimental Statistics**, provides a valid indication of the number of school leavers who attained a Foundation Apprenticeship. Despite this, there will be some completed Foundation Apprenticeships that have not been included. This is generally due to COVID-19 which caused disruption for learning providers in uploading results by the cut-off date of 31st July 2021.

Work to capture all Foundation Apprenticeship results continued throughout 2021 and additional, updated information will be included in SDS' annual FA progress report, due for publication in summer 2022. The latest version of this report (2021) is available from the [SDS website](#). Please note that data published in SDS reports relates to individual Foundation Apprenticeship cohorts, rather than school leavers as presented in these experimental statistics.

These statistics are being published as **Experimental Statistics** to provide useful information for users, while reflecting that they are undergoing testing to ensure they meet quality standards of Official Statistics in future. The statistics are undergoing ongoing development work with stakeholders including Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). They will remain with the 'Experimental' label for the duration of this work as more knowledge and quality improvements are built into the data to improve coverage in future outputs. Outputs will be compared on an ongoing basis with other sources to ensure that statistics presented are of sufficient quality.

[Supplementary tables](#) are available as supporting files to this publication.



## 6.3 All SQA Qualifications Attainment Measure (Experimental Statistics)

### 6.3.1 Background

As set out in section 1.4, the attainment statistics in Chapters 4 and 5 of this publication focus on Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications (including Skills for Work). These qualifications are a subset of the full range of SQA awards and qualifications<sup>2</sup> that pupils can achieve. A wide variety of other SQA qualifications, not included in the headline statistics in this report, are also increasingly being taken by school pupils.

In response to feedback from users, and to improve the evidence base on the attainment of broader achievements and skills as part of the Curriculum for Excellence, we have been exploring how a wider range of qualifications could be reflected in this publication to account for other attainment achieved by school pupils. Some, but not all, of these are already reflected in the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce [supplementary table](#), which shows that the percentage of pupils leaving school with vocational qualifications continues to rise (see section 6.1).

In our 2019/20 publication we therefore introduced four [supplementary tables](#) (W1-W4) covering a proposed 'All SQA qualifications' measure, including National Qualifications and other SQA qualifications such as National Certificates, National Progression Awards and Awards (full list given in section 6.3.2). These tables have also been produced for this report, for 2020/21 school leavers.

These statistics have been designated as **Experimental Statistics**, reflecting that they are undergoing development and are subject to revision based on informed feedback from users.

Further information on the range of SQA qualifications can be found on the [SQA](#) website.

### 6.3.2 Methodology

The 'All SQA qualifications' measure includes attainment in qualifications at SCQF levels 3-7.

Similarly to the National Qualifications-based attainment measure used in previous sections (for which details on methodology can be found in section 7.2.2), only the best result within a subject is counted and Grades A to C (or ungraded pass) are considered a pass. If a pupil attains a D at a certain level, this is counted as equivalent to a pass at the level below.

Where a pupil has attainment in a given subject at multiple Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) levels, potentially across different qualification types (e.g. National Qualifications, National Progression Awards) only the attainment at the highest level is counted.

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<sup>2</sup> A number of SCQF accredited courses and qualifications are provided by other bodies. These are not included in this measure. The Scottish Government does not receive data on a consistent basis for the full range of these qualifications/courses delivered by other providers.

This ensures that the number of passes achieved at a given SCQF level or better (see Table W2 in the [supplementary tables](#)) counts the total number of subjects where a pass was achieved, allowing us to measure the 'breadth' of attainment (for how many subjects a pupil attains a given level) as well as the 'depth' (to what level a pupil attains).

An important point to note is that for National Qualifications, all qualifications at a given SCQF level carry the same number of SCQF credit points, meaning that they are all associated with the same notional number of hours of learning. This means that it makes sense to treat all National Qualifications at a given SCQF level equally – each is treated as a single pass at a given SCQF level.

However across the full range of SQA qualifications included in the 'All SQA qualifications' measure, there can be variation in the number of credit points carried by different qualifications at the same SCQF Level. Some qualifications at a given SCQF level are worth, for example, 6 SCQF credit points; whilst others are worth, for example, 24. **In this proposed 'All SQA qualifications' measure, both of these qualifications are treated as being equal – each is treated as a single pass at the relevant SCQF Level.** This means that qualifications with varying magnitudes of notional learning hours are treated equally, although time and knowledge requirements of different qualifications at the same level may vary substantially. This should be borne in mind when interpreting the results.

The 'All SQA qualifications' measure includes the National Certificate and National Progression Award components of Foundation Apprenticeships. For school leavers who have completed a Foundation Apprenticeship since their establishment in 2016, the attainment achieved in these components is included in this measure – rather than the Foundation Apprenticeship qualification itself. This avoids double-counting attainment in these circumstances.

