



Item: 8

Education, Communities and Housing Committee: 1 April 2026.

Orkney Schools Attainment.

Report by Director of Education, Communities and Housing.

1. Overview

- 1.1. This report presents the Orkney Schools Attainment Report for academic session 2024/25 for members' information.
- 1.2. The National Improvement Framework (NIF) for Scottish Education's vision is to raise attainment and improve outcomes for all children and young people. These priorities are reflected in the Orkney Education Service Plan and Raising Attainment Strategy.
- 1.3. The Orkney Schools Attainment Report 2024/25, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, presents attainment for the academic year 2024/25, following national publication of the Broad General Education results, the final secondary qualifications results and school leaver data in December 2025 and February 2026.
- 1.4. The following data is presented:
 - i. Early Learning.
 - ii. Curriculum for Excellence Levels achieved by pupils in P1, P4, P7 and S3.
 - iii. Attainment of Senior Phase pupils and School Leavers.
 - iv. Young people's participation in education, employment or training.
 - v. Young people's wider achievements through the Community Learning and Development Service.
 - vi. Destinations of school leavers.
- 1.5. The key measures presented reflect those monitored by the Scottish Government in the Scottish Attainment Challenge, including core measures on which all local authorities report, and measures chosen by the service to reflect local priorities.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:

- i. Note the Orkney Schools Attainment Report for academic session 2024/25, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, which provides assurance on the levels of success and achievement of children and young people in Orkney.

For Further Information please contact:

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Implications of Report

1. **Financial** - Not applicable.
2. **Legal** - The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000, as amended by Part 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, places statutory duties on education authorities to plan improvement activity in line with the NIF.
3. **Corporate Governance** - Not applicable.
4. **Human Resources** - Not applicable.
5. **Equalities** - Not applicable.
6. **Island Communities Impact** - Not applicable.
7. **Links to Council Plan** - The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
 - Growing our economy.
 - Strengthening our Communities.
 - Developing our Infrastructure.
 - Transforming our Council.
8. **Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan** - The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
 - Cost of Living.
 - Sustainable Development.
 - Local Equality.
 - Improving Population Health.
9. **Environmental and Climate Risk** - None
10. **Risk** - Not applicable.
11. **Procurement** - Not applicable.
12. **Health and Safety** - Not applicable.
13. **Property and Assets** - Not applicable.
14. **Information Technology** - Not applicable.
15. **Cost of Living** - Not applicable.

List of Background Papers

[National Improvement Framework: Orkney Islands Council Report and Plan 2025/28](#)

Draft Raising Attainment Strategy 2026-2029

Appendix

Appendix 1: Orkney Schools Attainment Report 2024/25.

Orkney Schools Attainment Report Session 2024-25

This report summarises the key measures of attainment and achievement in Orkney schools in session 2024-25:

- **Section 1** Early Learning.
- **Section 2** Curriculum for Excellence levels achieved by pupils in their Broad General Education in Orkney schools at stages P1, P4, P7 and S3.
- **Section 3** Senior Phase and School Leavers' attainment and participation of 16-19 year olds in Education, Employment and Training.
- **Section 4** Wider Achievements of young people reported by the Community Learning and Development Service.
- **Section 5** School Leaver Destinations of young people, in Orkney, in session 2023 to 2024.

1. Early Learning

- 1.1. As part of their practice, nursery practitioners interact with children and observe their play to ensure that they are able to extend children's learning and follow children's interests. Practitioners continuously gather information about the children in their care and build up a learning journey for each child, consisting of observations, photographs and children's contributions. Each practitioner is particularly responsible for a group of children and several times each year, nursery managers meet with practitioners to talk about the learning of the children in the practitioner's key group. They note whether children are meeting developmental milestones typical for children of their age however, they are most interested in whether children are making good progress in their play and learning.
- 1.2. Some children will not be meeting typical developmental milestones but will be making good progress along their own developmental pathway. Practitioners use a Staged Intervention Approach to help them consider if they are meeting children's learning needs and how to plan for children's learning. This means that they can build on children's prior learning and provide additional support in specific areas as needed. Practitioners might also decide that they need to provide more challenging experiences.
- 1.3. The tables below summarise information for children moving on to Primary 1.

