

The Scottish Attainment Challenge

8 February 2022

**NASUWT evidence to the Scottish Parliament Education,
Children and Young People Committee**

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committee in its scrutiny of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

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(1) What has worked well?

1. The NASUWT is clear that one of the most profound and damaging consequences of child poverty is the impact that it has on pupils' educational attainment, their wider wellbeing and their future life chances.
2. The Union has campaigned consistently for more effective action to ensure that no child grows up in circumstances where they are deprived of the economic, social and cultural resources they need to thrive and make the most of their potential.
3. Key NASUWT campaigns and research has focused on the costs families face in providing education to their children and the implications for young people of financial hardship.
4. The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC), and associated Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), has successfully provided additional targeted resources aimed at tackling the poverty related attainment gap and further increased awareness politically, socially and within the education sector of the damaging impact of poverty upon children.
5. There have been isolated examples of good practice from individual schools utilising the SAC funding streams, however these are often isolated and insufficient opportunity has been taken to share these successes nor facilitate any learning where the results were disappointing.

(2) What could improve?

6. The Union believes that the Scottish Government should adopt the following key principles to underpin its school funding system. These are that the funding system for all state-funded schools should:

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- a. provide equality of opportunity and equitable access for all learners, including through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum, and contribute to raising educational standards for all pupils and narrow the achievement gap;
- b. ensure that all schools are funded on the same basis, which should not result in anomalies between schools where their needs and circumstances and the expectations upon them are the same;
- c. reflect the additional costs related to pupil deprivation, socio-economic circumstances, school location and setting;
- d. ensure the provision of, and access to, high-quality education and related support services for children and young people, including vulnerable children;
- e. provide equality of entitlement for all learners to be taught by qualified teachers and for the recruitment, retention and development of a world-class workforce in every school or setting as critical components in delivering better outcomes for all children, and that these entitlements must not be based on parents' ability to pay;
- f. be clear and transparent so that school budgets are based upon clearly identified and agreed sets of expectations about what work schools should do and the performance expectations that will apply to them;
- g. be fit for purpose, taking account of local circumstances and needs and the expectations on schools and local authorities, while promoting public and professional confidence in the system;

- h. be sufficient in ensuring that the global amount available for the funding of schools takes full account of education priorities and needs and promotes fairness, equity, inclusion and social cohesion;
 - i. ensure that changes to the funding for schools do not result in detriment to colleges or early years provisions, which are also essential in providing education for school-aged pupils;
 - j. be responsive to changing needs and circumstances;
 - k. be predicated on consultation and democratic involvement at national, local and institutional levels, including full recognition of school workforce trade unions;
 - l. promote stability for schools and enable schools to plan and organise their priorities in the longer term, and help to minimise turbulence;
 - m. support the best use of resources, through arrangements for strategic planning of local provision, institutional collaboration, economies of scale and the pooling of resources to meet locally identified educational needs; and
 - n. ensure that schools in receipt of state funding should not be able to make a profit and that they demonstrate the provision of good value for money.
7. The Union recommends that procedures set out a clear process for consultation with workforce unions on spending decisions both at LNCT level and school level. Ideally, any guidance should operationalise the expected collaboration.

8. There are advantages to utilising existing planning processes. Should SAC funding plans build on existing local authority and school improvement plans then it will be essential that all local improvement plans are developed in conjunction with Working Time Agreements (WTA). Without this joined up approach, schools will be unable to allocate sufficient, guaranteed time to teachers to both explore and implement localised approaches to tackle the poverty related attainment gap.
9. The NASUWT has argued that the costs of staffing should be excluded from devolved school funding streams and that local agreements resist devolving staffing costs, such as central support services and specialist teachers and instructors.
10. The NASUWT also considers that devolved school funding should not enable significant surplus balances to be built up.
11. It is important that there are safeguards in the system which prevent fraud and abuse of the funding regime. It is important that there are clear channels of locally agreed accountability, without placing unnecessary workload burdens and bureaucracy on schools.
12. There is a need to build equity and equality in an intersectional way within the narrative as well as ensuring links are made to education recovery and that best practice is accessible. Addressing inequalities must be at the heart of the response to Covid-19, longer-term recovery and improving education. Education recovery will not be a 1 year process. While the current proposals span 5 years, this strategy will still need to form part of a coherent longer term strategy for education recovery.
13. The desire to reduce the poverty related attainment gap must not result in increased bureaucracy and workload for teachers; deviating them from their core role of teaching and learning. Indeed greater time is

needed for teachers to engage fruitfully in collaboration, enquiry, review and planning to support the ongoing work of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

(3) How is the impact of funding measured?