## Differences between existing National Qualification attainment measures and the proposed 'All SQA qualifications' measure

	Existing National Qualifications attainment measure	Proposed All SQA qualifications attainment measure
<b>Qualifications included</b>	National Qualifications (National Courses, Skills for Work)	National Qualifications (National Courses, Skills for Work), Awards, Customised Awards, Higher National, National – Workplace, National Certificates, National Progression Awards, Professional Development Awards, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, Ungraded National Courses
<b>SCQF credit points</b>	<b>Same</b> for each qualification within a given SCQF level	<b>Differs</b> between qualifications within a given SCQF level
<b>Highest SCQF level achieved</b>	Highest SCQF level achieved across <b>any subject in National Qualifications (SCQF levels 3-7)</b>	Highest SCQF level achieved across <b>any subject in any SQA qualification (SCQF levels 3-7)</b>
<b>Number of passes achieved by SCQF level or better</b>	Total number of subjects where a pass was achieved in <b>National Qualifications</b>	Total number of subjects where a pass was achieved <sup>a</sup> in <b>any SQA Qualification</b>

a. Note that only the best result within a subject is counted. In cases where a National Qualification has been attained within a given subject this will not be counted towards total passes in the 'All SQA qualifications' attainment measure if another qualification has been achieved at a higher SCQF level within the same subject.

### 6.3.3 Results

[Supplementary tables](#) W1-W4 cover the 'All SQA qualifications' measure. Across all SQA qualifications, data for 2020/21 shows that 67.8 per cent of school leavers left with one pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better, while 1.9 per cent of school leavers achieved no passes at SCQF Level 3 or better. These patterns are similar to those presented for the National Qualifications-based attainment measure in Chapter 4, but show slightly higher overall levels of attainment because a pass in the 'All SQA qualifications' measure can be in a National Qualification, or in one of the other SQA qualifications (listed in section 6.3.2).

Note that, as in the measures in sections 4 and 5, we have included a dashed line break between 2018/19 (and earlier years) and 2019/20 (and subsequent years) for this measure as it includes National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications (for more information see sections 1.1.2 and 7.5.2).

### 6.3.4 Feedback

These statistics are being published as Experimental Statistics in order to gather feedback from users and aid development. The statistics will remain in 'Experimental' status for the duration of this work as we gain insight from feedback on whether the statistics meet user needs and how they could be presented to add value to existing attainment measures. The methods used to produce this measure are under development and users should be aware that results may therefore be revised in future releases. Timescales for development will depend on the results of user feedback.

We invite any comments from users on the usefulness of the measure, and on whether this is the best approach to include a wider range of qualifications to measure attainment. Please send any feedback on this measure to the following mailbox:

[school.stats@gov.scot](mailto:school.stats@gov.scot)

## Chapter 7: Background Notes

### 7.1 National Statistics Publication

This is a National Statistics Publication. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

These statistics undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. This publication has been assessed by the UK Statistics Authority.

### 7.2 Sources and Methodology

#### 7.2.1 Destinations

##### Source and Quality Assurance

School leaver destination data is sourced from the Opportunities for All shared dataset which is managed and hosted by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) on behalf of partners. The data is held on the SDS operational Customer Support System (CSS). This data set contains information shared by local authorities, colleges, Scottish Funding Council, Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) via a secure online portal known as the 16+ Data Hub. The data to be shared is documented within the Post-16 Education (Scotland) Act 2013 and there are a series of business rules governing the processing of this data.

Data that has been shared by partners is combined with information gathered directly from young people, their parents/carers or their representatives by SDS staff delivering services to individuals, including transitional support to school leavers. SDS has at least one named adviser for each school in Scotland who works directly with pupils and school staff to support the transition of young people from school. As this combined data is primarily used for operational purposes the quality is continually monitored to ensure SDS, local authorities and colleges can monitor and plan for a young person's involvement in education, training or employment and identify those young people who require advice or support.

SDS has developed guidance documents for their staff which set out the specific activities and processes involved in identifying, engaging with and confirming the status of SDS customers. This information includes definitions of the available statuses on CSS and step by step recording guidance. SDS staff have access to specific reports for data quality and more specifically to support the school leaver destination process. These reports will identify school leavers and provide details of their destinations including the source of the information and the date the information was validated.

Prior to destination data being shared with the Scottish Government, final quality checks are carried out centrally by the Corporate Planning and Performance Reporting team within SDS. These include a review of statuses to ensure the reported destination reflects the available detail e.g. course details and course levels are correctly reported as higher or further education. In addition, final checks of shared data are made to ensure destinations are consistent with data sources e.g. matching information about modern or graduate apprentices.

## Methodology

A pupil is counted as a school leaver if they have a leaver record on the Opportunities for All shared data set, a [Scottish Government pupil census](#) record for the same academic year, and no Scottish Government pupil census record in the following academic year.

