
NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

25 May 2021

Cabinet

Title:	School Attainment Results 2019 and 2020
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Purpose:	To update Cabinet on: (1) the overall performance of the 2019 and 2020 North Ayrshire Council school leavers as highlighted in the INSIGHT benchmarking tool; and (2) Curriculum for Excellence attainment levels in literacy and numeracy for 2019.
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Recommendation:	<p>That Cabinet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) Notes the content of the report, including the progress being made by learners, specifically in literacy and numeracy;(ii) Notes the achievements of school leavers in SQA examinations in 2019 and 2020; and(iii) Approves the measures being taken to implement learning recovery and to make further improvements to attainment and achievement levels across all schools.
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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the key performance measures of pupil attainment in the session 2018-19 and 2019-20, based on the benchmarking analysis tool INSIGHT, update released at the end of February 2021. The start of the pandemic in March 2020 has prevented the presentation of the report on the 2019 leavers cohort so this update includes performance in the same indicators over both years.
- 1.2 The performance of leavers in literacy and numeracy has improved at SCQF level 4. 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 2020, leavers from across almost all SIMD deciles in North Ayrshire performed better than the national average, although there is room for further improvement for those learners who live in the least deprived areas. The pandemic has had a negative impact on the percentage of leavers who entered initial positive destinations.
- 1.3 The report also includes an analysis of the Attainment of a CfE Level 2019 national data collection, assessing the performance in Broad General Education of pupils in P1, P4, P7 and S3. The national data collection was cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic (first lockdown).

- 1.4 The performance of our primary (P1, P4, P7) and secondary (S3) pupils in literacy and numeracy continues to improve and is either above or in line with the national figures in these measures. In primary, the gap between the attainment of the most and least deprived is broadly in line with national levels, while in secondary, the attainment gap is smaller in North Ayrshire than it is nationally.

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 2020 performance data is the result of an Alternative Certification Model (ACM) which placed teacher professional judgement in a more prominent position following the decision by the Scottish Government to cancel the SQA examination diet as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 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 diet analysed². The INSIGHT analysts have also provided the performance of the South West Education Improvement Collaborative (SWEIC)³ region as comparison and these values are represented in the supporting tables and charts. 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 2019 and 2020).
- 2.4 **Improving attainment in Literacy and Numeracy** (These highlights are supported by charts in Appendix 1)

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 2021 INSIGHT update refers to the performance of the 2020 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. Therefore, the values of the indicators in this Paper will not match exactly the figures available in the report presented to Members in previous years.

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

- 2.4.1 Performance of North Ayrshire school leavers in attaining Literacy at Level 4 and Level 5 has been maintained or steadily increased at levels exceeding the performance of the Virtual Comparator, the SWEIC authorities and (with the exception of 2020) the National performance in all 5 years of this analysis. In 2019 and 2020 95% of our leavers were achieving Literacy at least at level 4. In 2020 performance at level 5 or better has dipped slightly to 81.5% after reaching a maximum performance of 84% in 2019. However, we remain above or in line with the national cohort and our local comparators for this measure.
- 2.4.2 The performance of North Ayrshire school leavers in Numeracy at level 4 shows an improving picture from 2018 and we outperformed all other benchmarks (Virtual Comparator, SWEIC, and national performance) in 2020. At level 5, North Ayrshire performance in Numeracy has increased overtaking the performance of the Virtual Comparator and SWEIC and marginally below the National performance. In 2020, a higher percentage of our school leavers achieved SCQF Level 5 or above in numeracy than at any time in the 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 of the lowest attaining 20% of leavers (Appendix 2) has dipped slightly in 2019 and 2020 but has remained well above the Virtual Comparator. This trend is similar across the SWEIC and National performance.
- 2.5.3 The performance of the middle attaining 60% of school leavers from North Ayrshire has dipped in 2019 which is consistent with the performance nationally. This is likely to be partly the result of the previous policy decision on the number of subject presentations in S4 (which reduced to 6 in practice), and the changes to the grading methodology by SQA⁴.

However, 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. In 2020 attainment has bounced back, although performance still remains below the comparator measures. 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.

⁴ Changes were introduced to extend the grade D boundaries and remove the internally assessed units for SQA qualifications. These changes were introduced incrementally from 2018 (National 5), 2019 (Higher) and 2020 (Advanced Higher).

- 2.5.4 Similar to the middle attaining 60%, the performance of the highest attaining 20% of leavers (Appendix 2) dipped in 2019 and bounced back in 2020 achieving the highest performance over the last 5 years, although this remains below comparator benchmark performances, locally and nationally, suggesting there is scope for further improvement in this measure.

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 deciles⁵ where the school leavers reside.
- 2.6.2 The Attainment vs. Deprivation chart for 2020 SIMD decile performance (Appendix 3), shows that North Ayrshire school leavers have performed in line with or better than learners from the similar areas at the National level, except deciles 1 and 10 where we are lower than National performance. This is generally mirroring performance in 2019 although the average school leaver in each decile has performed better in 2020 than 2019. School leavers in SIMD deciles 3, 4 and 7 have performed significantly higher than the National establishment. The slope of the line is less steep than the one for the National performance, meaning that the gap between the attainment of school leavers from the *most* SIMD deprived and those from the *least* SIMD deprived backgrounds is smaller in North Ayrshire than in similar areas across Scotland.