Is the child making good progress? Child's needs are well met through universal provision, and they are making very good progress.					
	2020-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25
Listening and talking	87%	91%	92%	94%	93.5%
Early reading		90%	92%	96%	93%
Early writing		91%	91%	95%	92.4%
Mathematical development	90%	93%	88%	92%	93%
Wellbeing	80%	86%	87%	94%	88%

Is the child meeting the expected developmental milestones for their age?					
	2020-21	2021-22	22-23	23-24	24-25
Listening and talking	81%	84%	85%	78%	81%
Early reading		86%	89%	87%	90%
Early writing		87%	83%	84%	85%
Mathematical development	88%	87%	85%	87%	87%
Wellbeing	74%	79%	76%	83%	76%

1.4.

The children who moved into Primary 1 in August 2025 were born at the height of Covid, and many children spent their first year of life in lockdown. We know that social interactions are important for very young children’s social and language development, and that the first three years of a child life are sensitive periods for many aspects of child development.

The Early Years Service have taken a focus on supporting practitioner skill development in relation to language development for the last three years. It is heartening that many children are meeting typical developmental milestones across key aspects of their language development and are making good progress.

The data shows a dip in the number of children reaching well-being developmental milestones, following an improving picture since 2020. A quarter of children are not reaching milestones in this area, although a higher number are making good progress towards them. National research would indicate that this vulnerability is not unusual for children born during the early days of COVID.

2. Curriculum for Excellence Levels

- 2.1.** Scottish Government produces an annual report on the Achievement of Curriculum of Excellence Levels (ACEL). This data is published annually in December reporting on the previous school session. The data supports one of the drivers for improvement within the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education by providing a measure of progress in learning linked to the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).
- 2.2.** Data gathered in the ACEL survey relates to achievement of a level in Broad General Education (BGE), at Primary 1 (P1), Primary 4 (P4), Primary 7 (P7) and Secondary 3 (S3). The data is based on teacher professional judgements of the CfE Levels achieved by each pupil in areas of literacy and numeracy.
- 2.3.** The areas of Literacy reported on are Reading, Writing and Listening & Talking, and the combined number of pupils who achieve three out of three meaning achievement of a level in all 3 of the areas in literacy. (Reading, writing, listening and talking). Numeracy is reported as one area.
- 2.4.** Teacher judgements underpin the data reported in ACEL. Teachers make these judgements based on the evidence collected during on-going assessment (formative assessment) of children and young people's learning. Formative assessment involves the daily evaluation of children and young people's learning by the teacher and will include discussion with children and young people about their learning. Teachers create high quality assessment opportunities at regular intervals to help them understand pupils' ability to apply their skills in different contexts. Diagnostic assessments such as the National Standardised Assessments for Scotland (NSA) and Scottish Online Formative Assessment (SOFA) provide further information.
- 2.5.** Moderation procedures support staff to have a shared understanding of progress within and completion of a level.
- 2.6.** Most children and young people are expected to achieve the CfE levels within these timescales:
 - Early level by the end of P1.
 - First level by the end of P4.
 - Second level by the end of P7.
 - Third / Fourth level by the end of S3.

As each child's learning journey is unique, there will be children and young people who achieve the levels earlier or later than would be expected.

- 2.7.** The Broad General Education (BGE) tracking toolkit used by all primary schools provides a comprehensive data tracking and analysis tool. The toolkit helps to identify overall data trends, measures progress against improvement targets, and tracks the attainment of all children along with specific cohorts i.e., those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and Care Experienced Children and Young People. (CECYP).

- 2.8.** All S3 pupils are tracked three times a year and progress recorded either in SEEMIS Progress and Achievement or by individual school tracking processes. A new Junior High School BGE toolkit has been evolved over this year for use in 2025/2026.
- 2.9.** Data in the ACEL survey is reported in terms of the percentage of the year group stage who are recorded as having achieved the “expected” Level by that stage. For S3, the data is reported as the percentage achieving S3 achieving Level 3 and S3 achieving Level 4.
- 2.10.** The following table shows the overall summary of the ACEL data published in Dec 2025 of the 2024/2025 data. Figures show percentages of pupils achieving appropriate level by stage.