14. Measuring something is not the same as improving it. There is considerable variability on the ground between local authorities, schools and even departments and a need for increased transparency and accountability. The onus and workload associated with facilitating transparency must lie with Scottish Government and Local Authorities, not schools and teachers.
15. Any evaluation strategy must include talking to grass roots teachers and must not be overly reliant on paper based feedback from local authorities. A key issue around the use of the money is the extent to which it has made a difference to classroom teachers in meeting the needs of pupils with deprivation-related needs: so not to engage actively with these teachers would be a serious oversight.
16. Another important reason to involve teachers relates to the fact that headteachers have significant discretion around how PEF funding should be used. There is, therefore, a risk that the money could be used for purposes for which it was not intended: this has been a hard lesson of the Pupil Premium in England. It is also important that teachers are involved in developing strategies for the use of PEF which ensure there is meaningful accountability.
17. As part of the accountability framework, the government should be asking how many teachers in relevant schools were aware of PEF, knew how much funding their schools had received and were engaged in decision making about the use of this funding.

18. To date the evaluation process has been very top down. PEF is spent at the discretion of the headteacher so using headteacher responses to identify case studies does not provide a robust quality assurance check. Teacher views need to be sought directly, not only to provide that check and balance, but also because it will provide the best evidence of whether the funding has made any significant improvement to the classroom experience.

19. A shift in culture is also required whereby a more open and honest national conversation is able to be had about interventions which were not successful and sharing the learning from those experiences as well as those which had a more positive outcome.

20. Any national evaluation strategy must be determined in consultation with the profession. The experiences of teachers need to inform both evaluation and accountability.

21. Furthermore, the Union agrees that looking at qualifications and results on its own does not provide a sufficiently broad picture of attainment which best reflects the intentions and values of a Curriculum for Excellence. A wider focus on attainment would be welcome as well as one which better factored in readiness to learn and health and wellbeing. It must be clearly acknowledged that a broader consideration of attainment will be challenging to measure and therefore more trust needs to be put in the judgement and feedback of teachers.

(4) What has been the impact of the pandemic on attainment and achievement in schools?

22. The effects on society of the COVID-19 pandemic have been deep and wide-reaching, causing long-lasting issues that will undoubtedly be felt for many years.

23. It is undeniable that the impact of the global crisis in disrupting children's education has been significant. Educational progress and achievements have been inhibited, alongside damage to the social and cultural development of children and young people, and their emotional and mental wellbeing.
24. The NASUWT recognises the urgent need for a long-term, sustainable and properly funded education recovery strategy. A comprehensive strategy that brings together the work of schools and other bodies is essential.
25. Although the educational implications of the pandemic have been significant, it is clear that other important dimensions of children's lives have been affected. For this reason, the NASUWT rejects recovery strategies premised on a narrow vision of 'catch-up', in which the aim is little more than to fill in the gaps left by disrupted schooling. The Union also rejects an approach that asserts that the innate resilience of children means that any adverse impacts can largely be addressed simply by returning them to full-time education with limited or no additional support.
26. Recovery should be understood as a long-term process given the pandemic's far-reaching impacts. It should also be viewed as an opportunity to tackle deep-rooted structural issues affecting children and young people in all aspects of their lives that have been exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. Other education systems, including those in the Netherlands and the United States, have developed bold and ambitious plans that reflect this reality. To be sustainable, recovery will also need to be manageable for those in the workforce with day-to-day responsibilities for children and young people. It will need to take into account the pressures they faced before the pandemic, the increased pressures they encountered during it, and the challenges they will need to take on as it recedes.

