

Appendix C - Briefing on Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) exam results for August 2023

Introduction

This briefing covers attainment against Scottish Qualifications Authority data linked to the 2023 examination diet, which was released in August 2023. Attainment in around 1000 courses (the attainment of those undertaking National Progression Awards at L4,5 and 6, Foundation Apprenticeships and HNC Awards for example) are not included. This analysis has not taken account of student appeals.

As a result, this is a partial picture of Senior Phase attainment, pending a full local analysis of enhanced datasets provided through the subsequent release of Insight Tool information, including the courses outlined above. Early assessments of core Local Benchmarking Measures from this latter release are presented within Appendix A of this report.

Education Service Context

In terms of context, the size and characteristics of our Senior Phase school roll are seen as contributing influences on the attainment outcomes of this cohort in 2023. Over the last 2 years, schools have welcomed high numbers of both international students and those seeking refuge in the city. 5.2% of young people in S4, and 4% of those in both S5 and S6 have joined school communities since the school census was taken in mid-September 2022. As a result, these young people have often been placed into available courses rather than benefiting from being able to select from the full range of senior phases courses, some of which may have been areas of academic strength for these pupils.

Language barriers have also presented as an issue for some of these new pupils that have been welcomed to the City, although the Service has been able to apply its extended experience of guiding pupils with less developed English language skills, to assist them to meet their fullest potential.

2022/23 also saw industrial action impact on the delivery of senior phase courses and programmes at various points in the year which, despite school and service level mitigations during and subsequent to these periods of disruption, may be considered to have had some consequences.

National Data and Assessment Methodologies

2023 is the second year where grade boundary mitigation has been applied to a resumed exam diet. As a result, the boundaries for grade C and D in 2023 shifted by 2 percentage points across SCQF Levels 5-7. This has to be taken into account when making direct comparisons with results from 2022.

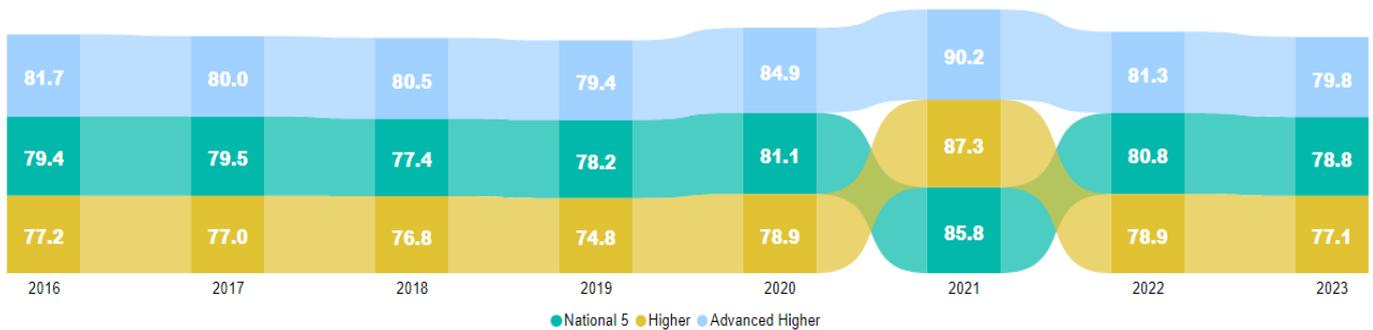
As a result of the changes in assessment methodologies and grade boundaries, the national pass rate across all levels of qualification rose in previous years, The extent of the change is highlighted below in the SQA comparison of 2022 data with that from 2021 and 2019.



Over recent years the Scottish Qualifications Authority have adapted grade boundaries to take account of the impact of the pandemic and ensure the long-term integrity of the qualifications system. This, along with changes in assessment models, has necessitated the need to take an extended view of attainment outcomes in order to gauge the progression of our pupil cohorts, an approach which is reflected in the data captured in Appendix A.