	P1	P4	P7	P1/4/7 Comb	S3/3	S3/4
Reading	87	85	89	87	90	62
Writing	85	80	84	83	90	58
Listening & Talking	92	92	92	92	89	58
Literacy combined	83	76	84	81	88	51
Numeracy	89	85	87	87	90	64

2.11. Summary over time

The following tables show the levels achieved by pupils in P1, P4, P7 and S3 compared against the national average.

No data was collected in 2019/2020 in all year groups. In 2020/2021 only primary schools' data was collected as schools recovered from the pandemic.

P1 Early Level		Reading	Writing	Listening and talking	Literacy Combined	Numeracy
2017/2018	Orkney	76%	68%	79%	67%	82%
	National	81%	78%	87%	75%	85%
2018/2019	Orkney	77%	69%	80%	66%	78%
	National	82%	79%	87%	76%	85%
2019/2020	No data collected - pandemic					
2020/2021	Orkney	78%	74%	85%	72%	84%
	National	77%	74%	84%	71%	81%
2021/2022	Orkney	81%	80%	87%	78%	82%
	National	79%	77%	86%	74%	84%
2022/2023	Orkney	88%	85%	92%	84%	88%
	National	81%	78%	87%	76%	85%
2023/2024	Orkney	88%	86%	95%	85%	89%
	National	81%	79%	87%	77%	85%
2024/2025	Orkney	87%	85%	92%	83%	89%
	National	81%	79%	87%	76%	85%

P4 First Level		Reading	Writing	Listening and talking	Literacy Combined	Numeracy
2017/2018	Orkney	76%	70%	81%	64%	77%
	National	77%	72%	85%	69%	76%
2018/2019	Orkney	66%	61%	72%	56%	68%
	National	78%	73%	85%	70%	77%
2019/2020	No data collected – pandemic					
2020/2021	Orkney	71%	63%	81%	62%	70%
	National	73%	67%	82%	64%	72%
2021/2022	Orkney	75%	68%	84%	67%	74%
	National	76%	70%	85%	67%	75%
2022/2023	Orkney	82%	73%	89%	71%	84%
	National	78%	72%	87%	70%	77%
2023/2024	Orkney	84%	79%	91%	79%	83%
	National	79%	74%	87%	71%	78%
2024/2025	Orkney	85%	80%	92%	76%	85%
	National	79%	74%	87%	72%	78%

P7 Second Level		Reading	Writing	Listening and talking	Literacy Combined	Numeracy
2017/2018	Orkney	75%	69%	75%	65%	72%
	National	79%	73%	84%	70%	75%
2018/2019	Orkney	75%	67%	80%	61%	72%
	National	80%	74%	86%	71%	76%
2019/2020	No data collected – pandemic					
2020/2021	Orkney	82%	74%	87%	71%	72%
	National	76%	69%	82%	66%	72%
2021/2022	Orkney	85%	76%	86%	72%	81%
	National	79%	73%	86%	71%	76%
2022/2023	Orkney	90%	80%	92%	78%	78%
	National	81%	75%	87%	73%	84%
2023/2024	Orkney	86%	80%	92%	78%	84%
	National	81%	76%	88%	74%	78%
2024/2025	Orkney	89%	84%	92%	84%	87%
	National	82%	77%	88%	75%	79%

P1, P4 and P7 combined		Reading	Writing	Listening and talking	Literacy Combined	Numeracy
2017/2018	Orkney	76%	69%	78%	65%	77%
	National	79%	74%	85%	71%	78%
2018/2019	Orkney	73%	66%	78%	61%	72%
	National	80%	75%	86%	72%	79%
2019/2020	No data collected - pandemic					
2020/2021	Orkney	77%	70%	84%	68%	75%
	National	75%	70%	83%	67%	75%
2021/2022	Orkney	80%	74%	86%	79%	94%
	National	78%	73%	85%	78%	89%
2022/2023	Orkney	83%	79%	91%	78%	85%
	National	80%	75%	87%	73%	80%
2022/2023	Orkney	86%	81%	93%	80%	85%
	National	80%	76%	87%	74%	80%
2024/2025	Orkney	87%	83%	92%	81%	87%
	National	81%	77%	88%	75%	80%

Commentary on primary 1, 4 and 7 attainment

- Exceeded national data in reading in P1, P4, P7 and P1/4/7 by 6-7pp.
- Exceeded national data in writing in P1, P4, P7 and P1/4/7 by 6-7pp.
- Exceeded national data in listening and talking in P1, P4, P7 and P1/4/7 by 4-5pp.
- Exceeded national data in literacy in P1, P4, P7 and P1/4/7 by 4-9pp.
- Exceeded national data in numeracy in P1, P4, P7 and P1/4/7 by 4-8pp.