The gap between the attainment of leavers from the 20% most SIMD deprived areas and the ones from the rest of the SIMD Areas (80%) has increased in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as the learning of pupils from the most deprived areas have been more seriously impacted due to the closure of our schools in lockdown 1.

2.7 **Increasing Post-School Participation** (Appendix 4)

- 2.7.1 Before 2020, the percentage of school leavers moving into positive destinations in North Ayrshire has been one of the highest across Scotland. While 94% of the 2019 school leavers cohort has achieved positive post-school destinations (one percentage point lower than the National performance in the same year but in line with our Virtual Comparator and the SWEIC performance), in 2020 pandemic conditions 92.5% of the cohort entered positive destinations. The 2020 figure is in line with our Virtual Comparator but is lower than both the SWEIC and national performance.
- 2.7.2 The pandemic had a significant impact both nationally and locally on the type of school leaver destination in 2020. For example, while the proportion of school leavers going into education and training has increased from 74% in previous years to 75.5% in 2020, the proportion of school leavers going into employment has decreased in 2020 by 3 percentage points compared to 2019 and by even more than that compared to previous years.

⁵ 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. We are able to pinpoint the SIMD deprivation decile of the area where a pupil resides using the pupil's postcode as 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.

2.8 Attainment in Broad General Education – Attainment of Curriculum for Excellence Level (ACEL) in P1, P4, P7 and S3 (Appendix 5)

- 2.8.1 In 2016, the Scottish Government began to collect statistics on the CfE 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 a level made at the end of June each session.
- 2.8.2 At the end of the 2018/19 Academic session 74% of primary pupils (P1, P4, P7 – combined) attained the expected level⁶ in Literacy (assessed in all the three components) and 79% attained the expected level in Numeracy. This compares favourably with the National performance which is 72% for Literacy in primary school (P1, P4, P7 – combined) and 79% in Numeracy.
- 2.8.3 By the end of S3, in the 2019 academic session, 93% of North Ayrshire pupils attained level 3 or better in Literacy (in all three components) and 50% attained level 4. Correspondingly, in Numeracy, 90% of S3 North Ayrshire pupils attained level 3 or better and 64% attained level 4. In 2018/19, S3 pupils in North Ayrshire exceeded the National performance in all measures.
- 2.8.4 Appendix 5 presents the detailed attainment of each stage in each of the Literacy components and in Numeracy, for the past three years. There is a strong improvement trend in all measures at almost all stages for the 2016-2019 period.
- 2.8.5 Appendix 6 shows that, in 2019, the gap between pupils living in the most deprived vs. those living in the least deprived SIMD areas is, in primary schools, largely in line with national levels. However, the gap becomes considerably smaller, in all areas of Literacy and in Numeracy, for pupils achieving level 3 or better by the end of S3 in North Ayrshire compared to National.

2.9 Proposed Improvement Actions

- 2.91. The following improvement actions are proposed in respect of the key performance measures in pupil attainment:
- 2.9.2. **Improving attainment in Literacy & Numeracy:** Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy will continue to be a principal focus of the Broad General Education and Senior phase. This will be supported through school improvement planning processes, quality assurance processes and the work of the Professional Learning Academy. North Ayrshire's Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding will continue to focus on improving literacy and numeracy skills and attainment for targeted groups of learners, including the current P1 who have been affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 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

⁶ 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

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 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 allocated **Covid Recovery funding in additional staffing and resources** specifically to target support towards those learners who need it most and who have been most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Our annual Education Service Plan and Attainment Challenge Programme have been updated to reflect the significant priority of further improving attainment and recovering the progress already made towards significantly reducing the poverty-related attainment gap.

3. Proposals

3.1 It is proposed that Cabinet:

- (i) Notes the content of the report, including the progress being made by learners, specifically in literacy and numeracy;
- (ii) Notes the achievements of school leavers in SQA examinations in 2019 and 2020; and
- (iii) Approves the measures being taken to implement learning recovery and 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.

Environmental and Sustainability

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

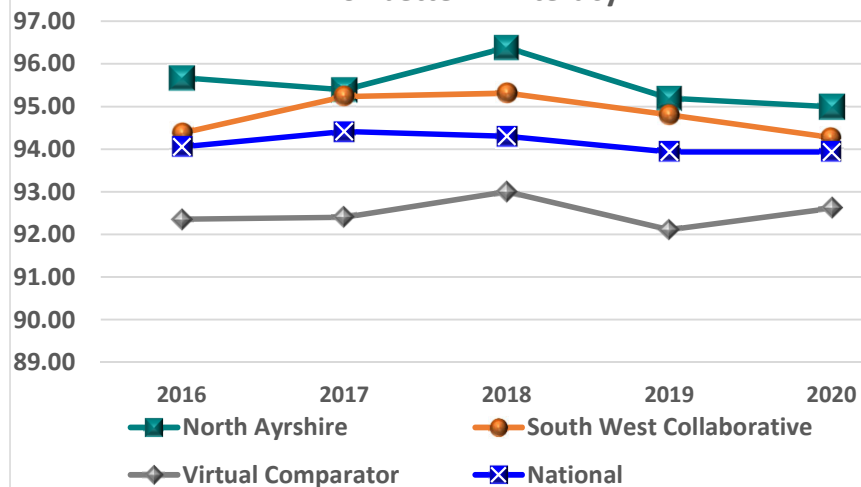
- 5.1 There is a robust Quality Improvement Framework in place to support schools to evaluate and analyse their performance and plan future improvements. This quality improvement process features regular evaluative visits to schools by Senior Officers. These visits feature evidence-based, challenging 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.
- 5.2 Lockdown 1 presented the Education service with significant challenges to maintain the provision of education, particularly to those living in the lower deciles due to the lack of access to technology. Considerable efforts were undertaken to provide devices, support the development of digital skills and to support our young people to continue to access their learning in innovative ways. Throughout this experience, many lessons were learned and the Education service has adapted it's provision which ensured we were better prepared, teachers and young people were more skilled and devices were readily available to ensure the best possible educational provision during lockdown 2. Our Quality Improvement Framework from January to Easter focused on the remote learning provision across our schools and featured challenging dialogue and reviews of evidence between Head Teachers and Senior Officers.