The initial destinations data in this publication provide information on the outcomes for young people approximately three months after the end of the academic year (the 1st Monday in October) while the follow-up publication provides information on the outcomes of young people approximately nine months after the end of the academic year (the 1st Monday in April). These collections should be seen as complementary to one another but it should be noted that various factors may affect the results at different time periods.

Throughout this publication the initial destination statistics exclude special school leavers from the calculations. For information on initial destination statistics which include special school leavers see table L3.1 in the [supplementary tables](#).

## Recording of 'unemployed seeking' statuses

The rollout of Universal Credit (UC) commenced in March 2016 and has replaced out of work benefits, such as Jobseekers' Allowance, that were previously used to update the status of individuals to 'unemployed seeking'. For previous releases of these statistics, Skills Development Scotland did not receive data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on Universal Credit claimants.

SDS now receive UC data from DWP which they have used to validate the initial destinations of 2020/21 school leavers.

It is likely that this data has had a limited impact on the initial destination figures presented at a national level in this report. SDS maintains an accurate record of the circumstances of the school-leaver-aged young people in unemployment that it engages with, through the delivery of post-school services. The availability of UC data from DWP will, in most cases, have confirmed the statuses of school leaver which had already been determined through this engagement.

### 7.2.2 Attainment

#### Source and Quality Assurance

Data on National Qualifications are provided by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) using data from the live SQA Awards Processing System (APS).

SQA provide two extracts of data to the Scottish Government (SG); one in August (pre-review data) and one in December (post-review data). The December extract is used in this publication.

For 2021, the August data extract includes records with a result date between 22 August 2020 and 31 July 2021 (where a candidate has been entered, has a final result or has been certificated), Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) credit information, SCQF points, SCQF levels and qualification types (where available) and excludes records on qualification types that are out of scope.

The SQA data extract is merged with school roll data provided by the Scottish Government (Scottish Candidate Number (SCN), centre number and stage information) from the SG pupil census. Data are retained and provided to the Scottish Government only where there is a match by SCN on the SQA data extract and the school roll data. This ensures SQA only provide records for which Scottish Government have legitimate interest to process.

The December data extract is formed of the August data extract, updated with information from the results of appeals. The December extract contains records provided in the August attainment data transfer which match with the SQA APS on SCN and product code. Any records that were present in the August extract, but are no longer present in SQA APS, will not feature in the December extract; such changes will typically be due to course withdrawals/changes.

## Methodology

Most of the data presented in this publication concentrates on National Qualifications (e.g. National 5, Highers, etc. – see section 1.4 for further information).

The attainment data presented in this publication (and [supplementary tables](#)) includes qualifications achieved throughout all stages of a pupil's schooling. Qualifications data from SQA are available on a consistent basis from 2005/06, meaning any attainment for earlier leaver cohorts (e.g. those who left in 2009/10) which pre-dates 2005/06 (i.e. in early stages of secondary school) may be missing.

The attainment data are based on the result date of learners' qualifications. In some cases, this may lead to attainment being reported in a different academic year to that reported by SQA. There is also the possibility of a small number of awards being excluded if an appeal is successful after a pupil has left. Only attainment data for candidates with a Scottish Candidate Number in the pupil census that year are included.

This publication uses the 'latest and best' approach for attainment data. This means that only the best result within a subject is counted, with a grade A to C (or ungraded pass) considered a pass. For example, if a pupil passes Higher Mathematics one year and Advanced Higher Mathematics the following year, only the Advanced Higher qualification will be counted when looking at how many qualifications at any level that leaver has achieved by the time they left school.

If a pupil attains a D at a certain level this is not counted as achieving that level. Instead it is counted as being equivalent to attainment at the level below (note, even though there may not be a qualification offered at the level below). For example, if a pupil attains a D at SCQF Level 5 in a certain subject this would be counted as attaining at SCQF Level 4 or better for that subject and not at SCQF Level 5 or better.

Attainment statistics exclude special school pupils unless otherwise stated.

The methodology used for these statistics is distinct from other sources of attainment data (for a comprehensive list of sources see section 7.10). The table below outlines the main differences between this publication and the SQA statistics published annually in August.



	<b>This publication</b>	<b>SQA attainment statistics</b>
Main measure	Numbers of passes achieved by <b>individual school leavers</b> at a given SCQF level ( <b>pupil level</b> )	Grades and number of passes achieved <b>in total</b> in a given qualification or course ( <b>qualification level</b> )
Focuses on	<b>Highest level attained</b> by individual school leavers	<b>Grades and pass rates</b> in different qualifications broken down by subject
Cohort covered	<b>School leavers</b> only	<b>All candidates</b> , including school pupils who entered SQA qualifications, as well as those in non-school settings
Qualifications covered	Main measures based on <b>National Qualifications</b> only, based on latest <b>6 years</b> of attainment data	<b>All SQA qualifications</b> entered in a <b>single year</b>

