
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

7 June 2022

Cabinet

Title: School Attainment Results 2021

Purpose: To update Cabinet on: (i) the overall performance of the 2021 North Ayrshire Council school leavers as highlighted in the INSIGHT benchmarking tool; and (ii) Curriculum for Excellence attainment levels in literacy and numeracy for 2021.

Recommendation: That Cabinet:

- a) Notes the content of the report, including the progress being made by learners, specifically in literacy and numeracy;
- b) Notes the achievements of school leavers in SQA examinations in 2021; and
- c) Approves the measures being taken to make further improvements to attainment and achievement levels across all schools.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the key performance measures of pupil attainment in the session 2020-21, based on the benchmarking analysis tool INSIGHT, update released at the end of February 2022.
- 1.2 The performance of leavers in literacy and numeracy has improved at SCQF level 5. In the attainment for all measures, performance is beginning to improve again following a dip after the previous change in policy affecting the number of subjects studied in S4. In 2021, leavers from across almost all SIMD deciles in North Ayrshire performed better than the national average, although there is room for further improvement, particularly for the school leavers from the least deprived areas. The percentage of leavers who entered initial positive destinations has improved after a dip over the last two years.
- 1.3 The report also includes an analysis of the Attainment of a CfE Level 2021 national data collection, assessing the performance in Broad General Education of pupils in P1, P4 and P7. The performance of our primary (P1, P4, P7) pupils in literacy and numeracy has been negatively impacted by the pandemic and is reflected in decreased achievement levels in contrast to previous strong performance from 2016-2019.

2. Background

- 2.1 Since 2014, the Scottish Government has produced a customised web interactive analytical tool to benchmark and inform performance evaluation in schools and education authorities. INSIGHT is consistent with the Curriculum for Excellence ethos as it emphasises the best achievement at the point of exit from school¹, rather than at stage-by-stage level, although it still allows users to drill down to cohort, level, subject or socio-demographic characteristics of pupils. It is worthy of note that the 2021 performance data is impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent modifications to SQA National Qualifications under the Alternative Certification Model for 2021.
- 2.2 The benchmarking methodology used by INSIGHT is centred on the idea of a "Virtual Comparator". This virtual school is built around four key characteristics, which constitutes the make-up of any school. From these four areas, the tool matches ten leavers from across Scotland to every one of the leavers in each school/authority and treats this matched group as the virtual school/authority.
- 2.3 The main analysis of each year's attainment and achievement for secondary schools is released by the Scottish Government in February of the following year of the data analysed². The INSIGHT analysts have also provided the performance of the South West Education Improvement Collaborative (SWEIC) region as comparison and these values are represented in the supporting tables and charts³. This Report is structured – as in previous years - along the four key national benchmarking measures aimed at:
1. Improving attainment in Literacy and Numeracy (% of candidates attaining Literacy and Numeracy)
 2. Improving attainment for all (Average Total Tariff Score distribution)
 3. Tackling Disadvantage by Improving the Attainment vs. Deprivation Gap (Average Total Tariff Score by SIMD decile)
 4. Increasing Post-school participation (School Leaver Destinations for 2021).
- 2.4 **Improving attainment in Literacy and Numeracy** (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendix 1)
- 2.4.1 Performance of North Ayrshire school leavers in attaining Literacy at Level 4 and Level 5 displays a positive 5-year trend. Our schools remain above or in line with the Virtual Comparator, the SWEIC authorities and the National performance in all 5 years of this analysis. In 2021, achievement of Level 5 Literacy is the highest in the 5-year comparison at 85%. Level 4 literacy has slightly decreased from 95% to 94.8%, although our performance remains above the Virtual Comparator.
- 2.4.2 The performance of North Ayrshire school leavers in Numeracy at level 5 shows a positive 5-year trend. Our schools remain above Virtual Comparator, and at

¹ The annual benchmarking "point of exit" indicators published in INSIGHT in February each year are called "National Benchmarking Measures". The set of similar indicators referring to specific cohorts of pupils on the school roll (S4, S5, S6) are designated as "Local Benchmarking Measures" in INSIGHT.

² Therefore, the February 2022 INSIGHT update refers to the performance of the 2021 cohort and – for comparison - the 4 years before that. The data for previous years' attainment is annually updated, to account for some corrections in the national methodology and the inclusion of some school leavers' records that were not available at the time.

³ The SWEIC region comprises of North Ayrshire, East Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway local authorities.

72.3%, attainment of North Ayrshire leavers at Level 5 numeracy is the best it has been in the last 5 years. While Level 4 Numeracy has decreased slightly in 2021 to 89.6%, it is still in line with a broadly positive trend across last 5 years.

