

REPORT TO BUCHAN AREA COMMITTEE 11 MAY 2021

ANALYSIS OF ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT IN ACCREDITED AWARDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN BUCHAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS UP TO 2019-20

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 This report presents an analysis of school attainment based on the set of data arising from qualifications taken by school leavers from Buchan secondary schools up to session 2019-20.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Consider and make comments on the contents of the report to inform the Education & Children's Service's ongoing plans to support improvements in attainment and achievement in the schools concerned.**

3 Purpose and Decision Making Route

- 3.1 It is important that the Area Committee is provided with summary information on aspects of school performance that have a bearing on the Council's priorities on a regular basis, in order that elected members can scrutinise the data and ask questions about performance and inform each school's and the Service's future plans. This report provides a summary of Buchan secondary school attainment levels based on the most recent release of national school attainment data of school leavers (March 2021).
- 3.2 In March 2020 the Education & Children's Services Committee decided on a revised process for the reporting of secondary school attainment and achievement data to committees. As part of this, the Committee decided that Area Committees should receive an annual report in May, on the most recently released attainment data of school leavers in their area. This would allow Area Committees to consider data that has been released relatively recently, replacing the previous system in which Area Committees considered in February/March each year data that was released in the previous September.

4 Discussion

- 4.1 Each year young people in secondary schools in Aberdeenshire are presented for National Courses and Units certificated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), as well as a smaller number presented for a range of qualifications and awards accredited by bodies other than SQA. Since September 2014, young people's achievements in these awards are collated, analysed and presented through the Scottish Government's benchmarking system, "Insight". The data and analysis presented in this report are sourced from Insight.

- 4.2 Insight is updated twice a year, once in September with the most recent set of data based on data from the most recent SQA diet of examinations for the school session just completed. This update allows attainment to be reported for cohorts of school year stages – at S4, S5 or S6. The second update of Insight occurs at the start of March each year and this allows the data to be linked to the most recent set of school leavers, meaning that attainment can be reported based on annual cohorts of school leavers. As this corresponds to the attainment of each student at the end of their senior phase experience, this data provides a valuable milestone at which to evaluate attainment. This report draws on data based on the March 2021 update of Insight, providing attainment of cohorts of school leavers up to and including the 2019-20 cohort.
- 4.3 Insight presents attainment data in the form of four key national benchmarking measures as follows:
- Improving attainment in Literacy and Numeracy
 - Improving attainment for all
 - Increasing post-school participation
 - Tackling disadvantage by improving the attainment of lower attainers relative to higher attainers,
- as well as a number of other measures, referred to as “Breadth and Depth” measures.
- 4.4 The key benchmark for performance in Insight is provided by the “Virtual Comparator”. The data that underlies performance of the Virtual Comparator (VC) for each school is generated by randomly selecting young people from across Scotland that match the characteristics of the young people in the school whose performance is being evaluated. Insight also provides data for each measure for local authorities and the whole of Scotland (the “national establishment”). Further information on Insight measures is provided in Appendix 1 to this report.
- 4.5 The decision by the Scottish Government, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, to cancel the 2020 diet of SQA examinations, and to base young people’s achievements on the professional judgement of their teachers, has major impacts on the data that appears in Insight. Of particular relevance to the data presented in this report is the fact that the changes made to the assessment and awarding processes have meant that the patterns of attainment and achievement for students in 2019-20 across Scotland are at variance with that observed in previous years. As a result, the data for 2019-20 that appears in Insight is accompanied with the following message advising the user to exercise caution in interpreting it:
- “For 2020 the absence of external assessment information, and the Ministerial direction to award estimated grades, have led to a different pattern of attainment than we have seen in previous years. The results for 2020 should not be directly compared to those in previous years. The 2020 Insight data cannot therefore be used to directly demonstrate subject, school or authority improvement compared with previous years.”*
- In addition, whilst the standards used to define grades and bands are defined nationally in SQA documentation, because the processes used to determine

and moderate the decisions taken in order to arrive at estimate grades and bands will have varied across schools and local authorities across the country, great caution also needs to be exercised when comparing measures between schools, between local authorities, between local authority and national data and even between local authorities and Insight's own key benchmark, the Virtual Comparator.

- 4.6 Data for each of the 2 Buchan secondary schools is presented in tabular form in Appendix 2. Because of the issues referred to in paragraph 4.5, care should be exercised in interpreting some of the data in this report. In particular, care should be exercised when comparing 2019-20 attainment data with previous years' data and also when comparing between a school's attainment data and another school's data, or its VC, the Aberdeenshire level data of the data for the national establishment for 2019-20.