S3 Third Level		Reading	Writing	Listening and talking	Literacy Combined	Numeracy
2017/2018	Orkney	92%	89%	94%	88%	93%
	National	90%	89%	91%	87%	89%
2018/2019	Orkney	88%	83%	88%	82%	94%
	National	91%	90%	91%	88%	90%
2019/2020	No data collected - pandemic					
2020/2021						
2021/2022	Orkney	89%	90%	86%	85%	94%
	National	88%	87%	89%	86%	89%
2022/2023	Orkney	88%	86%	88%	84%	94%
	National	90%	89%	91%	88%	90%
2023/2024	Orkney	88%	80%	88%	79%	90%
	National	90%	90%	91%	88%	90%
2024/2025	Orkney	90%	90%	89%	88%	92%
	National	91%	91%	92%	90%	91%

S3 Fourth Level		Reading	Writing	Listening and talking	Literacy Combined	Numeracy
2017/2018	Orkney	48%	42%	52%	37%	77%
	National	53%	51%	55%	46%	56%
2018/2019	Orkney	19%	19%	19%	11%	74%
	National	55%	52%	57%	48%	59%
2019/2020	No data collected – pandemic					
2020/2021						
2021/2022	Orkney	73%	69%	73%	64%	71%
	National	54%	52%	55%	48%	59%
2022/2023	Orkney	61%	60%	60%	55%	66%
	National	62%	60%	63%	56%	63%
2023/2024	Orkney	57%	47%	39%	27%	56%
	National	63%	61%	64%	58%	65%
2024/2025	Orkney	62%	58%	58%	51%	64%
	National	68%	66%	69%	63%	68%

Commentary on S3 third and fourth level attainment

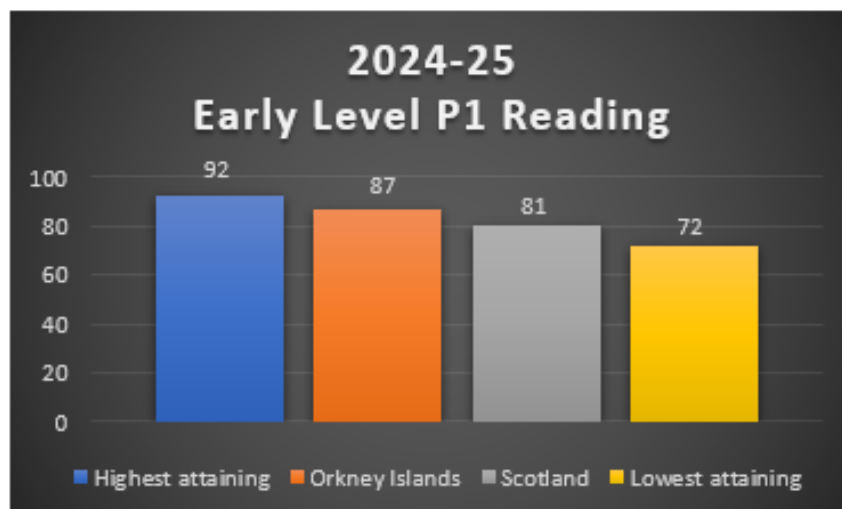
- Below national data in reading in S3/3 and S3/4 by 1-6pp.
- Below national data in writing in S3/3 and in S3/4, by 1-8pp.
- Below national data in listening and talking in S3/3 and in S3/4 by 2-12pp.
- Below national data in literacy in S3/3 by 9pp and S3/4 by 31pp.
- Below national data in numeracy in S3/3 and S3/4 by 1-4pp.

