



Scottish Health Equity
Research Unit

Insights, analysis and action on the socio-economic factors
that shape health

Reactive Stats Summary

2024 SQA Attainment Statistics

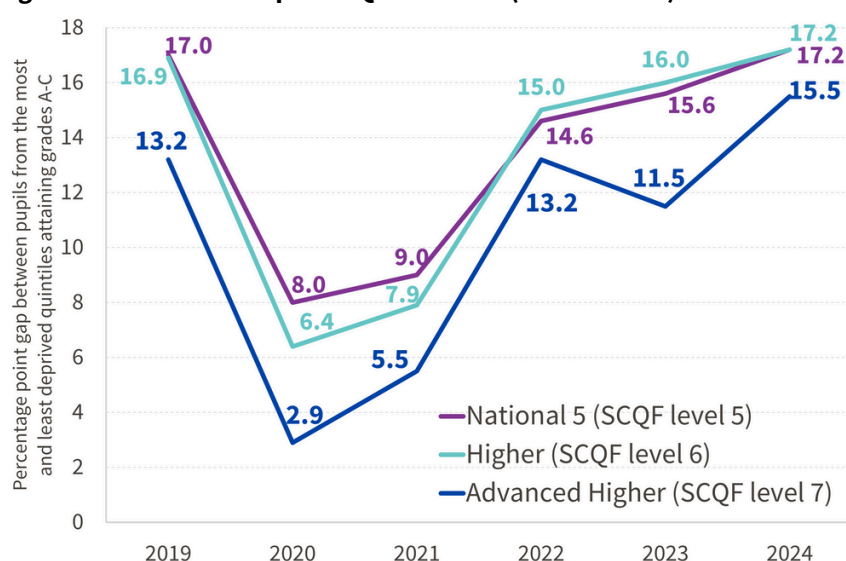
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Scotland's attainment gap widens

Early educational disadvantages can have long-lasting effects, influencing future academic achievements, employment prospects and health outcomes. School education is fully devolved to Scotland, funded through the Scottish budget and delivered by local authorities who have statutory duties to provide school places. Education policy is set by the Scottish Government and there have been a number of new initiatives in recent years, alongside the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).

The latest exam results published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) show that the attainment gap between pupils from the most and least deprived parts of Scotland has widened [1]. After a reduction in the gap during academic years impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, the poverty related attainment gaps at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher are all now wider than they were pre-pandemic (2019).

Figure 1. Attainment Gap at SCQF levels 5-7 (2019 to 2024)



Source: Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

Teacher estimates were a significant part of the assessment process for the 2020 and 2021 academic years, with the system evolving to include a broader range of evidence and moderated approaches in 2021. By 2022, traditional exams had largely resumed, though some adaptations and considerations remained in place. These changes meant that caution had to be exercised when comparing the results over recent years, with 2024 now seen as the most comparable year to the results in 2019. This is because it is deemed the first full return to qualification requirements since the pandemic.

Closing the attainment gap has been a key goal of the Scottish Government for several years, with funding initiatives such as The Scottish Attainment Challenge and Pupil Equity Funding implemented to support this aim. The widening of the gap compared to pre-pandemic levels is therefore concerning, as addressing it is crucial not only for promoting educational equity and enhancing social mobility but also for improving long-term health outcomes and fostering overall economic and social well-being in Scotland.

Sources:

[1] https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/equalities-monitoring-report-2024.pdf



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