As this data reflects the attainment and achievement of students as of the point at which they are leaving school, it is appropriate to consider how this attainment and achievement has supported the next steps in each student's vocational and academic journey. Accordingly, the appendix also includes data on the percentage of the leavers cohort who were able to secure a positive destination on leaving school. It should be noted that whilst putting in place pathways which aim to secure a positive post school destination for all students is a priority for all schools, this measure will always reflect, to some degree, external factors (such as the prevailing economic environment), over which individual schools have no control.

4.7 **Overview of school leaver data presented in Appendix 2 for Mintlaw Academy**

There is consistently a higher proportion of leavers from S4 and a lower proportion from S6 in the leavers cohort for Mintlaw Academy compared with the national pattern.

The attainment of leavers from Mintlaw Academy in literacy and numeracy is consistently higher than that of the VC at both SCQF Levels 4 and 5, in some cases by a significant degree.

The attainment of leavers from Mintlaw Academy tends to be above, or in line with that of its virtual comparator across most measures of general attainment.

The percentage of leavers from the school securing a positive post school destination has improved over the past three years (to 97.7% in 2019-20) and has been at a level above that of the VC in each of the last two years.

4.8 **Approaches to support and raise levels of attainment and achievement at Mintlaw Academy**

Ongoing Improvement Strategies:

- Core Values including "Aspiration" and "Success" is a key focus of planning.
- A comprehensive programme of Professional Learning is in place, including an increasing focus on e-learning in place for staff.
- Ongoing application of the Mintlaw Academy Learning Charter, devised by staff, students and parents.

- The DART (Discuss, Act, Reflect, Teach) programme has supported all staff in high quality engagement with formative learning, teaching and assessment methodologies. Online learning has been a particular focus in the second half of 19-20.
- Learning Visits - professional discussion after a learning visit leads to agreed actions to improve learning and raise attainment.
- Validated Self Evaluation process with partner schools has started the dialogue around strengths / next steps in learning and teaching.
- Learner Conversations with young people allows a robust focus on strengths and next steps for learning.
- Surveys of students / parents focused on e-learning strengths and next steps.
- A whole-school focus on skills development, particularly across S1 –S3 of the Broad General Education (BGE). The Principal Teacher of Skills Development leads the work of 'TRUST' (Targeted Reflection and Universal Support Time) teachers in developing young peoples' skills.
- All staff are trained in the use of both Insight and the CfE Machine. (An online package to support data analysis).
- Performance Management meetings involving Senior Leadership Team, Principal Teachers Faculty and Guidance ensure focus on ongoing/predicted attainment and early intervention strategies.
- Cluster collaboration has ensured a shared focus on Numeracy / attainment.
- Principal Teachers of English, Maths, Guidance and Additional Support for Learning have a shared focus on supporting vulnerable youngsters to attain optimum levels of Literacy and Numeracy.
- Baseline assessment data is used to target increased attainment at S4 and beyond.
- The revised School Evaluation and Improvement Plan requires all faculties to incorporate key "How Good is our School 4" Quality Indicators.
- All faculties provided additional support for students prior to prelim and SQA assessments. Faculty support moved online March – May 2019
- Accreditation is increasingly a feature of Wider Achievement options.

Targeted Improvement Strategies:

- Focus on S5 attainment / intervention strategies with Principal Teachers / Senior Leadership Teams involved in mentoring.
- Sharing of 2018-19 data with S4-6 youngsters via assemblies as a motivational tool.
- Widening of S5-6 curricular opportunities, including NESCOL, to increase stay-on rates into S5 and S6.
- Additional 1.0 FTE Acting Depute Head Teacher in place to ensure a focused approach to "Narrowing the Attainment gap".

- Additional posts of Acting Principal Teacher of Literacy and Health and Wellbeing also created to ensure focused approach to Narrowing the Gap

4.9 **Overview of school leaver data presented in Appendix 2 for Peterhead Academy**

The leavers cohort from Peterhead Academy is consistently made up of relatively more leavers from S4 and S5, and fewer leavers from S6, than is the case for the national establishment.

Peterhead Academy leavers tend to have attainment indicating higher levels of Literacy and Numeracy at SCQF Levels 4 and 5, than the school's virtual comparator, particularly so at Level 5.