## Curriculum

School leavers from 2020/21 are the sixth cohort to have experienced the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) throughout the senior phase (S4-S6) of their school education. School leavers from 2013/14 and 2014/15 will have taken a range of awards and qualifications, including both current qualifications and older qualifications that have now been phased out (such as Intermediate 1 and Intermediate 2)

For most young people S4 is the last compulsory year of school, but the majority choose to stay on and complete S5 and S6 (see Chart 1). Highers (SCQF Level 6) are generally taken in S5 or S6 and Advanced Highers (SCQF 7), are generally taken in S6. Highers, sometimes along with Advanced Highers, are the Scottish qualifications required for entry into Higher Education

Under CfE, schools and their partners are able to offer greater personalisation and choice in the Senior Phase (S4 to S6) in a range of ways, for example by: designing the Senior Phase as a three year experience, rather than planning each year separately; and delivering qualifications over a variable timeframe in response to young people's needs and prior achievements. Developing Scotland's Young Workforce (see section 6.1) has built upon this and has strengthened partnerships between schools, colleges, employers and other providers to increase the range of options and pathways on offer to young people.

With more choices available in the senior phase, young people are also taking a range of vocational qualifications, including National Certificates, Higher National Qualifications, Scottish Vocational Qualifications, National Progression Awards and Skills for Work qualifications, alongside their National Qualifications. These provide a valuable route into Further Education, Higher Education, training or employment. This publication mainly concentrates on National Qualifications (e.g. National 5, Highers, etc.) and Skills for Work qualifications. Statistics on school leavers achieving vocational qualifications can be found in section 6.1 (above) and in table A1.3 of the [supplementary tables](#). Statistics on Foundation Apprenticeships can be found in section 6.2 (above) and in table A1.5 of the

[supplementary tables](#). Section 6.3 (above) and tables W1-W4 in the [supplementary tables](#) provide information on the new, proposed 'All SQA qualifications' measure.

A list of all the tables available in the [supplementary tables](#) can be found in section 7.8.

## Literacy and numeracy attainment

When the publication refers to Literacy or Numeracy attainment, a pupil is counted towards having literacy or numeracy attainment if they have passed units from the list below.

<b>SCQF level</b>	<b>Literacy</b>	<b>Numeracy</b>
<b>SCQF Level 4</b>		
Intermediate 1	Gaidhlig Unit Group 1, English Unit Group 1, English Unit Group 2, Gaidhlig Unit Group 2, English Unit Group 3	Maths Unit Group, Maths Unit Group 2
National 4	ESOL Unit Group	Application of Mathematics, Gniomhachas Matamataigs (Applications of Mathematics)
<b>SCQF Level 5</b>		
Intermediate 2	Gaidhlig Unit Group 1, English Unit Group 1, English Unit Group 2, ESOL Unit Group 1, ESOL Unit Group 2, Gaidhlig Unit Group 2, English Unit Group 3	Maths Unit Group, Maths Unit Group 2
National 5	English Unit Group, ESOL Unit Group, Gaidhlig Unit Group, English Unit Group 2, English, English Speakers of Other Languages, Gaidhlig	Mathematics Unit Group, Matamataig Unit Group, Application of Mathematics, Mathematics, Gniomhachas Matamataigs (Applications of Mathematics), Matamataigs (Mathematics)
<b>SCQF Level 6</b>		
Higher	Gaidhlig Unit Group 1, English Unit Group 1, English Unit Group 2, ESOL Unit Group 1, ESOL Unit Group 2, Gaidhlig Unit Group 2, English Unit Group 3, English Unit Group 4, ESOL Unit Group 1, ESOL Unit Group 2, Gaidhlig Unit Group 3, English Unit Group 5	Maths Unit Group, Maths Unit Group 2, Matamataigs Unit Group, Maths Unit Group 3, Matamataigs Unit Group 2

Note: ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages

### 7.2.3 Attainment and destinations data matching

The school leaver destinations data from SDS is matched to the SG pupil census and to SQA data, so that pupil characteristics and attainment data can be linked to the destinations. Only leavers from the SDS data with a match to the pupil census are included in the analysis within this publication. This means that some leavers are excluded from the analysis.

For the 2013/14 school leaver cohort, the leaver matching methodology was updated. This updated methodology has been adopted since then, and data back to 2009/10 leavers have been produced on a consistent basis. These data are not directly comparable with data prior to 2009/10, and caution should be exercised when making comparisons with data prepared using the previous method.

All matching is done within certain constraints:

- Pupil census record must be in S3 or above, or categorised as SP (Special School), or AD (Adult Learner) in order to be included.
- School attended must be the main school attended by the pupil.

After being matched to the pupil census the destination data are then matched to the SQA attainment data using the Scottish Candidate Number (SCN).