2.5 **Improving attainment for all** (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendix 2)

- 2.5.1 This measure focuses on the average total tariff score of the candidates' latest and best qualifications. Tariff points are assigned to each unit or course achieved by learners – in all SCQF-graded awards, not only those provided by SQA. This acknowledges to a greater extent the drive towards wider achievement qualifications and encourages schools to offer curricular choices tailored to a variety of pupil abilities and aspirations. The information is presented as the total tariff score per average leaver in one of three categories of: the lowest attaining 20%, the middle attaining 60% and the highest attaining 20%.
- 2.5.2 The average total tariff score for lowest attaining 20% of learners is a significant improvement on 2019 & 2020. The lowest attaining learners are achieving as well in North Ayrshire as they would elsewhere in Scotland.
- 2.5.3 The average total tariff score of the middle attaining 60% of leavers is the highest on record in the 5-year trend. Though slightly below the Virtual Comparator, a positive 5-year trend is evident, particularly in the years since the change of curriculum structure in S4.
- 2.5.4 Similarly, the average total tariff score of the highest attaining 20% of leavers is the highest on record in the 5-year trend. Though slightly below Virtual Comparator a consistent 5-year positive trend is evident. The policy on the number of subjects studied in S4 was revised in late 2018, with the first results of this decision being visible in 2020. It is anticipated that it may take another two years for the remaining residual effects of reducing number of subjects in S4 (from 2017- 2019) to work their way through the system.

2.6 **Attainment vs. Deprivation** (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendix 3)

- 2.6.1 The INSIGHT measure aimed at tackling disadvantage presents the Average Total Tariff Score (ATTS) compared across the SIMD datazone deciles where the school leavers reside⁴.
- 2.6.2 The Attainment vs. Deprivation chart for 2021 SIMD decile performance shows that North Ayrshire school leavers in deciles 1 through to 8 have performed in line with or above school leavers living in the same SIMD deciles across the rest of the country. Significantly, this accounts for the vast majority, just under 91%, of our school leavers in North Ayrshire in 2021. The proportion of school leavers living in SIMD deciles 9 and 10 in North Ayrshire is significantly smaller

⁴ The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) – 2017 update - ranks the 6976 datazones across Scotland according to a composite of measures of socio-economic deprivation. The SIMD decile of the area where a pupil resides using the pupil's postcode is collected on the occasion of the annual School Census. SIMD decile 1 represents the 10% most deprived datazones in Scotland while SIMD decile 10 represents the least SIMD deprived of datazones in Scotland. INSIGHT has now updated their analysis, which is based on SIMD2020 and the new (redrawn) datazones based on the 2011 population census.

than the national share and the attainment performance of this group in North Ayrshire, while improved on previous years, remains lower than the national cohort, and is an area for improvement.

2.7 Increasing Post-School Participation (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendix 4)

2.7.1 At 95.2%, the proportion of leavers in North Ayrshire moving into a positive destination is the second highest figure in the 5-year comparison. This figure remains above the Virtual Comparator which is consistent with previous 5 years where North Ayrshire is above or in line with comparator. Schools continue to work hard in strong partnership with Skills Development Scotland to maximise the percentage of school leavers entering and sustaining positive destinations.

2.8 Attainment in Broad General Education – Attainment of Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) in P1, P4 and P7 (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendices 5 and 6)

2.8.1 In 2016, the Scottish Government began to collect statistics on the Curriculum for Excellence level achieved in Literacy (Listening and Talking, Reading, Writing) and Numeracy by pupils in the Broad General Education stages P1, P4, P7 and S3. This is based on teacher judgement about each pupil's achievement of expected level made at the end of June each session⁵. This data collection by the Scottish Government was suspended in 2020 for all schools due to the impact of the pandemic. Data was collected in 2021 for stages P1, P4 and P7, but not S3.

2.8.2 Appendix 5 presents the detailed attainment of each stage in each of the Literacy components and in Numeracy, for the past 5 years minus 2020 which was not recorded. There is a strong improvement trend in all measures at almost all stages for the 2016- 2019 period. However, there has been a significant decrease across all measures between 2019 & 2021.

2.8.3 In Appendix 6 the gap between the attainment of P1, P4 and P7 pupils living in the most and least deprived areas has increased both in North Ayrshire and nationally. The gap is more pronounced in numeracy than in literacy overall, although the absolute levels of attainment in literacy are significantly lower than numeracy in 2021 (see Appendix 5).

2.8.4 This data clearly demonstrates the significant impact of the pandemic on pupil learning. While learners in North Ayrshire were above the national figure for both Literacy and Numeracy combined between the years 2016-2019, for 2021 it is below the national figure for the first time since data was recorded. While nationally achievement also decreased, achievement in North Ayrshire decreased at a sharper rate. As a direct result of these achievement levels, additional interventions in literacy and numeracy have been implemented throughout session 2021-22, with significant efforts in every school to recover from the impact the pandemic has had on attainment.