SCQF Level 5-7 National Pass Rate (A-C)

Scotland: Attainment Rate (A-C)



High Level Analysis

There were 4,290 young people in the senior phase of our secondary schools at the point of school census in September 2022, this has since risen by a further 202 pupils resulting in a total of **4,492 pupils**. This is 352 more young people than in 2022. The rise in pupil numbers brings a corresponding rise in the number of courses young people were presented for to **23,022 in 2023**. This is an increase of around 3000 from 2022 and is 7000 higher than in 2019.

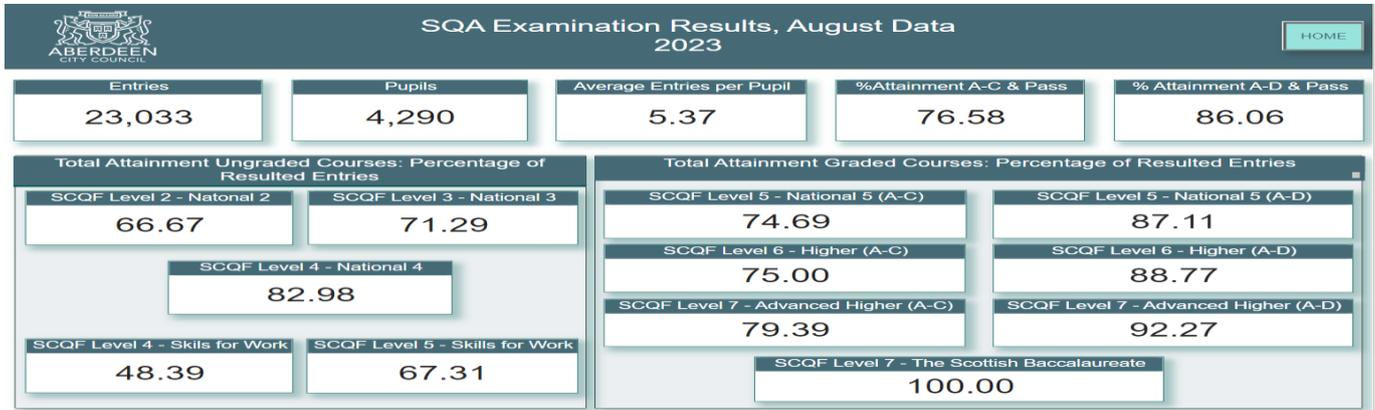
There has been a steady rise in the number of presentations for SQA awards per pupil from 4.65 per pupil in 2019, to 4.87 per pupil in 2022 to an all-time high of **5.37 per pupil in 2023**. The rise demonstrates increasing ambition for young people and indicates more ambitious and consistently applied presentation policies.

The pre appeal pass rate (A-C) for all (ungraded and graded) courses is **76.58% in 2023**. This is a **decrease of 4.8% on 2022**. Differing trends across different stages and Levels are explored later in this briefing.

There is a slight dip in the quality of overall grades:

- Nearly **36%** of those presented for an SQA course attained A, which is very similar to last year.
- **21.5%** presented for an SQA course attained a B, which is 2 percentage points lower than last year.

- **18%** presented for an SQA course attained a C, a dip of 1 percentage point from last year.
- Nearly **13%** presented attained a D, which is nearly 3 percentage points higher than last year.
- **12%** of pupils presented for an SQA award received no award, this is an increase of 2 percentage points on last year and possibly reflective of the first year of amended curriculum structures in some schools.