Audrey Sutton
Executive Director (Communities and Education)

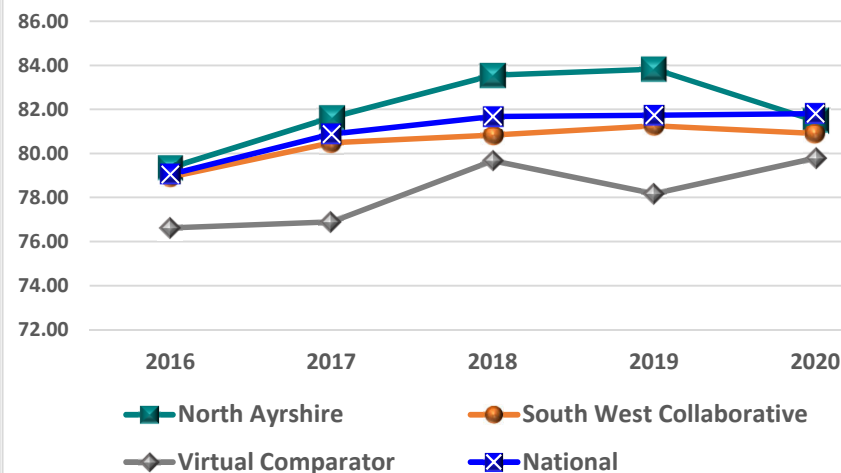
For further information please contact Alan MacDougall, Senior Manager, on 01294 324450

Background Papers

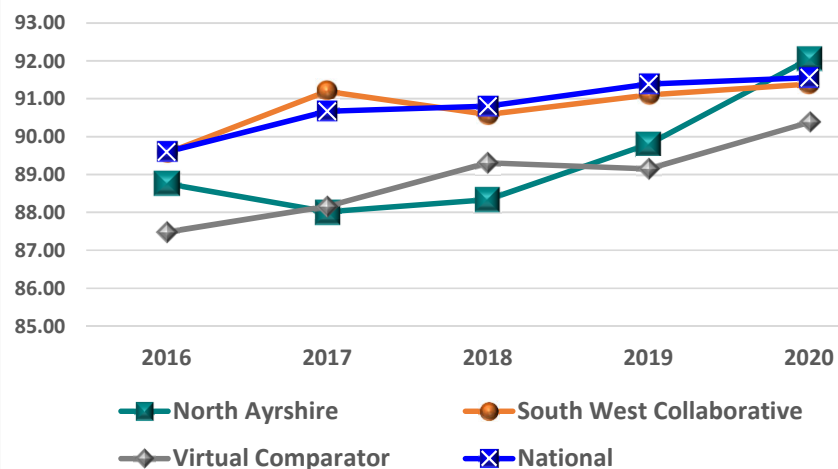
Percentage of school leavers attaining SCQF level 4 or better in Literacy



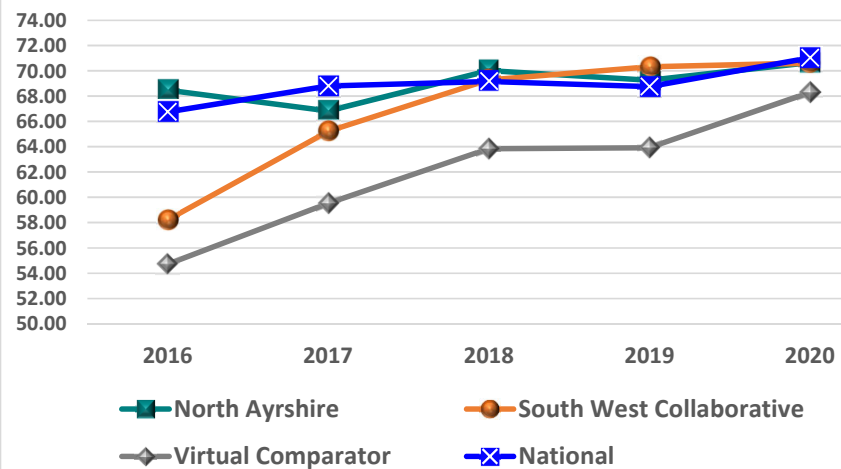
Percentage of school leavers attaining SCQF level 5 or better in Literacy