⁵ P1 pupils are expected to attain the Early level in Literacy components and Numeracy by the end of their first year in school, P4 pupils – First level and P7 Pupils – Second level. S3 pupils are expected to achieve level Three or better in Literacy and Numeracy, with some having also achieved Level 4 by the time they finish their Broad General Education

2.9 Proposed Improvement Actions

- 2.9.1 The following improvement actions are proposed in respect of the key performance measures in pupil attainment:
- 2.9.2 Improving attainment in Literacy & Numeracy: The service improvement plan includes specific actions to improve attainment in literacy and numeracy, including: the implementation of a new learning, teaching and assessment policy; the revision of our existing literacy and numeracy frameworks; the employment of additional teachers to support targeted schools with attainment in literacy and numeracy; the design and implementation of a 3-year raising attainment strategy and a further focus on effective moderation across and within schools. In parallel to this, schools will continue to be supported through school improvement planning processes, quality assurance processes and the work of the Professional Learning Academy.
- 2.9.3 Improving Attainment for All: There will be a continuation of the focus on the lowest and highest achieving learners to ensure that our performance continues to reduce the gap between North Ayrshire and the National performance. Part of our work will include a further expansion of available courses and units to ensure that the Senior Phase is meeting the learning needs and aspirations of all learners. The re-designed senior phase curriculum structures in many schools will also enable further targeted programmes to be developed for the lowest achieving learners, particularly in S4.
- 2.9.4 Attainment versus Deprivation: North Ayrshire's Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Fund will continue to implement interventions for pupils living in the most deprived areas to improve their levels of attainment and achievement. Establishments will continue to focus specifically on the learners living in deciles 1, 9 and 10 to endeavour to bring their performance into line with national levels.
- 2.9.5 Increasing Post-School Participation: To continue to monitor impact of the action plan implemented last session.
- 2.9.6 In addition to the measures outlined above, the Education Service has plans to invest the new permanent funding in additional staffing resources specifically to help us to address, not only the added challenges resulting from the pandemic, but also to support our schools to re-establish the previous strong progress towards raising attainment for all at the same time as reducing the poverty-related attainment gap.

3. Proposals

3.1 It is proposed that Cabinet:

- a) Notes the content of the report, including the progress being made by learners, specifically in literacy and numeracy;
- b) Notes the achievements of school leavers in SQA examinations in 2021; and
- c) Approves the measures being taken to make further improvements to attainment and achievement levels across all schools.

4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty

Financial

4.1 None.

Human Resources

4.2 None.

Legal

4.3 None.

Equality/Socio-economic

4.4 None.

Climate Change and Carbon

4.5 None.

Key Priorities

4.6 NAC Council Plan 2019-2024: Aspiring Communities: “Children and young people experience the best start in life”.

This work relates to the following high-level action in the Education Service Plan: “We will support our children and young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.”

Community Wealth Building

4.7 None.

5. Consultation

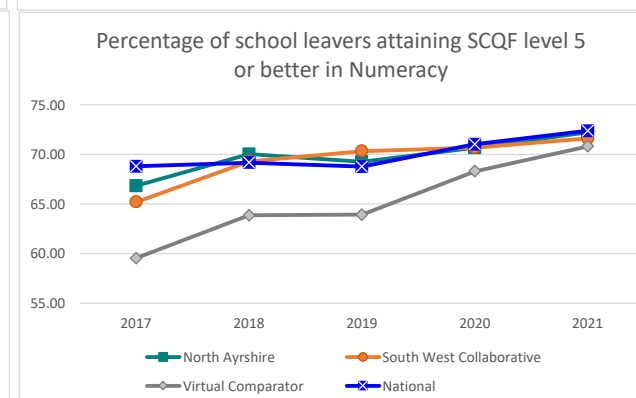
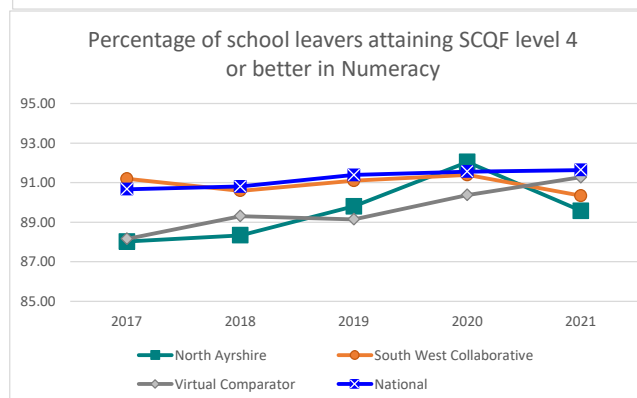
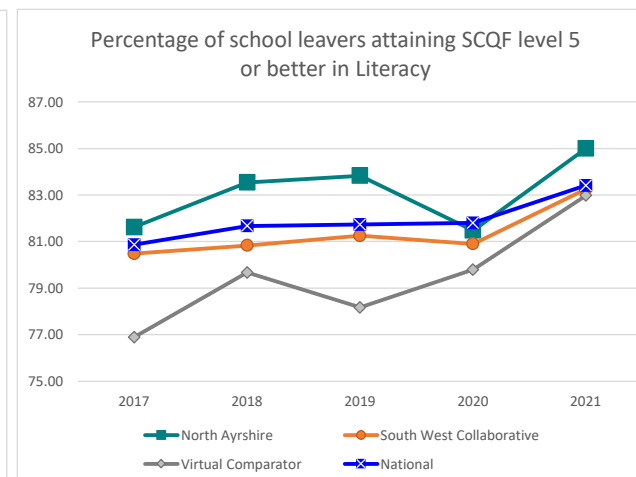
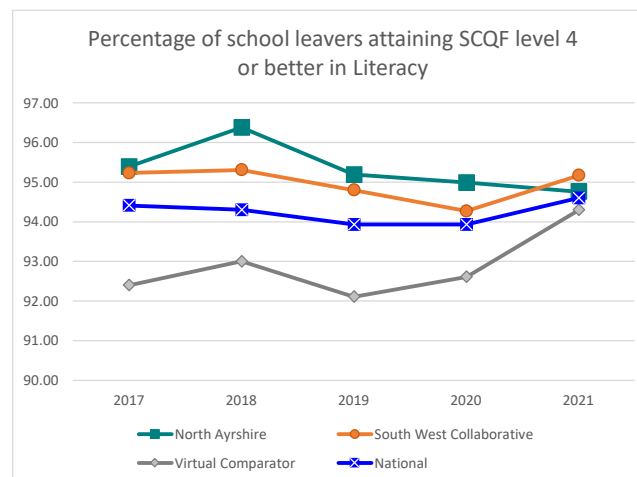
5.1 There is a robust Quality Improvement Framework in place to support schools to evaluate and analyse their performance and plan future improvements. This quality improvement process features regular evaluative visits to schools by Senior Officers. These visits feature evidence-based, challenging discussions to explore how schools are using the analysis of their attainment as a mechanism to inform targets for improvement. Furthermore, as part of our annual review process, we have consulted staff across the service on the improvement priorities for the coming session, and schools have in turn engaged with their school communities on their own priorities for improvement.