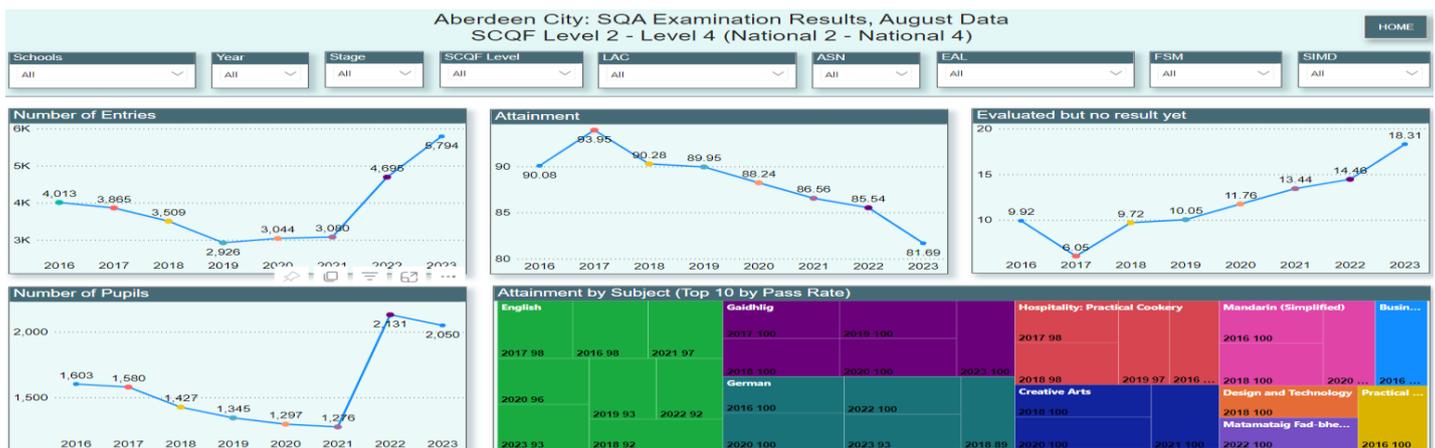


Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Levels 2 - 4: All Stages

In National 2, National 3 and National 4 courses, learners complete unit assessments throughout the year. National 4 courses also include an end-of-year assessment called an added value unit instead of an exam.

National 2, National 3 and National 4 courses are assessed as 'pass' or 'no result yet' and are quality assured by SQA. Some courses are delivered over more than one academic year.

SCQF 2-4 All Year Groups:



There has been a drop in the attainment rate from 85.5% in 2022 to 81.6% in 2023. The main drivers around this outcome are currently being examined in concert with school leaders, but this could suggest that young people are being coursed more appropriately to their assessed abilities. This analysis will help inform schools and teaching staff judgements on presentation decisions at these levels for the current year.

Young people from S3 to S6 were presented for awards with the highest proportion of young people being in S4.

The steep rise in the number of entries reflects the high number of young people arriving in the city over the last 2 years. This is evidenced, in particular, in increased presentations at Dyce and Bucksburn Academies, both of which support greater numbers/proportions of young people fleeing conflict.

There is, however, a slight drop in the number of children presented for a National 4, which appears to be linked to more young people being guided to maintain their studies at National 5 than previously. Professional judgements at school and teacher levels come into play with this direction of travel but it is important that pupils are encouraged to attain the highest level of qualification that their assessed capabilities can deliver.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 5: National Courses - National 5, All Stages

National 5 courses (SCQF Level 5) were introduced in 2014. National 5 courses require the attainment of a number of SQA quality assured internally assessed units and a course assessment which, in most cases, will be externally assessed through an examination and/or coursework.

National 5 courses are all graded A, B, C or D and 'No Award'; grades A to C indicate a pass and grade D indicates an achievement at SCQF Level 5. Achieving a D in a National 5 courses is more 'valuable' than a pass at National 4.

25% of the entire secondary population were presented for a National 5, 1295 more presentations were made compared than in 2022. This indicates higher aspiration for young people in schools and more consistent application of presentation policies.

SCQF 5-7 N5 All Year Groups:



Aberdeen City Council Attainment at National 5 in 2022 (79.5%) was in line with the national pass rate of 80.8%. The pre appeal pass rate (A-C) at National 5 in 2023 is sitting at **74.52%**. This constitutes a pre appeal reduction of 5% from 2022.

Over 36% of National 5 entries achieved an A, this is around 5 % less than 2022. 21% of National 5 presentations resulted in a B, and 17% a C. B and C grades are in line with 2022.