### 7.2.4 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

The [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) (SIMD) identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Scotland. The SIMD ranks small geographical areas – called data zones - from most deprived (ranked 1) to least deprived (ranked 6,976). The data zones can then be grouped into five quintiles, covering the 20% most deprived areas to the 20% least deprived areas.

In this publication, the SIMD is used to assess how the destinations and attainment of school leavers differ based on the level of deprivation in their home (or school) area. Pupils are assigned to an SIMD quintile based on the data zone recorded for their home address in the Scottish Government's pupil census. If the pupil does not have a data zone recorded in the pupil census data, the data zone of the pupil's school is used.

The SIMD is updated periodically (typically every three or four years) and therefore the SIMD used in these statistics is also updated in line with this to ensure that the most appropriate version is used. For example, SIMD 2016 was first used for 2016/17 school leavers and, in line with this, for the 2020/21 school leavers covered by this report, SIMD 2020 has been used for the first time.

Analysis has been conducted to determine the impact of using different SIMD versions for 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers. This has shown that the change in SIMD version has had little impact on the figures on destinations and attainment by deprivation presented in sections 3.3 and 4.3 of this report i.e. the change to using SIMD 2020 for 2020/21 school leavers is not the reason for the narrowing of the gaps which is observed between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

## 7.3 Definitions & Symbols

### 7.3.1 Destinations

Leaver destinations are categorised by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) based on shared administrative data wherever possible. Alternatively, they have been captured by staff in data sharing organisations or through direct data input by SDS staff, as a result of contact with individuals, their parents/carers or organisations an individual is engaging with. The following categories for leaver destinations are included in this statistical bulletin:

Positive destination: includes higher education, further education, training, employment, voluntary work, Personal Skills Development and (between 2010/11 and 2017/18) Activity Agreements.

Higher Education: includes leavers following Higher National Diploma (HND) or Higher National Certificate (HNC) courses, degree courses, courses for the education and training of teachers and higher level courses for professional qualifications. It includes programmes at a level higher than the standard of the National Qualifications, i.e. above SCQF Level 7. Leavers with a deferred, unconditional place in higher education have also been included in this category.

Further Education: includes leavers undertaking full-time education which is not higher education and who are no longer on a school roll. This may include National Qualifications.

Training: includes leavers who are on a training course and in receipt of an allowance or grant, such as the Employability Fund national training programme. It also includes leavers who are on local authority or third sector funded training programmes that are in receipt of a training allowance or those participating in Community Jobs Scotland.

From 2018/19 this category includes school leavers receiving support that would previously have been recorded as 'Activity Agreements'. This means that the proportions of 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers with a destination category of Training cannot be directly compared to the proportion recorded for previous years. Further information can be found in the Activity Agreements definition below.

Employment: includes those who consider themselves to be employed and in receipt of payment from their employers. It includes young people undertaking training in employment through national training programmes such as Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships.

Voluntary Work: includes those undertaking voluntary work/volunteering which will involve a young person giving of their time and energy through a third party with or without financial allowance.

Personal Skills Development: Young people who have a destination as Personal Skills Development (PSD) on the Opportunities for All shared dataset fall into one of two different categories:

PSD (Employability): including individuals who participate in activities with the aim of employment. For example programmes run by community learning and development or third sector organisations.

PSD (Social & Health): includes individuals who may not be ready to enter the labour market and require access to support from support services to make transitions into

learning/work or adulthood. An example of this is where an individual undertakes structured opportunities appropriate to their long term needs or to address their barriers to engaging in education, employment or training.

The way in which school leavers undertaking Personal Skills Development are counted in these statistics changed in 2018/19 and data for previous years was revised to allow consistent comparisons over time. Further information can be found in a [previous release of this publication](#) (section 6.1)

Activity Agreements: prior to 2018/19 this included those for whom there was an agreement between a young person and an advisor that the young person would take part in a programme of learning and activity which helped them become ready for formal learning or employment.

The integration of funding streams as part of the ongoing implementation of No One Left Behind<sup>3</sup> means that although local authorities will provide the same type of support and opportunities for young people, this activity will no longer be funded under the banner of 'Activity Agreements'. This means it is no longer appropriate to record school leavers receiving this support using this category. Instead they are recorded in the Training category for 2018/19 onwards. Note that data for earlier years continues to include the Activity Agreements category reflecting the support that was available at the time.

Unemployed seeking: includes those known by Skills Development Scotland or their partners to be seeking employment or training. This includes those receiving support from SDS, Department of Working and Pensions and other partners. It is based on regular contact between the supporting organisation and the individual. This does not refer to the definition of 'unemployed' used by the Department of Work and Pensions to calculate published unemployment rates.

Unemployed not seeking: includes all those individuals who are not yet ready or are unavailable to enter the labour market for a range of reasons. The reasons may involve ill health/sickness, prison, pregnancy, caring for children or other dependents or taking time out.