Percentage of school leavers attaining SCQF level 4 or better in Numeracy

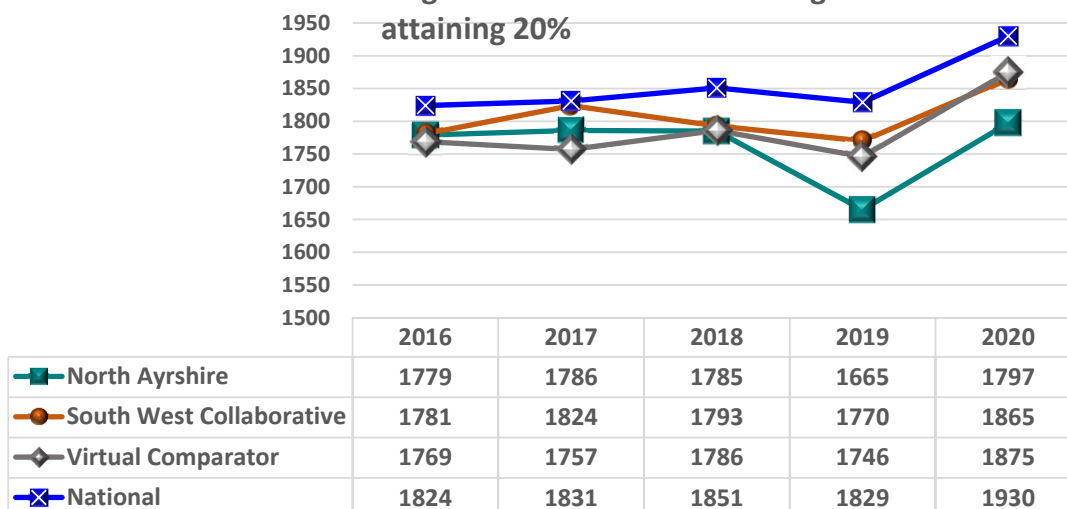


Percentage of school leavers attaining SCQF level 5 or better in Numeracy



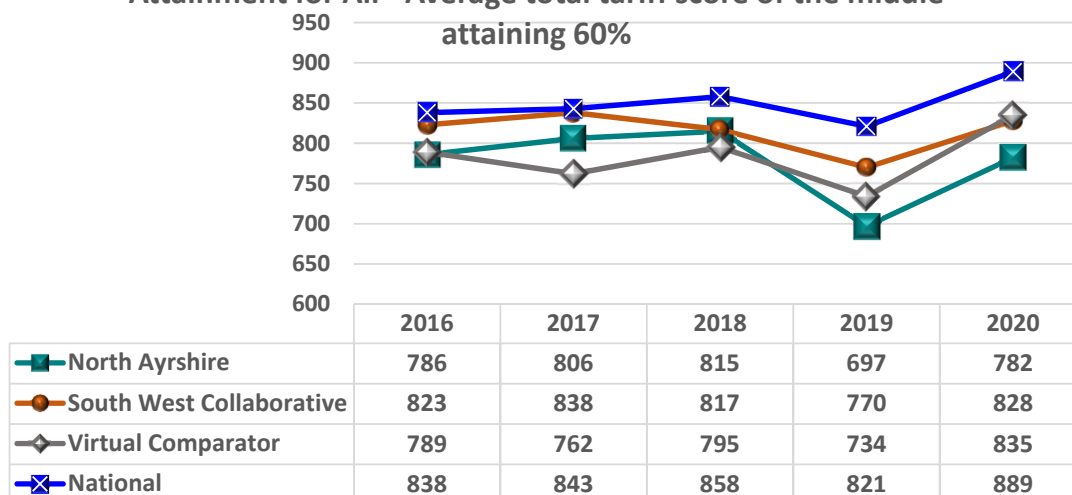
Attainment for All - Average total tariff score of the highest

attaining 20%



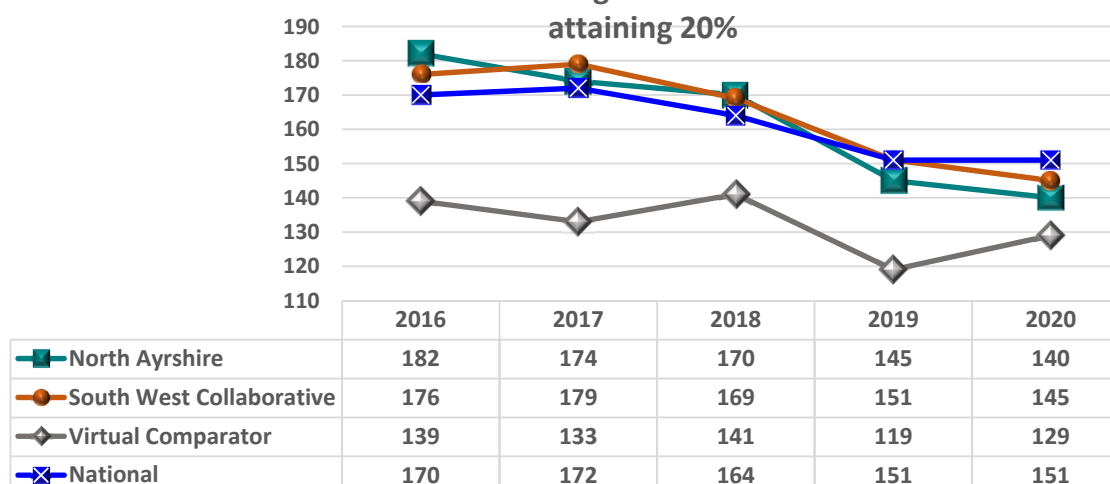
Attainment for All - Average total tariff score of the middle

