

Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation Interim report (2015 – 2017)

The evaluation aims to provide learning about the overall implementation of the Attainment Scotland Fund and the extent to which the aims of the fund have been met. These key findings focus on the first two years of the fund, from 2015 to 2017. It examines the Challenge Authority and Schools Programme prior to the introduction of Pupil Equity Funding. The document is of particular interest to policy makers and practitioners working in education as well as those who benefited from the fund.

Main findings

Overall, the Attainment Scotland Fund was found to be a driver for change and cohesion. As a result of the fund, there was an increased awareness, understanding and shared commitment to address the impact of poverty on attainment across local authorities and schools.

While significant progress has been achieved over the first two years, the poverty related attainment gap continues to exist. This evaluation highlights a range of issues to be considered in future planning and implementation of the fund in order to drive further sustainable improvements in attainment.

What activities took place?

Most interventions focused on numeracy, literacy and health & wellbeing. During the first two years, Literacy and Health & Wellbeing interventions were prioritised.

Strong foundations around leadership, resources and training had been built particularly in primary schools, where the fund has been introduced for longer.

There were wide ranging and varied approaches to choosing interventions or devising targeting strategies. Approaches varied by school and local authority.

What was working well?

The fund made a positive impact on:

Improved collaboration. Stakeholders felt there had been an increase in the level of collaboration, particularly within-schools and with external partners.

Increased data usage and understanding. This appeared well embedded within fund activities. Data played a significant role in selecting, monitoring and targeting interventions.

Greater professional development opportunities. The fund provided access to training and encouraged reflection on skills, increased professional dialogue and provided opportunities to mentor.

The **role of local authorities and Attainment Advisors** in supporting schools were found to be pivotal to the

success of the fund – specifically around planning and developing strategies for implementation, and targeting and using data to drive improvements.

What challenges were encountered?

In some areas, levels of **bureaucracy** and **tight timescales** for planning and spending the funding were seen as areas for further improvement.

Stakeholders reported on challenges relating to **recruitment of staff**, which often led to frustration and underspend.

There was scope for greater **collaboration** particularly at a local authority level, within and across authorities.

Poverty as a wider issue. Stakeholders stressed that it was important to recognise that a number of factors, other than poverty, were likely to affect attainment. Stakeholders emphasised that education could not bring about sustainable change on its own, and that wider partnership across a range of other services was essential.

What is the impact on long term outcomes?

Confidence in sustainability of improvements increased over time. This was associated with a belief that the fund had created significant change in practice and culture.

At local authority level, stakeholders reported positive evidence from small scale interventions, particularly for literacy and health & wellbeing outcomes.

The poverty related attainment gap continues to exist. There was some evidence that the gap was smaller in Challenge Authorities than non-challenge authorities and that pupils from areas of greater deprivation performed better in

Challenge Authorities than in other areas of Scotland.

Evaluation approach

The evaluation is designed to provide learning and inform future decisions regarding the implementation of the fund.

The interim report focuses primarily on the perceived impact of the fund by key stakeholders. It also describes levels of attainment and health & wellbeing, and the poverty related attainment gap at local authority and national level.

A mixed method approach was used combining multiple sources of data:

- Quantitative data (attainment measures)
- Internal administrative data
- Challenge Authority and school reports and plans
- Surveys
- External qualitative research

Analysis and reporting of the data was underpinned by a set of evaluation questions covering a variety of themes, including amongst others governance, targeting, sustainability, use of data and collaboration.

Next Steps

Evidence on levels of attainment and health & wellbeing across Scotland will continue to be monitored in order to further develop understanding of the association between deprivation and educational outcomes.

A second evaluation report will be conducted at the end of Year 4, to consider how the overall Attainment Scotland Fund has evolved over time. It will also include evidence regarding Pupil Equity Funding.

How to access background or source data

The full report containing all background detail and analysis can be found online at: www.gov.scot/scotlandfund-interimreport-years-1-2

The data collected for this social research publication:

may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialresearch@gov.scot for further information.



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