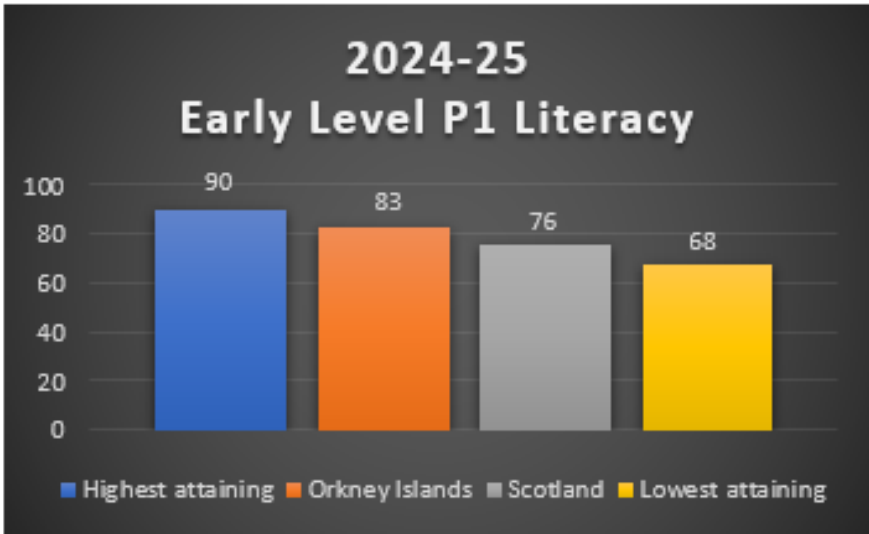
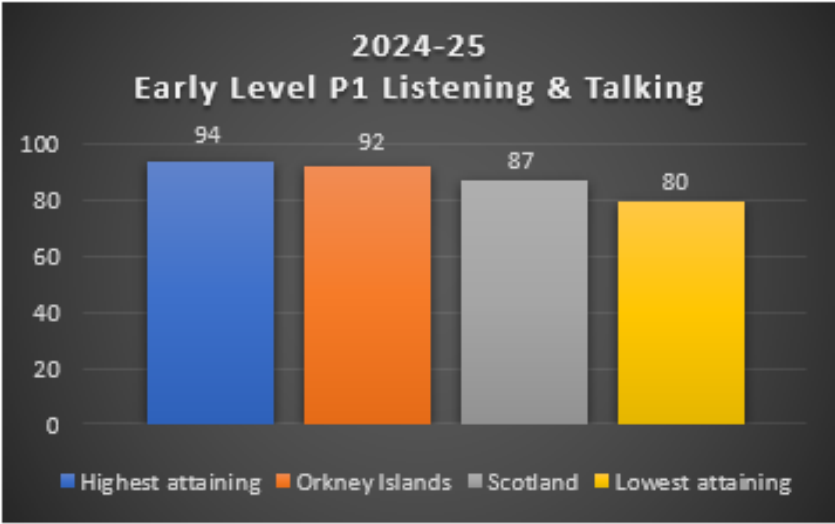
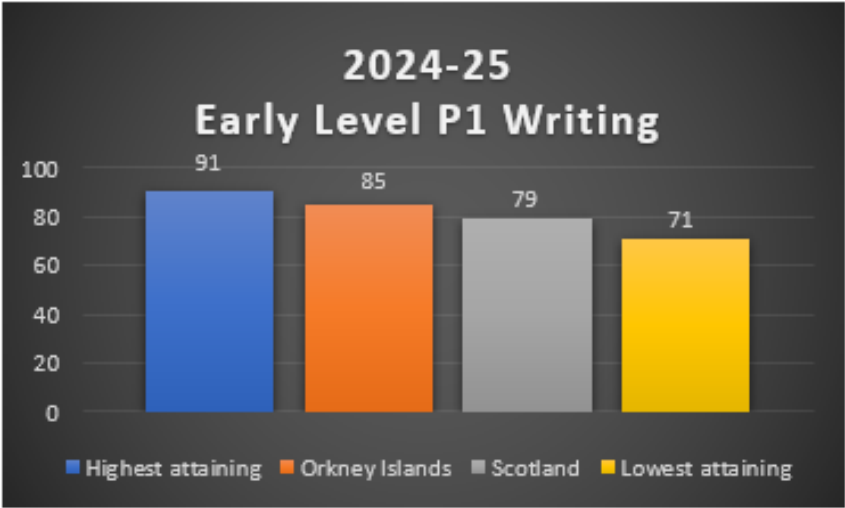
S3 BGE attainment in 2024/25 has improved from the previous year, particularly in fourth level. However, we are still sitting below the national average and therefore, this still remains a priority area for focus.