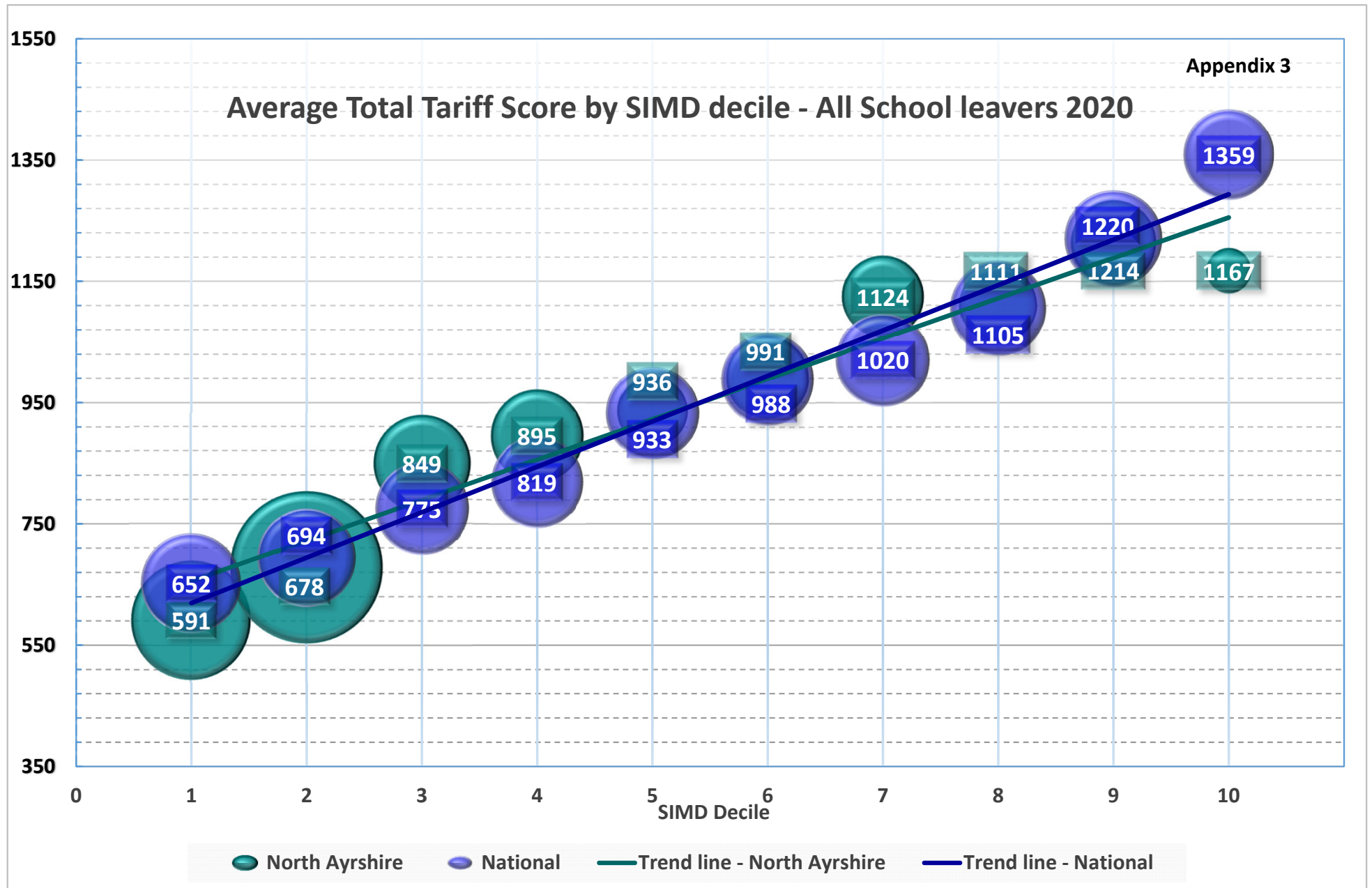
attaining 60%



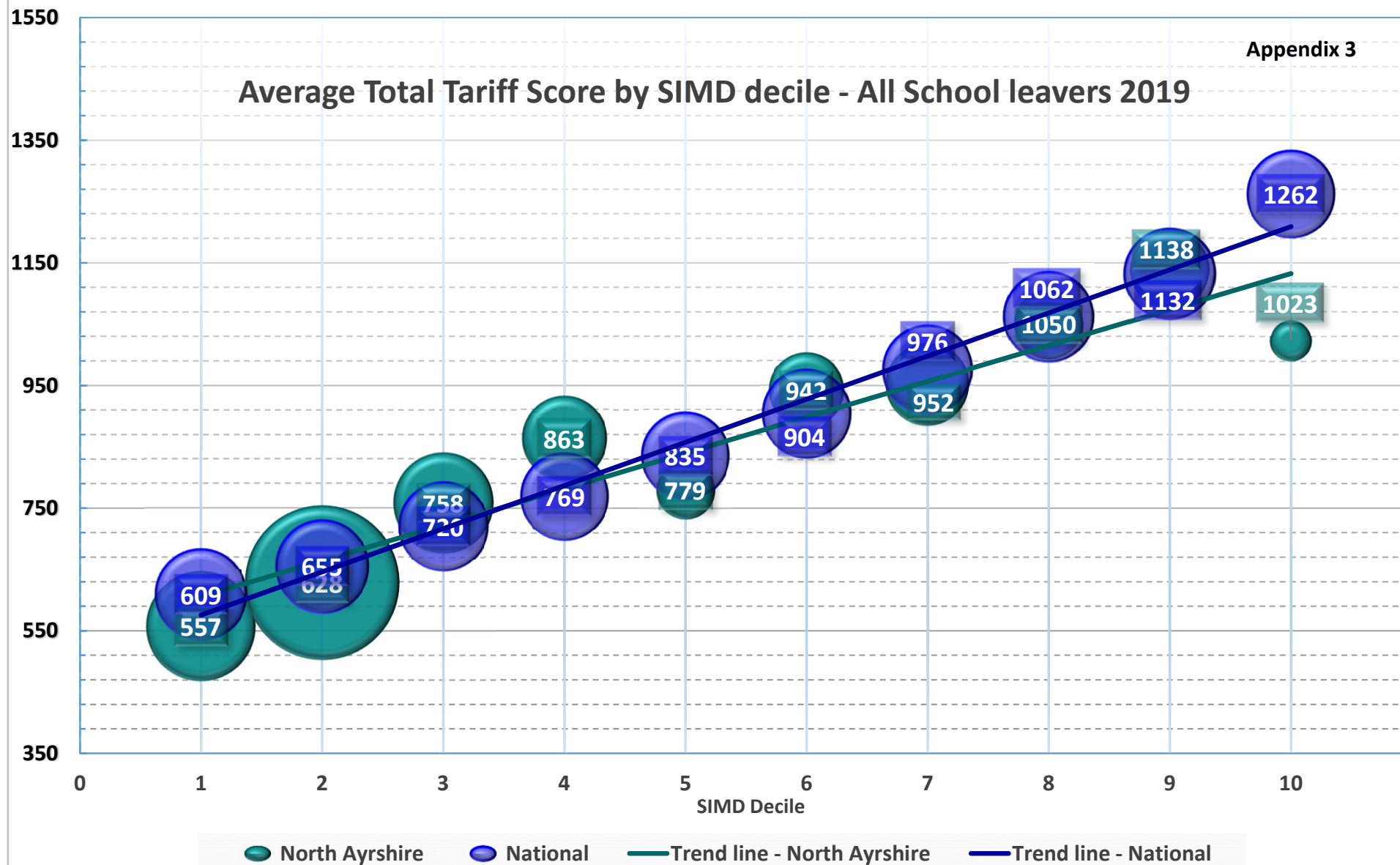
Attainment for All - Average total tariff score of the lowest