The general level of attainment of leavers tends to be higher than, or in line with that of the VC across most measures. The exception is in relation to the highest attaining 20% of leavers, where the school's attainment is consistently below that of its comparator.

Although the percentage of leavers with a positive post school destination was down in 2019-20 (in line with the Aberdeenshire and national trends), it was still in line with that of the virtual comparator.

4.10 **Approaches to support and raise levels of attainment and achievement at Peterhead Academy**

These have included:

- All staff (teaching and non teaching) are being trained by educational psychology colleagues in nurture approaches. Over 60 staff across the school have been trained this session. After the past year, the school has focused on the wellbeing of students as being the most important factor to consider so that they are in a positive frame of mind to learn. This will be rolled out over a 2 year period.
- Related to nurture approaches, the school has simplified its set of whole school expectations. It believes that a calm and consistent approach where all staff are delivering the same message across the school will improve the ethos of the school and provide a better environment for learning.
- Training has been provided to staff in the use of Microsoft Teams to improve delivery of online learning.
- An annual quality improvement calendar is in place to ensure that faculties reflect on their practice on a termly basis highlighting their strengths but also their development needs to improve attainment.
- Increased number of students taking Foundation Apprenticeships at level 6.
- Introduction of a wider range of courses at level 5 and 6 that are continually assessed and not all based on a final exam. This better reflects student strengths (Travel and Tourism (level 5), Exercise and Fitness Leadership (level 6) as well as Foundation Apprenticeships).

- Parents are informed through intervention letters when students are not progressing as they should. Parents can then contact the Faculty Head directly to gain subject specific advice.
- Revision and catch up classes are offered by most faculties to further support students.
- Annual learning visits have been replaced by student interviews showing their experience of Teams and the quality of work provided online.
- The “Bring Your Own Device” programme has been introduced to support students in their learning.
- Connect Scotland, Equinor and Asda have provided 200 chromebooks to allow students to access digital learning.
- Parents have been informed of engagement in learning during periods of lockdown.
- Performance review meetings with Faculty Heads focus on attainment data and next steps for improvement.
- The use of ACEL (Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels) and SNSA (Scottish National Standardised Assessments) combined with subject progress to target students in need of further support.
- Guidance teachers are now much more involved in student progress and attainment and have a clearer overview of performance over a student’s range of subjects.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 This report helps deliver the Strategic Priority “Education” within the Pillar “Our People”, having the right people, in the right place, at the right time to tackle poverty and inequalities.

5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		x	
Staffing		x	
Equalities			x
Fairer Scotland Duty			x
Town Centre First			x
Sustainability		x	
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing		x	

5.3 An equality impact assessment is not required because the purpose of this report is to inform the Committee on performance and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

- 5.4 The following Risk has been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:
- [Workforce performance culture ACORP0002](#)
Mitigation: The information provided in this report forms part of the agenda for attainment review meetings and improvement planning processes within schools. The outcomes from these discussions will be shared across all schools through appropriate channels to ensure that performance remains a high priority.

6 Scheme of Governance

- 6.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 6.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section B.1.2 and 11.4 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to a matter of performance (school attainment and achievement).

Laurence Findlay
Director of Education and Children's Services

Report prepared by:
Linda Duthie, Head Teacher, Mintlaw Academy
Shona Sellars, Head Teacher, Peterhead Academy
Gordon Lennon, Education Support Officer
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List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Insight measures of attainment and other information
Appendix 2: Attainment data for Mintlaw and Peterhead Academies

APPENDIX ONE

INSIGHT MEASURES OF ATTAINMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT AND OTHER INFORMATION

This appendix presents a brief summary of the main whole school measures within Insight referred to within the report, and as detailed within Appendix Two, as well as some additional information on the Insight Virtual Comparator and SCQF Levels to assist elected members in their interpretation of the data presented. Further information on Insight is available via the Scottish Government website at

<https://insight-guides.scotxed.net/>

1. Leavers Cohort

The measures in the report are based on cohorts of school leavers during the academic session. Thus for 2019-20, the leavers cohort consist of all of the students who are recorded as having left school during that session. Students may have left school after their 4th year, 5th year or 6th year at school. Because students tend to take qualifications at SCQF Levels 6 (and beyond) only once they are in S5 or S6 (nationally, over 90% of Level 6 qualifications are taken in either S5 or S6), in order to make comparisons of attainment between schools, and between schools and local authority or national level data more meaningful, for some of the measures the leavers cohort is based on only S5 and S6 measures. These are clearly indicated in the tables. For information, the first table in Appendix two shows the composition of the leavers cohort for the school, for Aberdeenshire and for the national establishment (in terms of percentages of S4, S5 or S6 leavers) for each of the past three years.