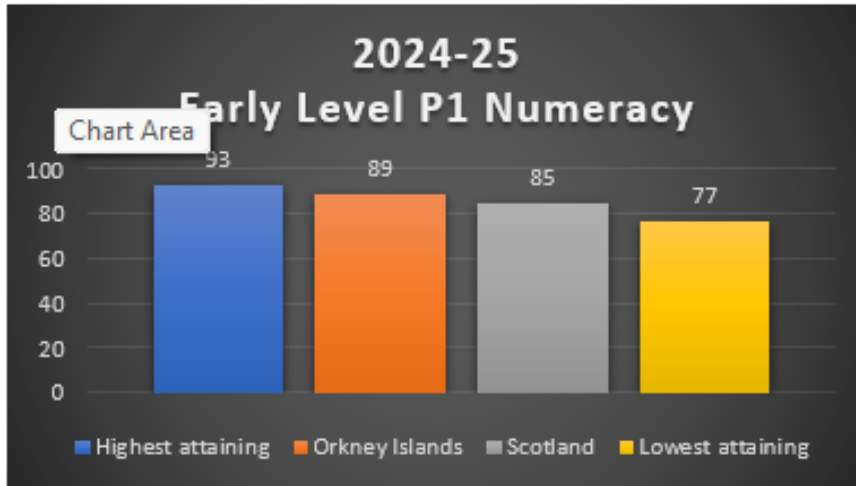
2.1. Comparative data ACEL data 2024

The following graphs show Orkney (orange) compared to the highest attaining (blue) and lowest attaining (yellow) authorities in Scotland. You are also able to see the Scottish national average (grey). The literacy percentage is where the children and young people achieve all three of the literacy organisers. All data is expressed as percentages.