Unknown: includes all leavers whose destination is not known either to Skills Development Scotland, the school attended, other partners or were not able to be contacted at the survey point.

### 7.3.2 Symbols

The following symbols are used:

[z] = not applicable

[c] = value suppressed to protect against the risk of disclosure of personal information

[low] = value less than 0.05%

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<sup>3</sup> No One Left Behind: review of employability services sets out the next steps that will be taken to deliver more effective and joined-up employability support across Scotland. As part of this the funding streams associated with Activity Agreements and other programmes are being integrated into a new local employability delivery model managed collaboratively between Scottish Government and Local Government from April 2019.

## 7.4 Additional Support Needs

An Additional Support Need (ASN) is recorded where a pupil is receiving any form of additional support for learning, this could be for a wide variety of reasons, of different durations and of any type. The different types of support provided include Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSP) and Individualised Educational Programmes (IEP) as well as disabilities, Child's Plans and other plans. Under previous legislation a pupil may have been categorised as having a Record of Need (RoN).

## 7.5 Coronavirus (COVID-19)

### 7.5.1 School Leaver Destinations

Destinations figures may reflect both choices made by pupils, as well as the opportunities available to them upon leaving school. The availability of particular opportunities (employment opportunities, for example) to 2019/20 school leavers may have been directly affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Last year for 2019/20 school leavers, the start dates for some opportunities were delayed, leading to a direct impact on the destinations recorded for some pupils. The pandemic may also have affected local partnerships' ability to track some school leavers through home visits.

For 2020/21 school leavers these issues are not thought to have affected destinations data. However, it is likely that the pandemic will have continued to affect the choices made by, and opportunities available to, some school leavers.

In addition to possible ongoing direct impacts on the availability of some opportunities, the approaches taken to the certification of SQA qualifications in 2020 and 2021 will have affected the attainment of some school leavers. Similarly, the pandemic may have influenced pupils' decisions on when to leave school (for example, delaying leaving from 2019/20 to 2020/21). Together these factors could have affected the attainment of some school leavers, which may in turn have affected the destination choices and opportunities available to them.

### 7.5.2 School Leaver Attainment

#### 2020 and 2021 attainment in National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher

The attainment data presented **in this report covers Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) National Qualifications at SCQF levels 3-7** achieved throughout **all stages** of pupils' education at school.

The attainment data is calculated by considering school leavers' attainment over the previous 6 years. Results focus on the highest level achieved and so it is likely that attainment in earlier years will have a limited impact on the final figures. For 2020/21 school leavers' total attainment is based on attainment from 2016 to 2021.

In both 2020 and 2021 the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to the cancellation of National 5 (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5), Higher (SCQF Level 6) and Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) exams and alternative approaches were taken to determining grades.



In 2020 exams were cancelled and the decision was taken that the SQA could not collect coursework or mark coursework that had already been collected. Grades in the qualifications listed above were instead based on teacher estimates.

In 2021 the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was employed. This differed from the approach taken in 2020 and required teachers and lecturers to use their professional judgement of a learner's demonstrated attainment to determine results in line with subject-specific guidance. The SQA selected courses from each school and college for national quality assurance and provided subject-specific feedback to centres.

The measures in this report focus on the highest SCQF level achieved. Typically this is gained in the final year before a pupil leaves school. For example, amongst 2020/21 school leavers, 69 per cent achieved their highest level in 2021 and 27 per cent achieved their highest level in 2020. So for many 2020/21 school leavers the demonstrated attainment approach taken in 2021 will have had the biggest impact on the attainment measures in this report. In total, 96 per cent of 2020/21 school leavers achieved their highest level in either 2020 or 2021 meaning that for almost all 2020/21 school leavers the highest level was attained in a year in which an alternative approach to certification was in place.

The pandemic may also have influenced some pupils' decisions on when to leave school (for example, delaying leaving from 2019/20 to 2020/21), which will have affected their opportunities to attain passes and qualifications.

In this report, the proportions of 2020/21 school leavers attaining passes at SCQF levels 5, 6 and 7 (or better) have increased by more than has typically been seen in previous years. This follows on from relatively large increases in attainment amongst 2019/20 school leavers reported last year. When interpreting these changes, the different approaches to certification in 2021 and 2020 should be kept in mind.

Attainment at SCQF level 4 may also be affected as a result of the treatment of grade Ds at SCQF level 5 (see Section 1.3). In addition, the 'total qualifications achieved' figures in this report and the associated tables provide information on the number of passes at a given SCQF Level **or better**. Any impact of the different approach to certification in 2020 or 2021 on SCQF Levels 5, 6 or 7 could filter down to measures at SCQF Level 3 or better and at SCQF level 4 or better.