2. Breadth and Depth Measures

Insight includes 70 measures under this heading. They provide data on the percentage of the specified pupil cohort achieving a range of awards at a range of SCQF Levels. The report provides data on three such measures, over the past three years:

- The percentage of the leavers cohort achieving 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 5 or better
- The percentage of the leavers cohort (leaving from S5 or S6) achieving 5 or more awards at SCQF Level 6 or better

3. Improving Literacy and Numeracy

This measure shows the percentage of the leavers cohort who achieved an award in Literacy *and* Numeracy at, at least, SCQF Level 4 or SCQF Level 5. The report displays data for the leavers cohort in a table for each of the past three years. The table shows, for each year, data for the specific school, the specific school's Virtual Comparator, the average across Aberdeenshire and the average across Scotland.

4. Improving attainment for All

This provides a general measure of attainment for the school across three ability cohorts for the selected cohort of leavers. The measure of attainment is the Insight “points based tariff scale”, which allocates a number of “tariff points” to each qualification, based on the level of difficulty of the qualification and the volume of work required to achieve the qualification. Thus, a course award at Higher gets more points than an award at National 5 because it is more demanding. Similarly, a course award at Higher gets more points than a unit award at Higher because the former involves a greater volume of work. The aggregate level of attainment displayed for the school using the measure is the average of the total tariff points achieved by all pupils in the cohort within the specified year. The three ability cohorts are defined by splitting the whole leavers cohort into the 20% lowest attaining, the 20% highest attaining and the middle 60%, with the average total tariff score for each calculated separately. The report provides this information in a tabular format for the school, its Virtual Comparator, for Aberdeenshire and for the national population for the past three years.

5. The Insight “Virtual Comparator” (VC)

As noted in paragraph 4.5 of the report, the key benchmark against which a school’s performance should be gauged is the Virtual Comparator school (VC). For each cohort of pupils within a real school, Insight selects 10 pupils for every 1 pupil in the real school. The pupils are chosen at random from pupils across all schools in Scotland but match the pupils in the real school in respect of 4 key characteristics – stage, gender, SIMD profile and Additional Support Needs profile. In this way a virtual cohort is created of pupils with similar characteristics to those in the real school, for which attainment levels can be calculated for each of the Insight measures to provide appropriate benchmark levels of attainment that the real school can use to benchmark its own attainment.

6. SCQF Levels

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) provides a framework within which all qualifications can sit. The framework takes into account the level of difficulty of the qualification as well as the volume of work required to complete it. In simple terms all qualifications are allocated to a level, with the most common school qualifications fitting into the framework as follows:

SCQF Level 1:	Qualifications at National 1 Level
SCQF Level 2:	Qualifications at National 2 Level
SCQF Level 3:	Qualifications at National 3 Level
SCQF Level 4:	Qualifications at National 4 Level

SCQF Level 5: Qualifications at National 5 Level
SCQF Level 6: Qualifications at Higher Level
SCQF Level 7: Qualifications at Advanced Higher Level

APPENDIX TWO

ATTAINMENT DATA FOR: MINTLAW ACADEMY

Please note that care should be exercised in comparing 2019-20 attainment data with other years and in comparing between schools and other establishments within 2019-20.

(Relevant data where care should be exercised is shaded below).

LEAVERS COHORT

	2017-18				2018-19				2019-20			
	Lvrs	%S4	%S5	%S6	Lvrs	%S4	%S5	%S6	Lvrs	%S4	%S5	%S6
<i>School</i>	132	21.2%	34.8%	44.0%	182	28.0%	31.3%	40.7%	137	27.7%	29.2%	43.1%
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>	2547	14.7%	29.0%	56.3%	2620	17.3%	32.5%	50.2%	2531	15.1%	30.2%	54.7%
<i>National</i>	49707	11.4%	25.9%	62.7%	49717	11.9%	26.8%	61.3%	47435	11.4%	25.8%	62.8%

% LEAVERS ATTAINING LITERACY AND NUMERACY (AT SCQF LEVELS 4 & 5 OR BETTER)

	Level 4			Level 5		
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
<i>School</i>	90.5%	94.5%	94.7%	61.3%	62.1%	70.4%
<i>VC</i>	84.3%	83.5%	85.9%	55.8%	55.3%	58.4%
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>	92.8%	90.7%	92.3%	72.9%	70.0%	73.2%
<i>National</i>	89.1%	89.3%	89.6%	67.1%	66.6%	68.5%