Audrey Sutton
Executive Director (Communities and Education)

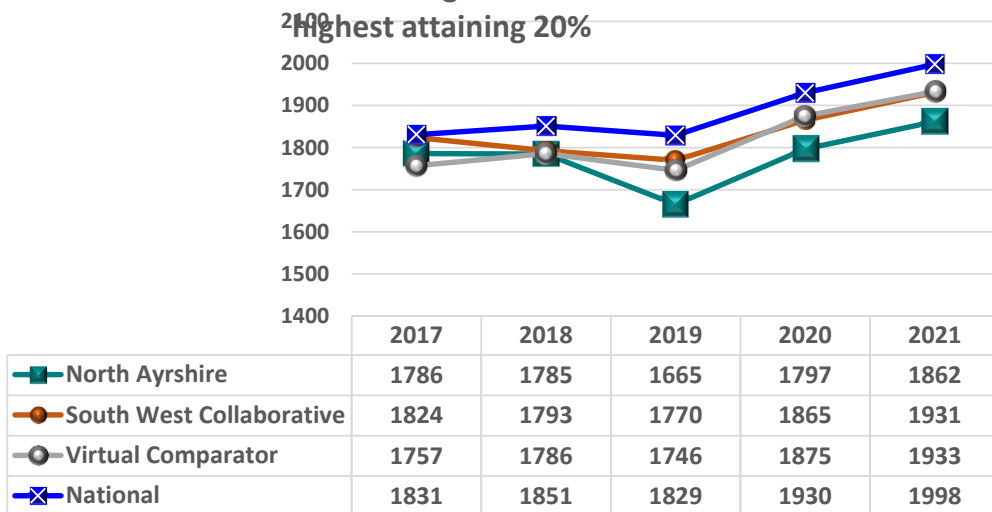
For further information please contact **Kevin Herron, Senior Manager, Education** on
(01294) 324450)

Background Papers

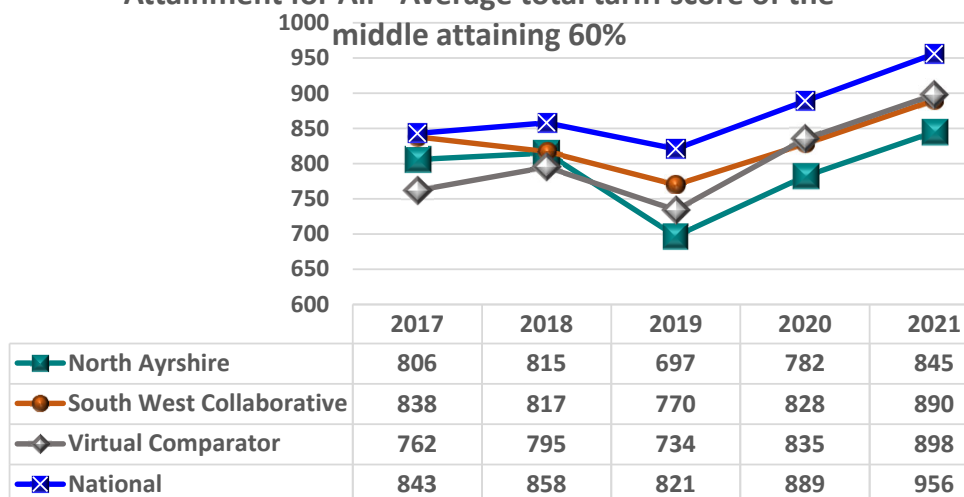
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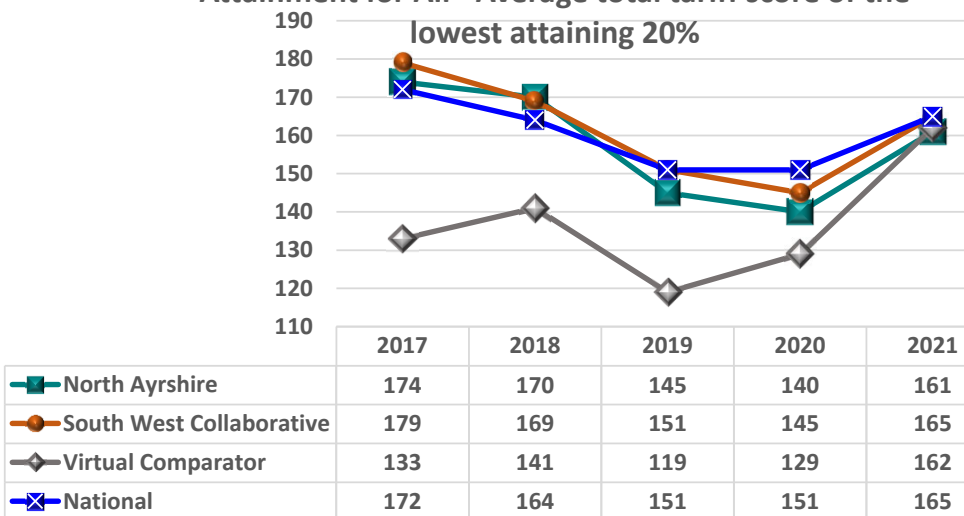
Attainment for All - Average total tariff score of the highest attaining 20%