1,299 pupils presented for a National 5 were awarded a D. This award is of more value than a National 4 and is an increase of nearly 300 from 2022. 99.85% of all pupils on the roll in September were presented for at least one National 5 award.

12.4% of National 5 presentations resulted in a No Award (1349 pupils), this is 3% higher than in 2022. This is most likely as a result of schools maintaining the presentation of young people on higher level courses and is variable from school to school. This will be explored more fully when full national comparisons can be made.

Pupils from across S1 to S6 were presented for a National 5 award with the highest number of entries from those in S4. There were more entries from S3 pupils than ever before with 45 presentations made and a pass rate of 93% for S3 pupils.

SCQF 5-7 National 5 S4:



SCQF 5-7 National 5 (S5 and S6)



There is clear evidence that those in higher secondary stages (S5 and S6) have prioritised higher level qualifications over National 5 as the level of No Awards increases from 11% in S4 to 22% in S6. This likely indicates that young people are being quite tactical to secure the higher-level qualifications required to access their positive destination of choice.

National 5 highlights:

- 1582 English presentations (15% of the total secondary school population) with over 39% of those presented achieving an A Pass
- 563 Physical Education presentations (5% of population) with 46.7% of those presented achieving an A Pass
- 732 Biology presentations (7% of the total secondary school population) with 42.5% of those presented achieving an A pass

- 668 Chemistry presentation (6% of the total secondary school population) with 43.7% of those presented achieving an A pass.
- 1067 Mathematics presentations (10% of the total secondary school population) with 33.8% of those presented achieving an A pass
- 111 French presentations (1% of the total secondary school population) with over 70% achieving an A Pass.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 6 – Higher

The current Higher qualification was first introduced in 2015. The courses require the attainment of a number of SQA quality assured internally assessed units and a course assessment which, in most cases, will be externally assessed through an examination and/or coursework.

17.5% of all secondary school students were presented for at least one Higher.

275 more presentations were made in 2023 than in 2022.

SCQF 5-7 Higher, All Year Groups:



ACC Attainment at Higher in 2022 (80%) was higher than the national pass rate of 79%. The pre appeal pass rate (A-C) at Higher for 2023 is sitting at **75%**. This is 2% below post appeals data for 2019 and nearly 5% less than in 2022.

34% of those entered for a higher achieved an A grade and 22% a B (both around 2% lower than in 2022). 19% achieved a C grade which is a slight increase from 2022.

Of the 5,663 presentations, 780 were awarded a D and 636 a No Award. These are both slightly higher than in 2022 where 632 young people were awarded a D and 454 a No Award. The 2023 data is more reflective of pre-pandemic levels. 46 young people in S4 were presented for 54 Highers.

SCQF 5-7 Higher S5:



SCQF 5-7 Higher S6:



Pupils from across S3 to S6 were presented for a higher with the highest proportion of young people being in S5. There is clear evidence that those in S6 were more likely to prioritise Advanced Highers required to secure their positive destination of choice over Higher courses with more No Awards in S6 than at other stages.

Highlights include:

- 333 Modern Studies students presentations (3% of the total secondary school population) with 46% achieving an A grade
- 159 Music presentations (2% of the total secondary school population) with 56% achieving an A grade
- 270 Physical Education presentations (3% of the total secondary school population) with 45% achieving an A grade
- 600 Mathematics presentations (6% of the total secondary school population) with 38% achieving an A grade
- 367 Biology students (4% of the total secondary school population) with 40% achieving an A grade.
- 417 chemistry students (4% of the total secondary school population) with 35% achieving an A grade
- 961 English students (9% of the total secondary school population) with 28% achieving an A grade

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Level 7- Advanced Higher

The current Advanced Higher (SCQF Level 7) qualification was first introduced in 2016. The courses require the attainment of a number of SQA quality assured internally assessed units and a course assessment which, in most cases, will be externally assessed though an examination and/or coursework.

4.3% of all pupils were presented for an Advanced Higher with 74 more presentations than in 2022.