The attainment data in this report provides an accurate reflection of the attainment with which 2019/20 and 2020/21 school leavers in Scotland left school. For this reason the 2019/20 and 2020/21 attainment data have been presented alongside each other and alongside data for previous years. However, care must be taken when comparing between years. Interpretation must take full account of the different certification models used in 2021, 2020 and before and increases in attainment levels in 2020/21 and 2019/20 should not be seen as an indication that performance has improved without further evidence.

## **2020 Attainment in National 3 and National 4**

National 3 and National 4 qualifications are made up of units which are internally assessed as pass or fail by the school or college and externally assured by SQA.

Adaptations were made as appropriate to assessment within National 3 in 2020/21.



For National 4 courses, SQA reviewed its approach to assessment in response to feedback from teachers and lecturers, and to support schools, colleges, and training providers to manage assessment where it has been impacted by disruption to learning and the ongoing restrictions associated with COVID-19.

## **2021 Attainment in National Certificates, National Progression Awards, Skills for Work courses and other Awards**

For these qualifications, the approach to certification was adapted for 2021 depending on the circumstances and on what level of assessment evidence could be produced.

- Where learners were able to produce sufficient evidence using the traditional unit-by-unit assessment model, assessments continued as normal. Internal verification and processing of results also continued as normal.
- Where it was not possible to progress with or complete assessments using the traditional unit-by-unit approach the course team were advised to consider opportunities to use permitted adaptations in line with SQA guidance. Following this guidance, learners could generate assessment evidence for all outcomes for all units, and assessment judgements were determined on the basis of this evidence. Internal verification and processing of results continued as normal.
- Where it was considered not possible to complete assessments to meet the outcomes of units in an award, centres were advised to carry out holistic assessments to meet the aims of many of these awards and any critical competences for that award.

In situations where conditions meant that a unit-by-unit assessment approach could not progress, even with permitted adaptations and the qualification was subject to regulation and/or professional body requirements, and/or if the assessment conditions could not be met, centres were advised to postpone assessment until it is possible for it to take place.

SQA carried out external quality assurance activity in support of local quality assurance processes.

## **7.6 Rounding**

Figures used in the commentary of this report are based on the unrounded data which can be found in the [supplementary tables](#). This means that they may not always match with figures that are derived using the rounded data displayed in tables and charts.

## **7.7 UK Comparisons**

### **7.7.1 Attainment**

Scotland has a different set of qualifications to the rest of the United Kingdom (UK) and comparisons cannot be made directly. Scotland, and the other UK countries, participate in the [Programme for International Assessment \(PISA\)](#) survey on education performance.

### **7.7.2 Destinations**

The information presented here is for young people who have left school, while in England and Wales information is collected on 16-19 year olds who are not in education, employment or training. As a result direct comparisons cannot be made.

## 7.8 List of Supplementary Tables

[Supplementary tables](#) on attainment and leaver destinations are available.

These tables on attainment and school leaver initial destinations include breakdowns by: characteristics of leavers; local authority; additional support needs; stage of leaving; and subject. There will be information on attainment and leaver destinations of those from special schools.

### School Leaver Destinations

- Tables C1.1a & C1.1b: Number and percentage of initial school leavers by stage of leaving, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table L1.1. Percentage of leavers from publicly funded secondary schools by initial destination category, 1992/93 to 2020/21.
- Table L1.2. Percentage of leavers from publicly funded secondary schools by initial destination category and sex, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table L1.3. Percentage of leavers from publicly funded secondary schools by initial destination category and 6-fold Urban Rural classification of school, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table L1.4. Percentage of leavers from publicly funded secondary schools by initial destination category and ethnic background, 2020/21.
- Table L1.5. Percentage of leavers from publicly funded secondary schools by initial destination category and national identity, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table L1.6. Percentage of leavers from publicly funded secondary schools by initial destination category and whether declared or assessed disabled, 2009/10 and 2014/15 to 2020/21.
- Table L2.1. Percentage of leavers from publicly funded secondary schools by initial destination and local authority, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table L2.2. Number of leavers from publicly funded secondary schools by initial destination category and local authority, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table L3.1. Percentage of secondary and special school leavers from publicly funded schools by initial destination category and Additional Support Need, 2009/10 to 2020/21.

### Attainment Statistics

- Tables A1.1a. Percentage of secondary school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved, by SIMD quintile, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table A1.1b. Percentage of secondary school leavers by total qualifications achieved, by SIMD quintile, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Tables A1.2a and A1.2b. Attainment of secondary school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved in each subject, number and percentage, 2011/12 to 2020/21.
- Tables A1.3a and A1.3b. Number and percentage of secondary and special school leavers from publicly funded schools attaining vocational qualifications at SCQF Level 2 to 7, by local authority, 2013/14 to 2020/21.
- Tables A1.4a and A1.4b. Percentage and number of secondary school leavers with no passes at SCQF Level 3 or better, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table A2.1. Percentage of school leavers by highest SCQF Level achieved, by local authority, 2009/10 to 2020/21.