attaining 20%



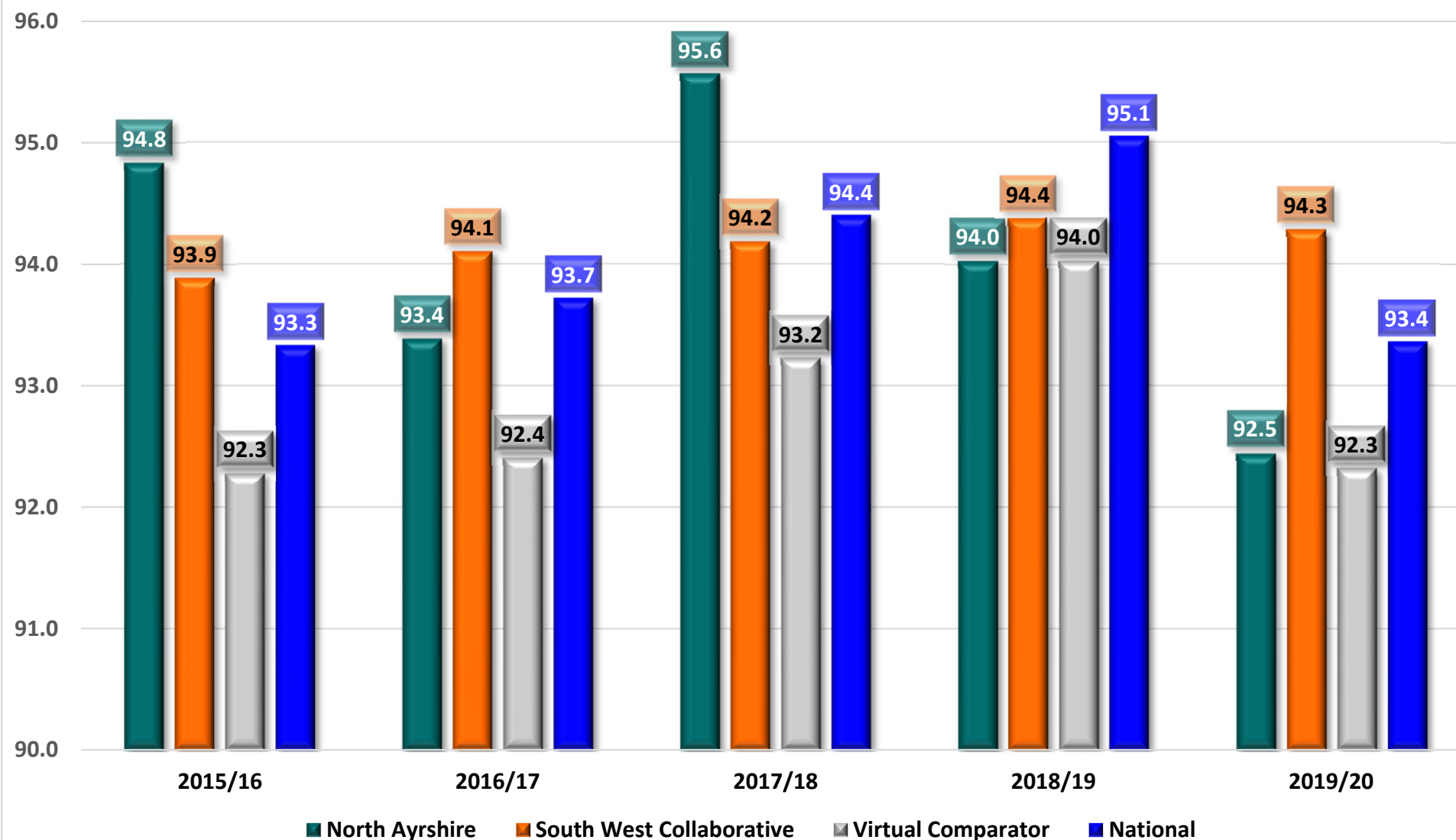


Average Total Tariff Score by SIMD decile - All School leavers 2019

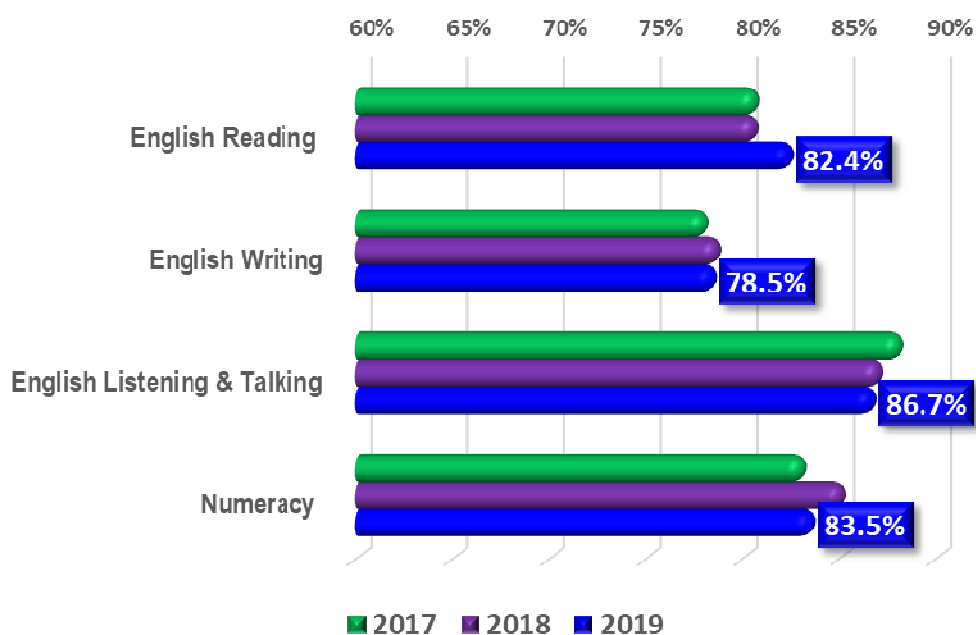