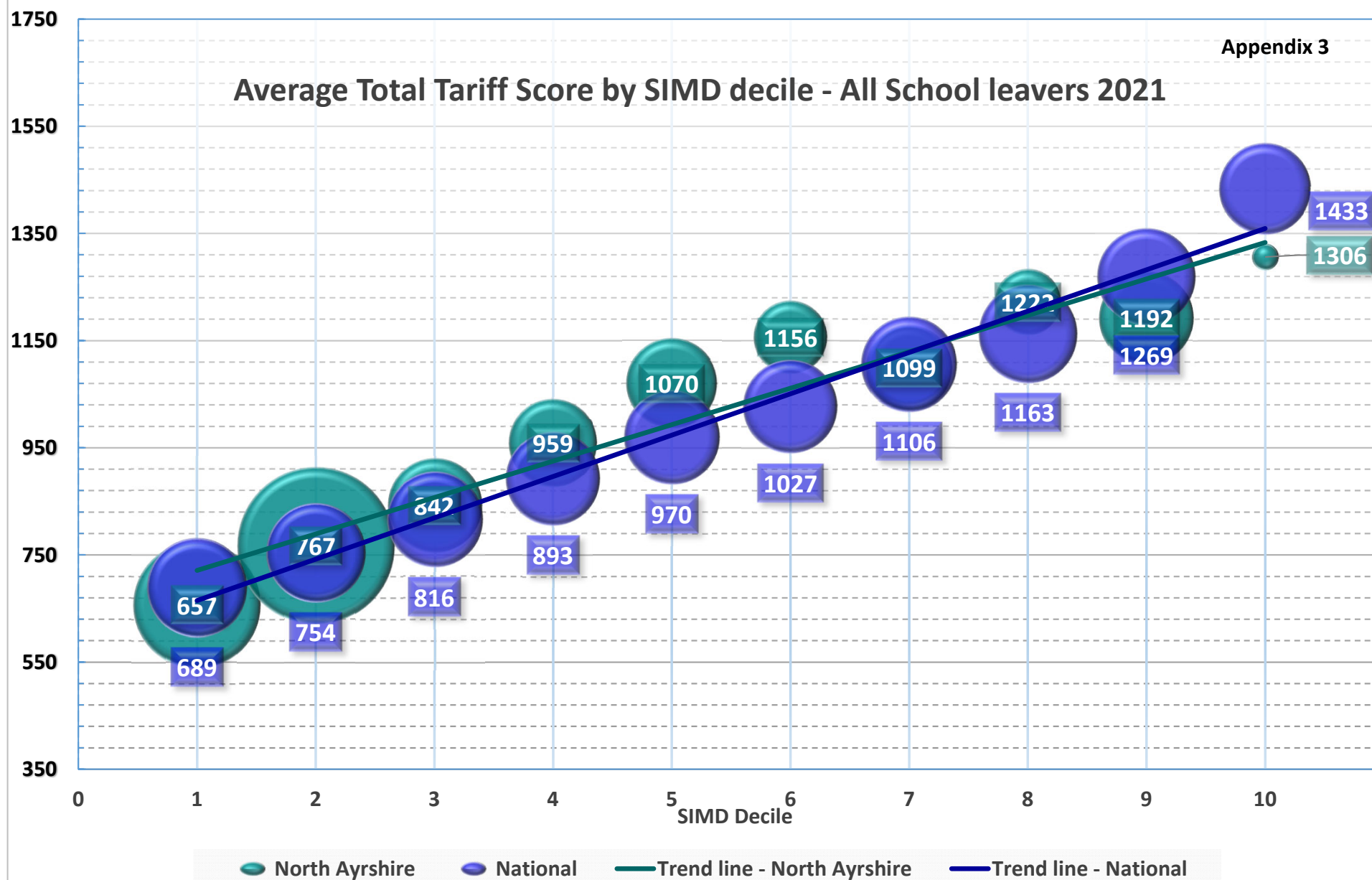
Attainment for All - Average total tariff score of the middle attaining 60%