SCQF 5-7 Advanced Higher All Year Groups:



ACC Attainment at Advanced Higher in 2022 (80.3%) was in line with national pass rate of 81.3% following a considerable rise in entries. The pass rate (A-C) at Advanced Higher is sitting at **79.39%**. This is less than 1% below post appeals data for 2019 and nearly 6% less than in 2022.

32% of those presented for an Advanced Higher achieved an A Pass in line with 2022 data. 26.5% of those presented achieved a B pass (2% higher than 2022) and 21% achieved a C (a reduction of 2% from 2022)

Young people from across S5 to S6 were presented for an Advanced Higher. The 20 young people presented for an Advanced Higher in S5 enjoyed a 100% pass rate (14 at A and 6 at B). The number of No Awards have reduced since 2022 but are slightly higher than in 2019. Highlights include:

- 100% pass rates in some subjects including Spanish and French
- 87% of those who were presented for Advanced Higher Spanish achieved an A

Breadth and Depth S4-6

There is evidence that young people are being presented for and awarded a greater range of qualifications at a higher level. The full extent of this will only be known with the final publication of Insight in February. The following table outlines the pre-review achievement. outcomes.

Percentage of pupils by National Awards gained and the SCQF Level at which they are achieved by Stage

Year	Awards	S4			S5		S6	
		% SCQF Level 3	% SCQF Level 4	% SCQF Level 5	% SCQF Level 5	% SCQF Level 6	% SCQF Level 6	% SCQF Level 7
2023	1 or more awards at A - C	98	97	80	65	56	39	20

2 or more awards at A - C	96	93	69	55	45	28	11
3 or more awards at A - C	90	88	58	44	36	16	5
4 or more awards at A - C	83	80	49	34	28	4	0
5 or more awards at A - C	72	70	42	22	17	0	0
6 or more awards at A - C	60	58	33	2	1	0	0

At Stage 4, the outcomes at SCQF Levels 3-5 are generally in line with that in 2022 with increases in the proportion of pupils achieving 6 and 7 or more awards at A-C and gains in the proportion of pupils achieving at least Level 4 by the end of the stage. The 2022 results represent a significant advance on those in 2019.

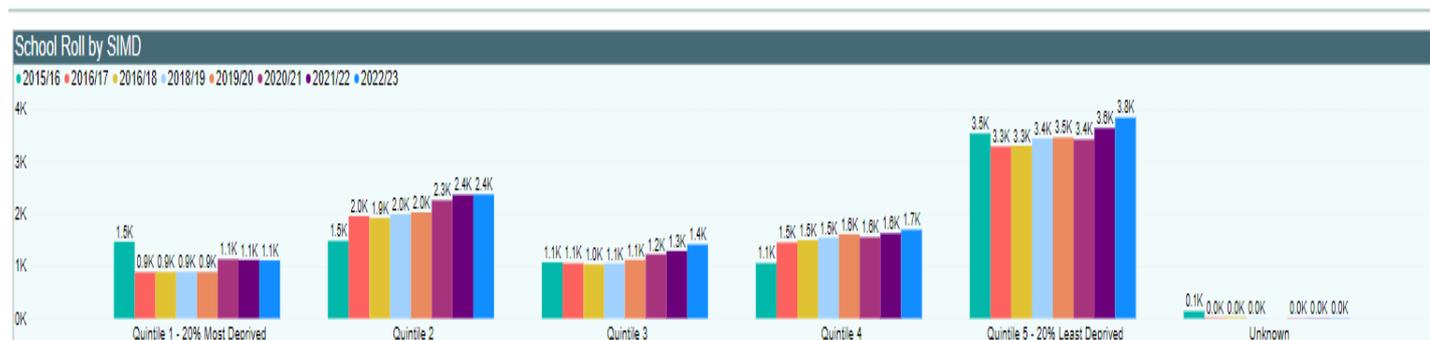
Stage 5 results at SCQF Levels 5 are indicating a slight fall off in achievement on 2022 and with SCQF Level 6 (Higher) attainment being in line with previous year figures Pupils at Stage 6 experienced reductions on 2022 achievement at SCQF Level 6 (Higher) but a stable outcome at SCQF 7 (Advanced Higher). The SCQF Level 7 data shows statistical gains on the 2019 figures.