Comparative Performance on % of School Leavers Moving into Positive Destinations

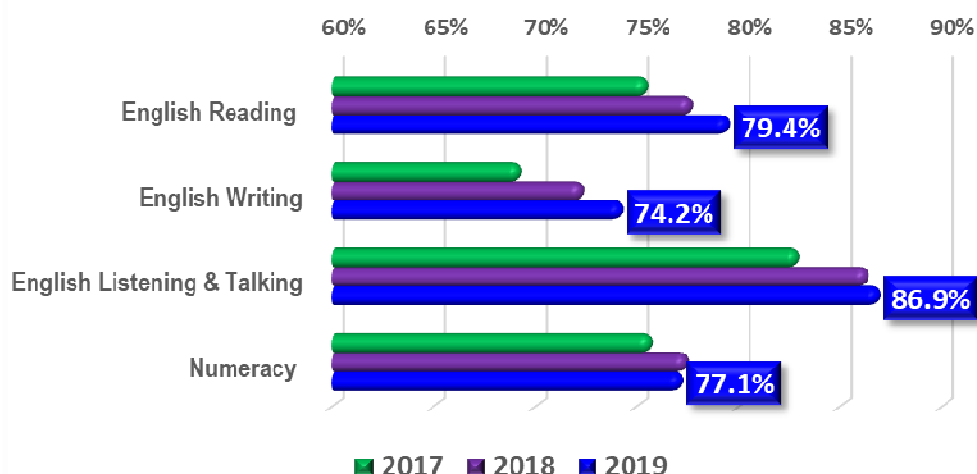
Appendix 4



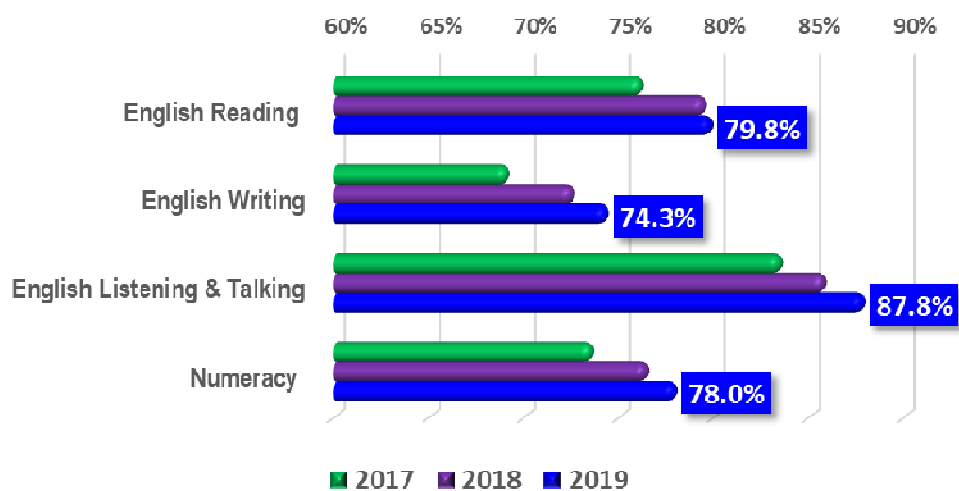