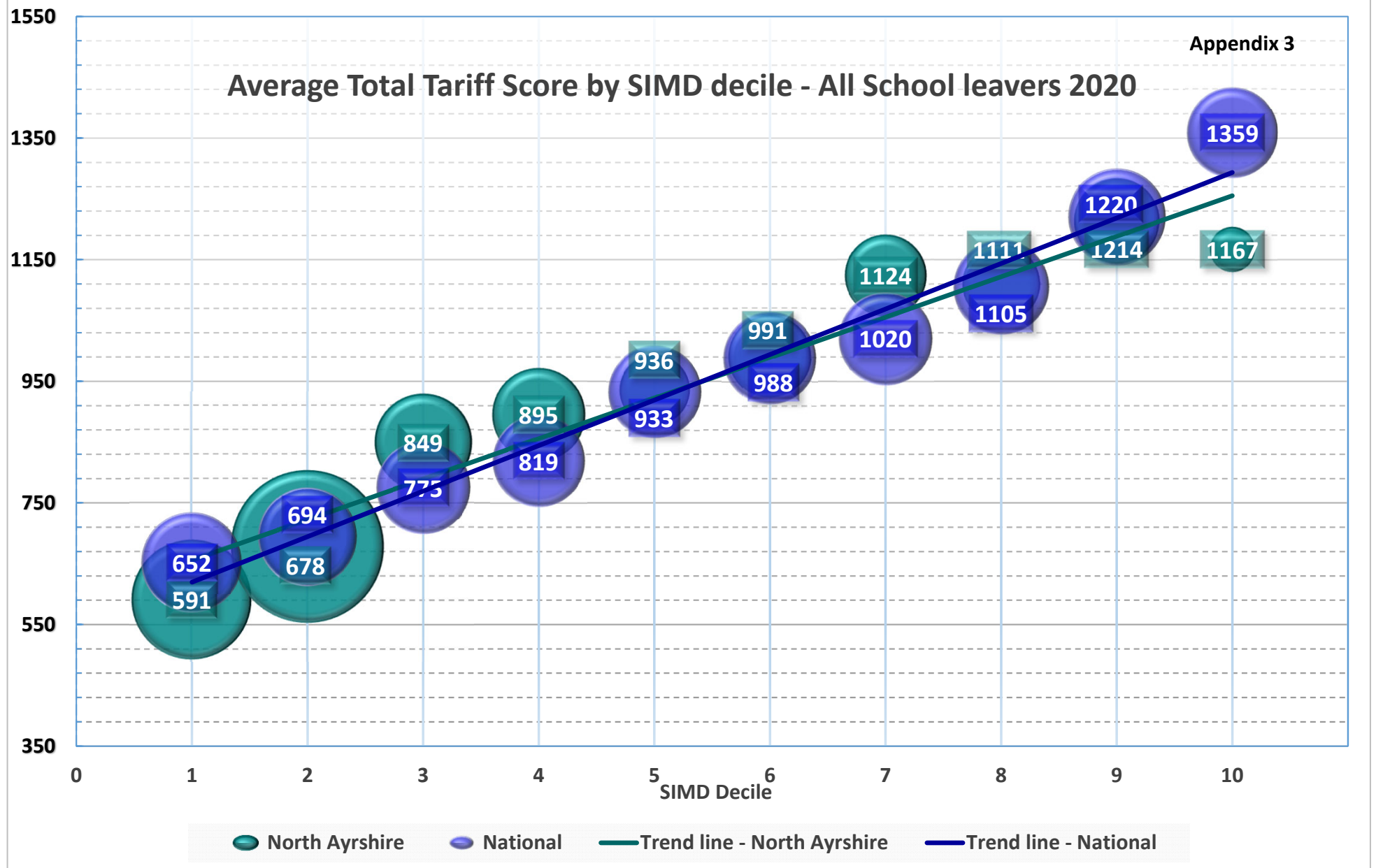


Attainment for All - Average total tariff score of the lowest attaining 20%