% LEAVERS ACHIEVING 5+ AWARDS (AT SCQF LEVELS 5 & 6 OR BETTER)

	Level 5			Level 6*		
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
<i>School</i>	56.9%	59.9%	77.3%	33.3%	37.4%	41.3%
<i>VC</i>	53.9%	50.9%	56.9%	36.1%	35.8%	39.6%
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>	69.2%	64.8%	71.3%	45.1%	40.5%	46.5%
<i>National</i>	64.4%	64.3%	67.5%	40.1%	40.8%	45.3%

*Level 6 data is for S5/6 Leavers only

AVERAGE TARIFF SCORE OF 20% LOWEST ATTAINING, 60% MIDDLE ATTAINING & 20% HIGHEST ATTAINING COHORTS OF S5/6 LEAVERS

	Lowest attaining 20%			Middle attaining 60%			Highest Attaining 20%		
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
<i>School</i>	233	194	234	687	665	692	1239	1264	1293
<i>VC</i>	213	158	169	684	630	679	1292	1232	1286
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>	261	218	231	791	716	772	1385	1325	1375
<i>National</i>	213	194	190	723	703	738	1308	1296	1340

% LEAVERS WITH POSITIVE POST SCHOOL DESTINATIONS

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
<i>School</i>	94.2%	95.0%	97.7%
<i>VC</i>	94.6%	93.5%	93.6%
<i>Aberdeenshire</i>	96.3%	96.4%	94.7%
<i>National</i>	94.4%	95.0%	93.4%

ATTAINMENT DATA FOR: PETERHEAD ACADEMY

Please note that care should be exercised in comparing 2019-20 attainment data with other years and in comparing between schools and other establishments within 2019-20.

(Relevant data where care should be exercised is shaded below).

LEAVERS COHORT

	2017-18				2018-19				2019-20			
	Lvrs	%S4	%S5	%S6	Lvrs	%S4	%S5	%S6	Lvrs	%S4	%S5	%S6
School	202	24.3%	42.1%	33.6%	212	31.1%	40.6%	28.3%	214	29.9%	38.3%	31.8%
Aberdeenshire	2547	14.7%	29.0%	56.3%	2620	17.3%	32.5%	50.2%	2531	15.1%	30.2%	54.7%
National	49707	11.4%	25.9%	62.7%	49717	11.9%	26.8%	61.3%	47435	11.4%	25.8%	62.8%

% LEAVERS ATTAINING LITERACY AND NUMERACY (AT SCQF LEVELS 4 & 5 OR BETTER)

	Level 4			Level 5		
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
School	93.6%	82.5%	92.1%	71.8%	58.0%	66.4%
VC	86.2%	84.5%	83.3%	55.0%	51.6%	52.2%
Aberdeenshire	92.8%	90.7%	92.3%	72.9%	70.0%	73.2%
National	89.1%	89.3%	89.6%	67.1%	66.6%	68.5%

% LEAVERS ACHIEVING 5+ AWARDS (AT SCQF LEVELS 5 & 6 OR BETTER)

	Level 5			Level 6*		
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
School	54.5%	51.4%	57.5%	34.0%	31.5%	25.3%
VC	50.9%	48.6%	48.0%	29.4%	31.0%	32.7%
Aberdeenshire	69.2%	64.8%	71.3%	45.1%	40.5%	46.5%
National	64.4%	64.3%	67.5%	40.1%	40.8%	45.3%

*Level 6 data is for S5/6 Leavers only

AVERAGE TARIFF SCORE OF 20% LOWEST ATTAINING, 60% MIDDLE ATTAINING & 20% HIGHEST ATTAINING COHORTS OF S5/6 LEAVERS

	Lowest attaining 20%			Middle attaining 60%			Highest Attaining 20%		
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
School	239	182	194	622	584	568	1173	1156	1158
VC	182	151	127	595	592	580	1224	1228	1236
Aberdeenshire	261	218	231	791	716	772	1385	1325	1375
National	213	194	190	723	703	738	1308	1296	1340

% LEAVERS WITH POSITIVE POST SCHOOL DESTINATIONS

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
School	95.0%	92.0%	91.1%
VC	93.7%	92.8%	91.3%
Aberdeenshire	96.3%	96.4%	94.7%
National	94.4%	95.0%	93.4%