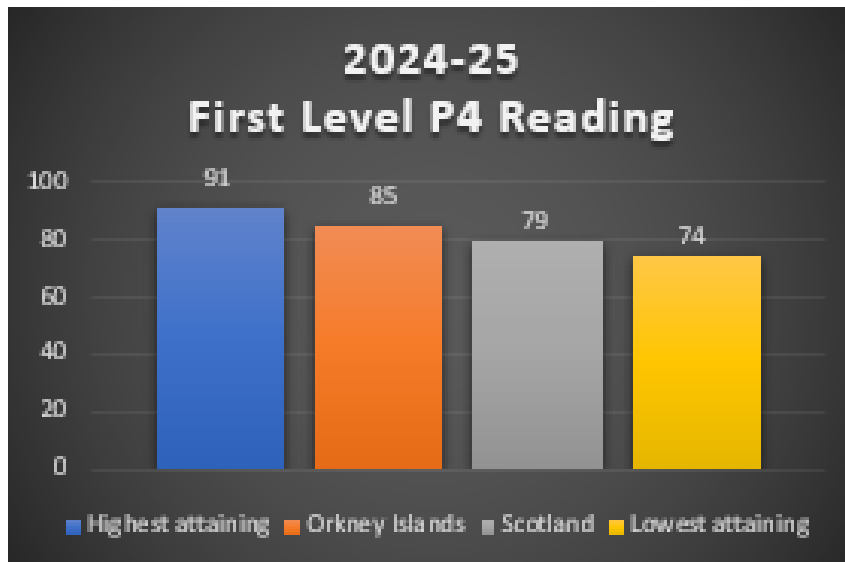
P1 - Early Level

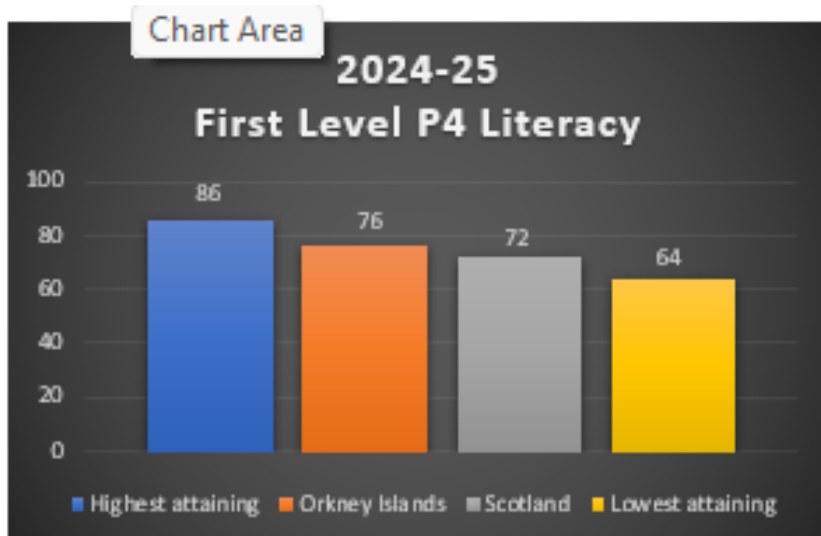
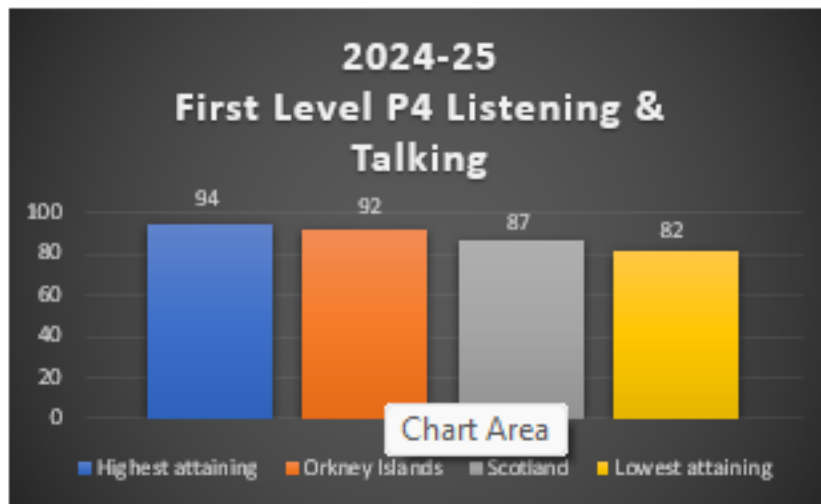
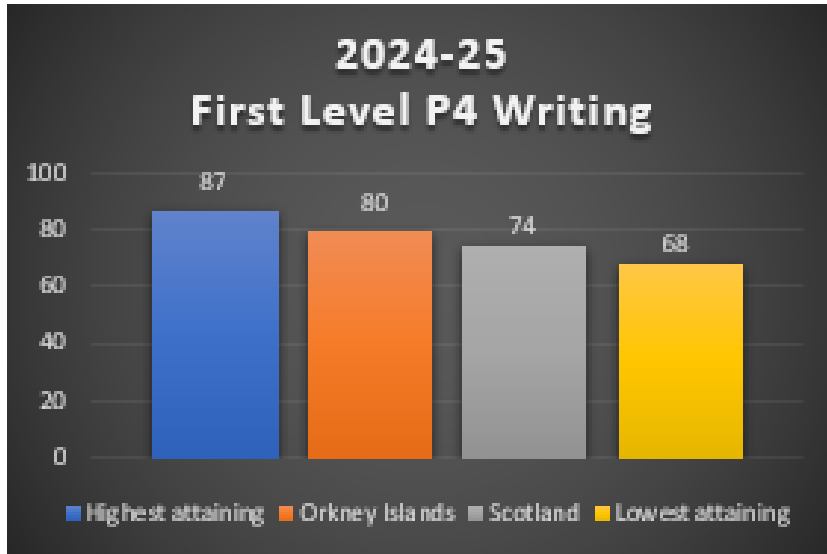