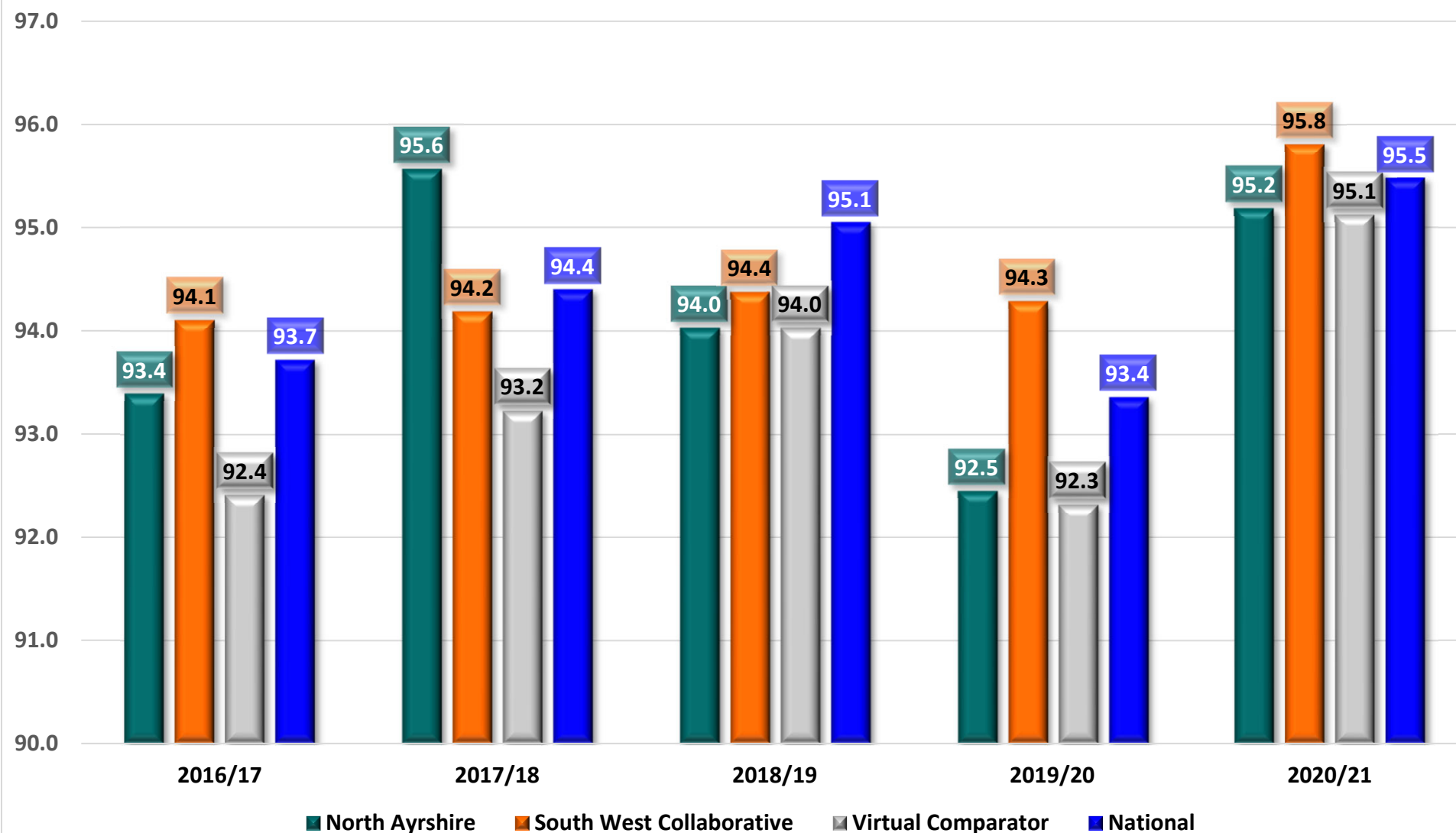
Average Total Tariff Score by SIMD decile - All School leavers 2021