27. For these reasons, the NASUWT advocates a holistic view of recovery, based on supporting children in all aspects of their lives, including, but not limited to, those relating to formal schooling. Schools will have a critical role in securing recovery, but they cannot be expected to contribute in isolation or without working in effective partnerships with other services for children and young people that are resourced adequately and supported appropriately.
28. It is also clear that the impact of the pandemic has not been experienced uniformly. While it is likely to be the case that every child has been adversely affected by the crisis, some will have been impacted on more profoundly than others, particularly those who were more vulnerable or more disadvantaged before the pandemic.
29. There are huge disparities in educational outcomes that young people face from particular backgrounds, and this is an increasing problem that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Racism, racial injustice, economic disadvantage and other discriminatory factors have impacted on the education outcomes and life chances of young people well before the pandemic as a result of systemic inequalities. This situation has worsened for young black pupils, as well as those from Gypsy, Roma Traveller (GRT) and poorer backgrounds, further compounding the socioeconomic disadvantages they face. Any education recovery plan and supportive budget must address these existing disparities and ensure that, going forwards, policies and practices focus on demonstrable positive outcomes for all pupils and communities.
30. The Scottish Government must recognise and seek to address the demonstrable disparities in experience and outcomes that particular groups of pupils have faced during the pandemic, including those that relate to race, socioeconomic status and geographical location. It must give practical effect to provisions set out in equalities legislation, particularly the Public Sector Equality Duty, and the specific duties and

responsibilities these establish in respect of those with protected characteristics.

31. Recovery will also need to reflect the aims and objectives of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including those set out in Article 12 of the Convention on ensuring that appropriate weight is given to children's views in matters that affect them, especially since the introduction of the Convention into domestic law. Articles 28 and 29 of the UNCRC provide the right to education, and more generally to the rights of children to have their wellbeing promoted in all respects, as the preamble to the Charter confirms. In a context where the UNCRC is incorporated into domestic legislation, these become legal requirements on the Scottish Government.
32. Given the significant scale of the recovery challenge and the need for it to be impactful, it will be essential that it is subjected to an ongoing system-level evaluation, such that it makes a difference for children and supports the workforce.
33. The structures and systems in place across Scottish Education cannot be viewed in isolation. There is a significant question to be asked about whether the processes which were put in place to navigate the pandemic generally and more specifically to deliver alternative certification created an increased poverty related attainment gap: any impact requires to be acknowledged and addressed publicly.
34. Securing high quality education for all must be allied to a concerted national effort to end child poverty. Tackling the causes of poverty must underpin any education related intervention. The educational success and wider wellbeing of children and young people is dependent on ensuring that their legitimate rights and entitlements are respected in all aspects of their lives, both within and beyond school. Teachers and school leaders have important roles to play in this respect but the

contribution of families and other agencies with responsibilities for children and young people's care is also critical.

35. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child confirms that it is a responsibility of the state to ensure that children and young people, as well as having access to an effective education, are safe, secure, can make a contribution and enjoy good physical and mental health. Health, social care, youth justice and cultural and leisure services all have a critical part to play, working in partnership with schools, to ensure that every child has the best possible start in life, as well as good future life chances. There have been reductions in the resources available to these services and ineffective frameworks for collaboration between them. Critical areas of concern, including child protection and promoting good mental health among young people, depend crucially on a well-funded public service framework.

36. It is essential that links are made with other policy workstreams across Scotland including the OECD report, UNCRC, race equality, education recovery etc. It is frustrating and unnecessarily burdensome for teachers to have to make these links themselves and contributes to workload and bureaucracy at school level. A refreshed and renewed governance structure across Scotland would greatly assist in creating a more cohesive policy narrative.

37. While any refreshed Scottish Attainment Challenge needs to take account of the global pandemic, it also needs to take account of the increasing numbers of families and children who are being pushed into poverty inter alia as a result of cost of living increases.

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