P1

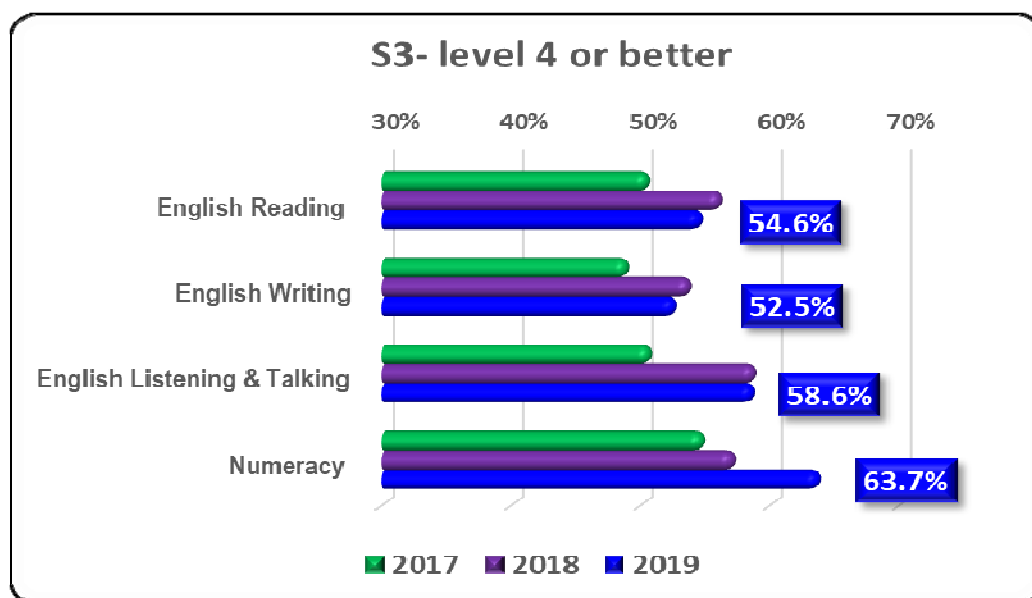
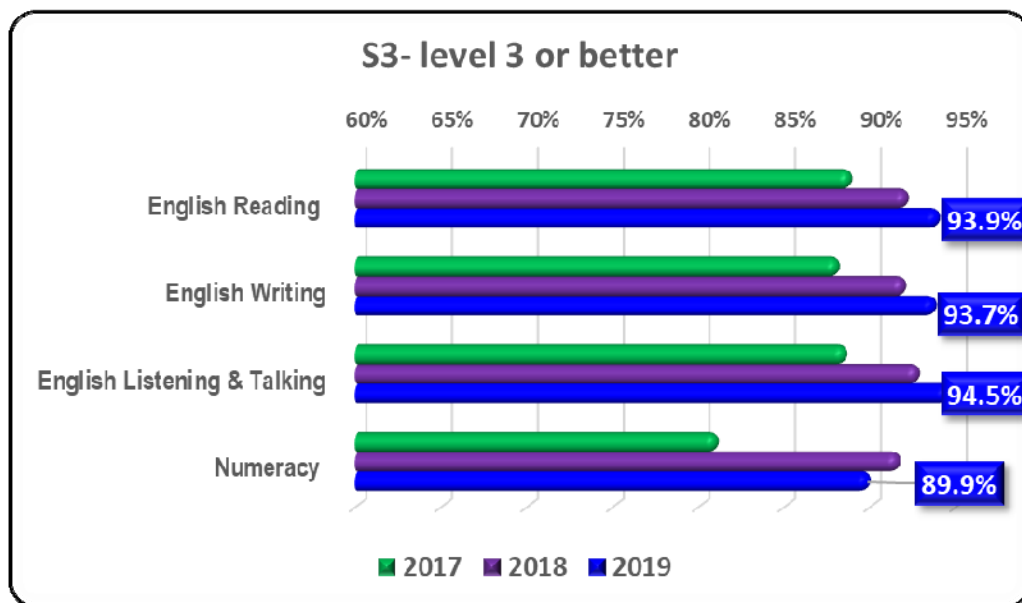


P4



P7





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

Appendix 6