- Table A2.2. Percentage of school leavers by total qualifications achieved, by local authority, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Tables A2.3a and A2.3b. Number and percentage of secondary school leavers by total qualifications achieved, by local authority and SIMD, 2012/13 to 2020/21.
- Table A3.1. Percentage of secondary and special school leavers from publicly funded schools by highest SCQF Level achieved and Additional Support Need, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table A3.2. Percentage of secondary and special school leavers by total qualifications achieved and Additional Support Need, 2009/10 to 2020/21.

## Experimental Statistics

- Table A1.5. Number of secondary school leavers from publicly funded secondary schools attaining Foundation Apprenticeships, by subject, 2020/21.
- Table W1. Percentage of secondary school leavers achieving one or more passes at SCQF Level 3-7 or better, All SQA Qualifications measure, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table W2. Secondary school leavers' attainment by SCQF Level or better and number of passes achieved, percentage of leavers, All SQA Qualifications measure, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table W3. Percentage of secondary school leavers by attainment at SCQF Level 4 to 6, by pupil characteristic, All SQA Qualifications measure, 2009/10 to 2020/21.
- Table W4. Percentage of secondary school leavers by total qualifications achieved, by SIMD quintile, 2009/10 to 2020/21.

## 7.9 Cost

### 7.9.1 Attainment

There is no additional cost to SQA to supply the attainment data.

### 7.9.2 Leavers

As part of the overall approach to delivering the Scottish Government's Opportunities for All commitment the follow-up of school leavers is a business as usual activity for Skills Development Scotland and costs are embedded within their daily operations.

## 7.10 Further Information

Copies of this publication are available on the [Scottish Government's website](#). School level information, including attainment on a consistent basis is available through Insight (a professional benchmarking tool used by local authorities and schools) and published on the [School Information Dashboard](#).

The scope of these destination statistics is limited to school leavers, but other sources are available to assess patterns across the wider society. For example, information on employment trends more broadly is available from the [Scottish Government labour market statistics website](#), and the [Scottish Funding Council](#) publishes data on participation in Higher Education.

The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) have developed the Annual Participation Measure (APM) which complements school leaver destination

statistics. Published every August, the APM captures the activity of all 16-19 year olds across a complete year, including those who choose to stay on at school as well as those who have left school. The APM has been adopted as the metric for measuring success in relation to the Young people’s participation national indicator within the [National Performance Framework](#). The indicator measures the percentage of young adults (16-19 year olds) participating in education, training or employment.’ [Latest results](#) were published in August.

The [Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence \(CfE\) Levels](#) return is a census based data collection and gathers data on whether or not pupils have achieved the expected CfE Level for their stage based on the class teachers’ professional judgement. The collection covers numeracy and the three elements of literacy (reading, writing, listening and talking) at four stages within Broad General Education: P1, P4, P7 and S3. Following a year in which the data was not collected (2019/20) the collection went ahead for primary school pupils only in 2020/21.

Scotland participates in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey. This assessment is undertaken by 15 year-olds in almost eighty countries, including all OECD countries, and as such is a key international benchmark of performance. [Results](#) are available on the Scottish Government website.

Skills Development Scotland publish Foundation Apprenticeship Progress Reports on an annual basis. These include data on the [number of young people undertaking Foundation Apprenticeships in Scotland](#).

The table below provides summary information for some of the key sources of data on attainment and the activity of young people in Scotland.

Source	Organisation, usual date of publication, web link	Key points
THIS PUBLICATION Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations	<a href="#">Scottish Government</a> , February 2022	Provides information on the <b>attainment of school leavers</b> and on the activities being undertaken by <b>school leavers 3 months after leaving school</b> .  Coverage: School leavers
Summary Statistics for Follow-up Leaver Destinations	<a href="#">Scottish Government</a> , June	Provides information on the activities being undertaken by <b>school leavers 9 months after leaving school</b> .  Coverage: School leavers

Annual Participation Measure	<a href="#">Skills Development Scotland</a> , August	Reports on the economic and employment activity of the <b>wider 16-19 year old cohort</b> , including those at school.  Coverage: All 16-19 year olds
Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels	<a href="#">Scottish Government</a> , December	Provides information on national performance of <b>P1, P4, P7 and S3 school pupils</b> . Reports on the percentage of pupils who have achieved the expected Curriculum for Excellence level in these organisers.  Coverage: All P1, P4, P7 and S3 school pupils. Not collected in 2019/20. Collected for primary school pupils only in 2020/21.
SQA Attainment Statistics	<a href="#">Scottish Qualifications Authority</a> , August	Attainment Statistics for every course and qualification in a given year.  Coverage: all SQA attainment, not just that of school leavers (and covering those attaining SQA qualifications in non-school settings such as Further Education)

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