From this pre-review data, at an aggregated level, the number of pupils across S4-6 gaining a greater number and level of qualifications has increased on both 2022 and the 2019 baseline with those at Stage 4 showing the most improvement,

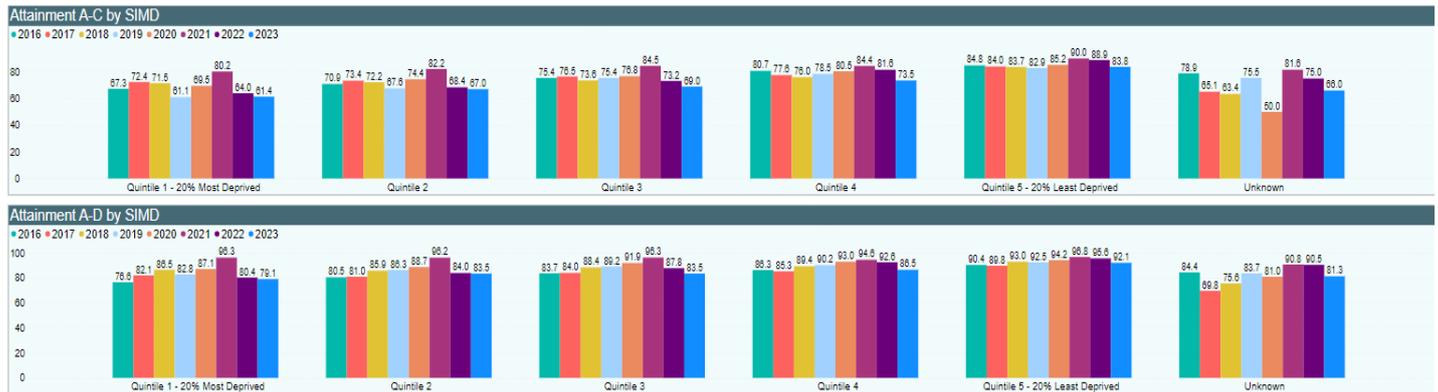
Closing the Gap

This data needs to be evaluated with some caution and can only be fully interpreted when detailed analysis of the Insight data is completed. The information contained in Appendix A offers some perspectives around SIMD outcomes aligned with Local Benchmarking Measures derived from early analysis of the data from the Insight Tool. These data, although only a snapshot, suggest that the outcomes of the Most Deprived (SIMD 1) pupils are improved over time with a consequential closing of the deprivation related gap.

The spread of young people across SIMD quintiles is uneven as outlined below with the number living in Quintile 2 being almost two and a half times greater than those living in Quintile 1. Up to this point, we had a considerable attainment gap at Quintile 2, an issue that is an express point of focus in delivery of the National Improvement Framework Plan over the course of this academic year.

