

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	11.
Report No	EDU/16/25

Committee: Education

Date: 4 June 2025

Report Title: Education Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides Members with updates on:

- i. School Leaver Destinations for 2023/24, including updates on work undertaken by the Education and Learning Service to ensure young people in our communities secure positive and sustained destinations;
- ii. Progress towards updating the Raising Attainment Strategy; and
- iii. The ongoing central officer restructure within the Education and Learning Service which will better support the raising attainment agenda.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the content of the report and the positive progress made in improving positive destinations for all;
- ii. Note the planned next steps on the development of the refreshed Raising Attainment Strategy; and
- iii. Note the ongoing progress with the restructure of the Education and Learning service.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

There are no additional financial requirements linked to the contents of this report. The central officer restructure will be delivered at less cost than the arrangements that are being replaced. The full recurring savings achieved will be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

3.2 Legal

There are no implications arising as a direct result of this report.

3.3 Risk
Maximising economic activity and employment is a key priority in the 'My Highland Future' portfolio within the Council's Operational Delivery Plan. The portfolio is established to manage the risk of ensuring that all Highland school leavers benefit from positive destinations and economic opportunities.

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)
There are no implications arising as a direct result of this report.

3.5 Gaelic
There are no specific implications for Gaelic Medium Education and Gaelic Learners Education courses. The Raising Attainment Strategy and service restructure are relevant to both Gaelic and English medium education and will contribute to the continued improvement in Gaelic educational outcomes.

4. Impacts

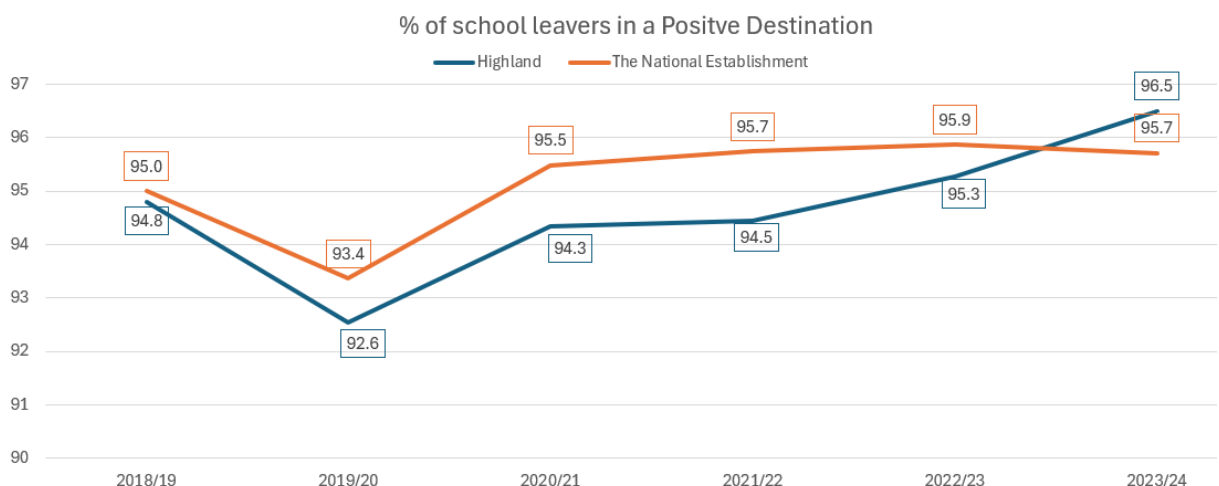
4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies, or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is a monitoring and/or update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. School Leaver Destinations

5.1 The 2023/24 National Initial Leaver Destination Report shows that 96.5% of the 2692 Highland young people who finished school in the last academic year have progressed in their studies or careers within three months of the academic year end. This is the highest leaver destination figure for Highland in the last 5 years and ahead of the national average.



- 5.2 Employment continues to grow as the highest percentage for positive destinations as well as the most sustained. 8.28% of leavers in employment were undertaking a Modern Apprenticeship. Last year 40.4% entered employment compared to 39.1% in the previous year. This is much higher than the national average of 23.1%. The percentage of young people entering Further Education is at 20.4% compared to 20.5% in the previous year with the national average at 26.4%. 32.1% of leavers went onto Higher Education, which is a slight decrease from last year at 33.1%, with national at 40.8%.
- 5.3 3.5% (94) of Highland's young people did not enter a positive post-school destination. Work is required to understand the demographic profile of these young people. There will be a continued focus on 16+ Pathway Planning for those young people at risk of a negative destination.
- 5.4 The 'My Highland Future' portfolio within the Council's Operational Delivery Plan is a key driver in supporting positive post school destinations. The portfolio will support structured careers education within schools and encourage uptake of modern and graduate apprenticeships and is designed to increase young people's aspirations and opportunities.
- 5.5 Within Education and Learning, a realignment of services now sees Developing the Young Workforce, Vocational Education, Employability and Community Learning all within the portfolio of one Chief Officer. This will lead to a strengthening of joined up working across teams, shared vision and values and, most importantly, more effective deployment of resources leading to improved outcomes for young people both within and post-school.

6. **Raising Attainment Strategy**

- 6.1 The Local Authority is developing a refreshed Raising Attainment Strategy. Initial development sessions have taken place with central officers, a Headteacher Reference Group and a union representation to undertake an evaluation of areas which are currently supporting schools to improve and identify key aspects which require additional focus.
- 6.2 Going forward there is agreement that the areas requiring strategic activity within an updated Raising Attainment Strategy are:
- leadership
 - learning & teaching
 - curriculum
 - data and self-evaluation

Some of these activities already sit within our NIF Plan, approved by Committee in November 2024, and these will be developed further throughout the coming session alongside the following supporting strategies and policies, so that all staff within the system are clear on the priorities for change.