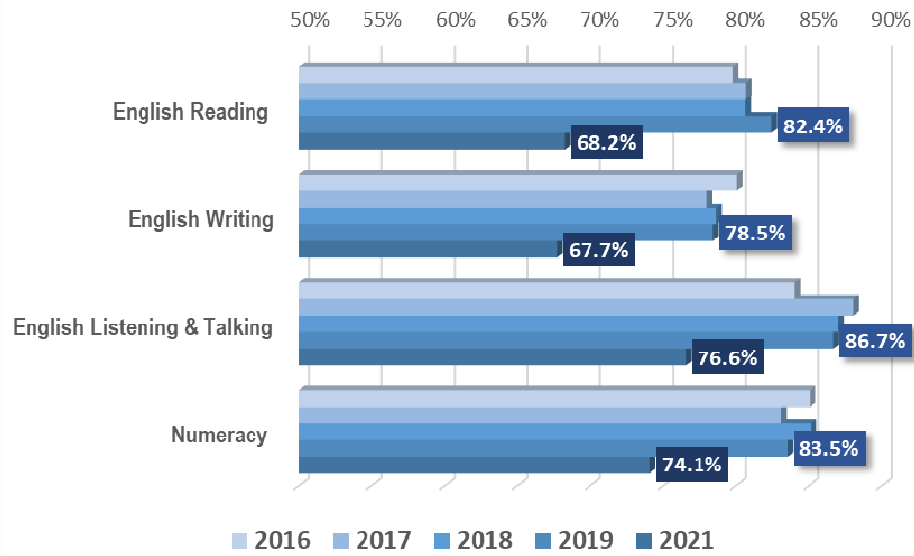


Comparative Performance on % of School Leavers Moving into Positive Destinations

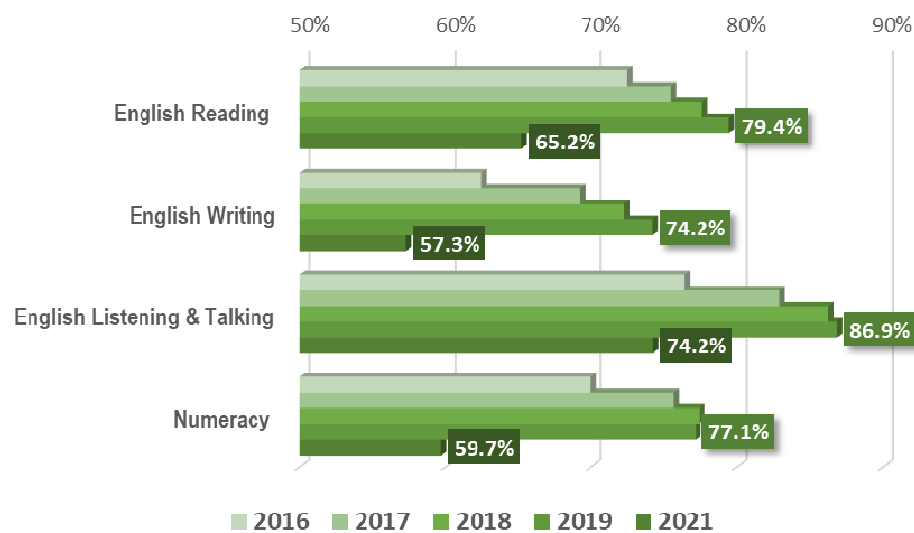
Appendix 4



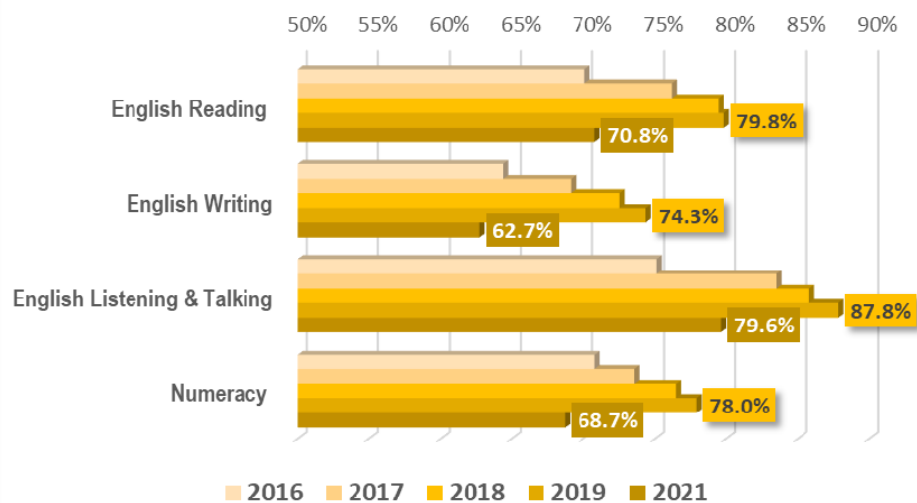
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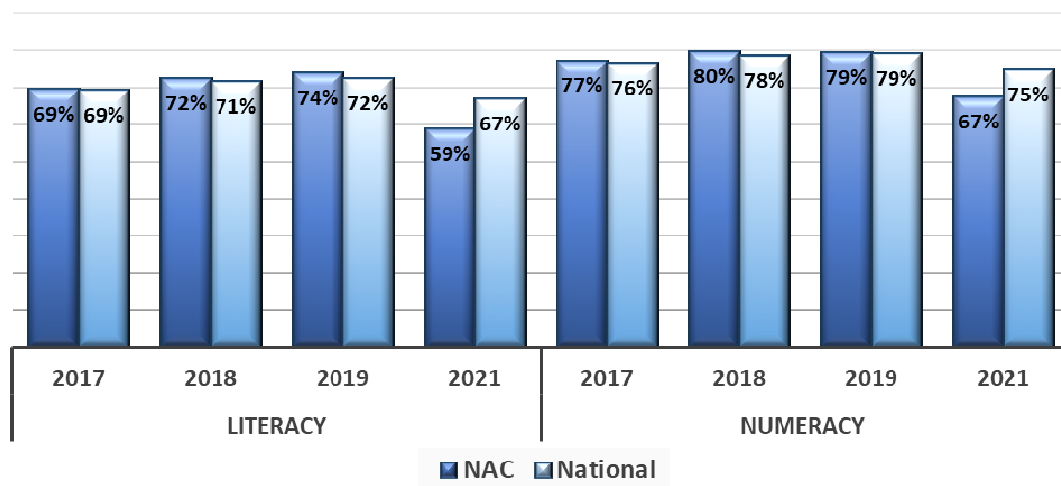
P4



P7



Curriculum for Excellence Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy - P1, P4, P7 - combined



Attainment Gap between the 20% most SIMD Deprived and 20% least SIMD deprived areas in North Ayrshire compared to National (Percentage Points)

Appendix 6