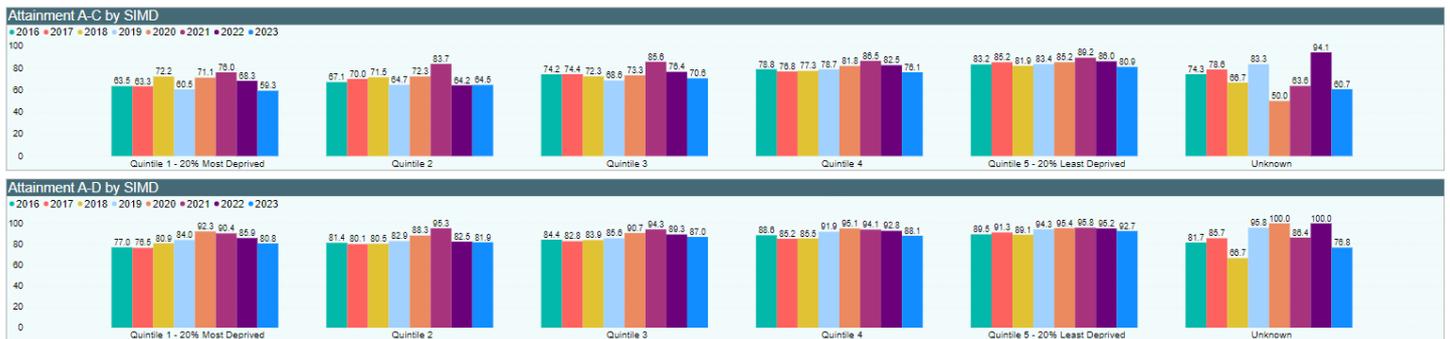


Attainment at National 5 by SIMD Quintiles:



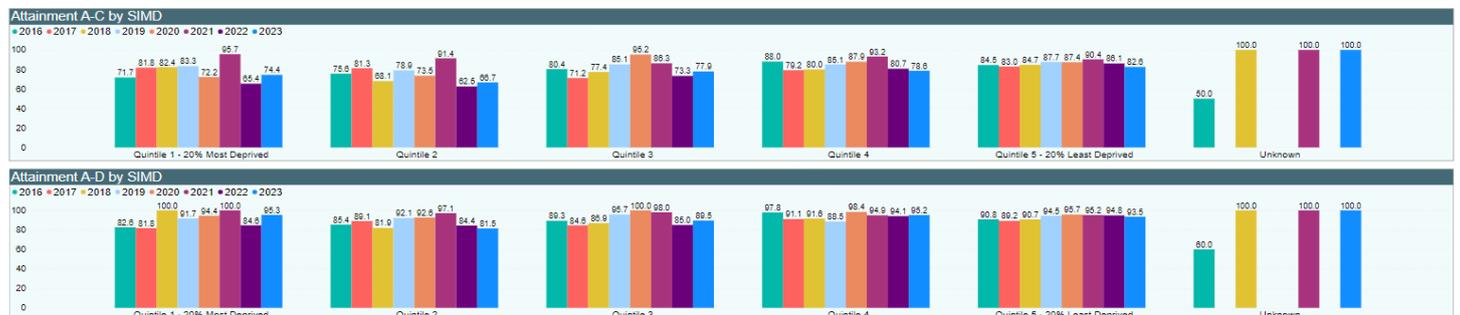
The dip in pass rate appears to have impacted all quintiles, (see comment above under_National Data and Assessment Methodologies section) although appears to have impacted on higher quintiles more. Quintile 2 is the least impacted by value and year-on-year percentage change, followed by Quintile 1.

Attainment at Higher by SIMD Quintiles:



With the exception of Quintile 2, which presents very stable year-on year outcomes at Higher Level, there is a uniform but small reduction in attainment across the SIMD spectrum.

Attainment at Advanced Higher by SIMD Quintiles:



Attainment is most improved at Quintile 1 with Quintiles 2 and 3 also realising growth. We are, however, unable to draw firm conclusions on this data until final Insight is published in February.

Reflections on the data:

- The increase in pupil presentations is positive
- The dip in pass rate is of concern but will only be fully understood when we have complete published national data.
- There is evidence of young people being quite tactical which will have contributed to the number of No Awards. The higher number of No Awards is worthy of further investigation
- There is evidence of improvement for those who are Looked After and evidence of the impact of the two Edge of Care Pilots
- There are positive signs in Breadth and Depth measures, again, this need to be reviewed fully when Insight is published in February.
- There is evidence of increased ambition for those with additional support needs with over 1000 additional presentations
- Generally, there are signs that those living in lower quintiles have been less impacted by the reduction in passes than their peers in higher Quintiles. This will have to be fully analysed when Insight is published in February.
- There is evidence that there can be a dip with an outgoing HT. This needs to be carefully considered so that we can respond proactively.
- There is a need to continue to focus on tracking and moderation
- The thread of curriculum required to be a continual focus.
- There are some exceptionally strong teachers who have helped young people achieve 100% pass rates. There is a need to continue to utilise their expertise to support others.