- Parental Engagement
- Improving Attendance
- Promoting Positive Behaviour
- Additional Support for Learning

- Learning and Teaching Framework
- GIRFEC Refresh

6.3 A workstream for each of the 4 strategic areas will be established, led by the Head Teachers in the Reference Group and engaging with head teachers, depute head teachers, principal teachers, and classroom teachers with support from the Area Quality Improvement Managers. Each work stream will develop an improvement plan to identify the priorities and actions that will be undertaken in session 2025-26. The purpose of this work is to identify key principles, pedagogies, resources, strategies and approaches that Highland schools will use to address attainment gaps caused by the identified attainment barriers.

Progress on the work streams, and the raising attainment strategy as a whole, will be directed by the Raising Attainment Headteacher Reference Group.

6.4 A Headteacher conference has been arranged for June to share expectations with all Headteachers. This will be followed by meetings with all teaching and support staff across our schools and early learning centres in September to raise awareness of the strategy. All schools will have an identified raising attainment plan, underpinned by the raising attainment strategy to provide coherence and consistency but capable of tailoring to local requirements and circumstances. These will inform the development of every schools' Improvement Plan for the next session. The new Area Quality Improvement Managers (AQIMs) will have a central role in working with school leaders to deliver continued, sustained improvement.

6.5 An all-Members' seminar will be arranged to provide information and seek feedback on the strategy as it is developed.

7. **Restructure Update for Education & Learning Service**

7.1 As reported at February Committee, the Service is undergoing a restructure of the central support team. A new area-based model will push resources from the centre to 8 new operational areas with a strong focus on raising attainment and driving improvement in all settings from Early Years through to post school destinations.

7.2 8 Senior officers reporting to the 2 Chief Officers will be responsible for providing support and challenge to clusters of ASGs, with clear spans of control and strategic remits. Responding to feedback from headteachers; Education Scotland; wider staff groups and elected Members; this new structure will provide clarity of role and function for senior officers responsible for quality improvement who will work together with Headteachers across all Highland schools to raise attainment and deliver improved outcomes for all Highland's children and young people.

7.3 The changes deliver a simplified and streamlined structure, removing a number of layers of management and providing clear lines of responsibility and accountability, delivered at less cost. A summary of the structure is attached at Appendix 1. This also highlights the additional capacity that will be provided through the new investment agreed in the budget by the Council in March 2025.

7.4 There has been extensive staff and union engagement prior to commencing the formal recruitment process. It has also been agreed with unions that the new

structure, including the cluster boundaries, will be reviewed after a year so that any adjustments can be made if required.

- 7.5 Interviews for the AQIM posts took place in the week commencing 19 May and an update on appointments will be provided to Members ahead of Committee. Once in post, the AQIMs will join the Head Teacher Reference Group in developing our refreshed raising attainment strategy.
- 7.6 Recruitment for the Education Support Officer (ESO) roles will commence in the week commencing 26 May, with the intention to have these two tiers of the structure fully in place by the end of the session. Recruitment to the remaining roles will be undertaken as soon as possible thereafter. The expectation is that positions will be found for all staff whether in the new central support team or in schools. Training and support will be provided for all officers undertaking new roles.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date: 23 May 2025

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Education and Learning Structure

Appendix 1.

Education & Learning Structure

Assistant Chief Executive People							
Chief Officer Primary and Early Years South Area Management				Chief Officer Secondary North Area Management			
AQIM1 ESO, ESA	AQIM2 ESO, ESA	AQIM3 ESO, ESA	AQIM4 ESO, ESA	AQIM1 ESO, ESA	AQIM2 ESO, ESA	AQIM3 ESO, ESA	AQIM4 ESO, ESA
ASN PT, PSA Lead Practitioner, EYESO	ASN PT, PSA Lead Practitioner, EYESO	ASN PT, PSA Lead Practitioner, EYESO	ASN PT, PSA Lead Practitioner, EYESO	ASN PT, PSA Lead Practitioner, EYESO	ASN PT, PSA Lead Practitioner, EYESO	ASN PT, PSA Lead Practitioner, EYESO	ASN PT, PSA Lead Practitioner, EYESO
ASGs & HTs Ardnamurchan Lochaber, Kinlochleven Mallaig 29 schools/14 HTs/2,934 pupils	ASGs & HTs Kilchuimen Inverness High Inverness Royal 22 schools/18 HTs/ 4,930 pupils	ASGs & HTs Nairn Grantown Kingussie Culloden 21 Schools/20 HTs/4,869 pupils	ASGs & HTs Millburn Charleston Glenurquhart 19 schools/19 HTs/ 5,122 pupils	ASGs & HTs Portree, Plockton Gairloch 26 schools/17 HTs/1,974 pupils	ASGs & HTs Ullapool, Dingwall, Invergordon 20 schools/20 HTs/ 3,657 pupils	ASGs & HTs Farr, Kinlochbervie, Thurso, Wick, Golspie 33 schools/20 HTs/ 4,302 pupils	ASGs & HTs Dornoch, Tain, Fortrose, Alness 26 schools/18 HTs/4,381 pupils
Strategic AQIM Remits– not area/post specific but would be assigned according to the skills and experience of officers once appointed.							

** Yellow Highlighted roles are new posts funded as part of additional £2.3m investment agreed in the Council budget in March 2025.

Glossary: AQIM – Area Quality Improvement Manager; ASN PT – Principal Teacher ASN; EP – Educational Psychologist; ESO – Education Support Officer; EYESO – Early Years Education Support Officer; ESA – Education Support Assistant - new role to provide operational support in each cluster to the AQIM and ESO