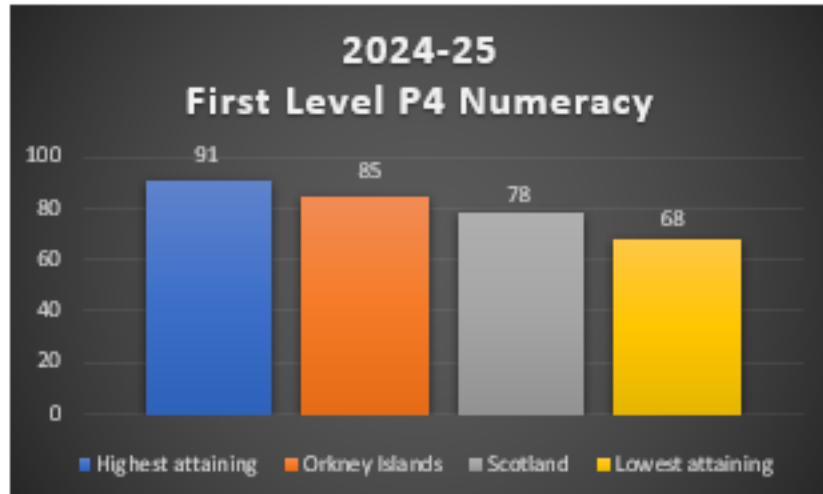




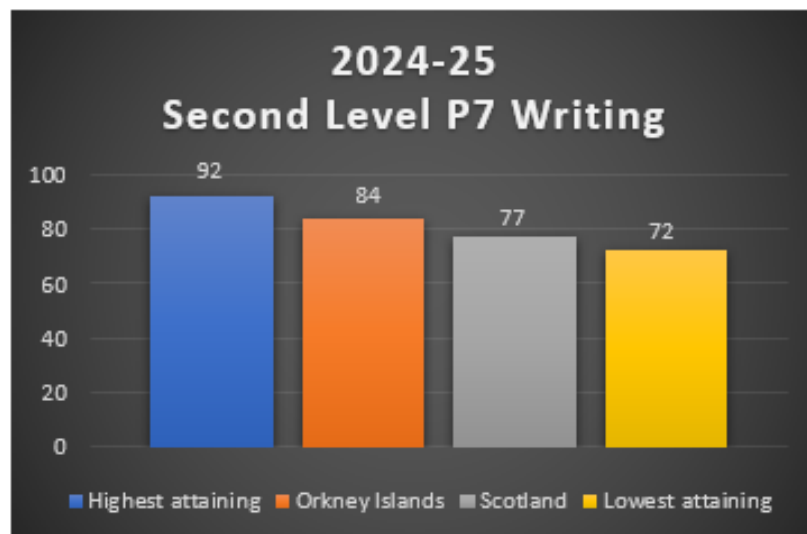
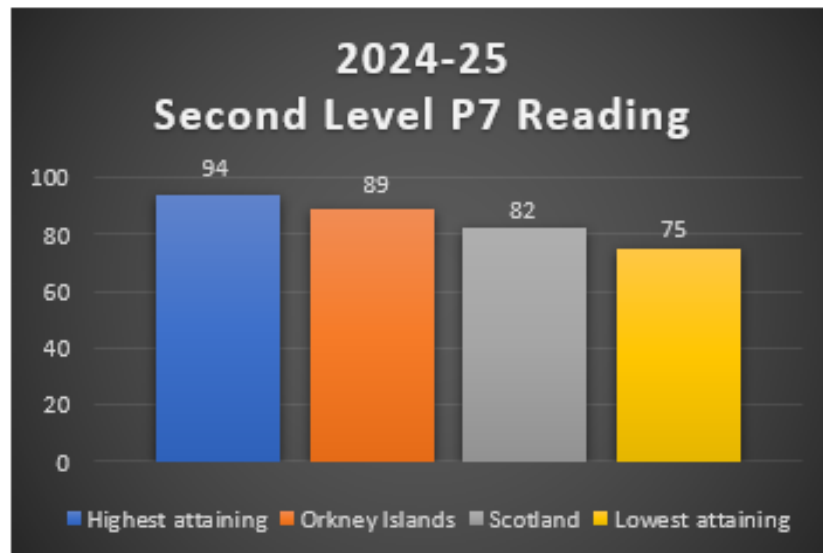
P4 - First Level

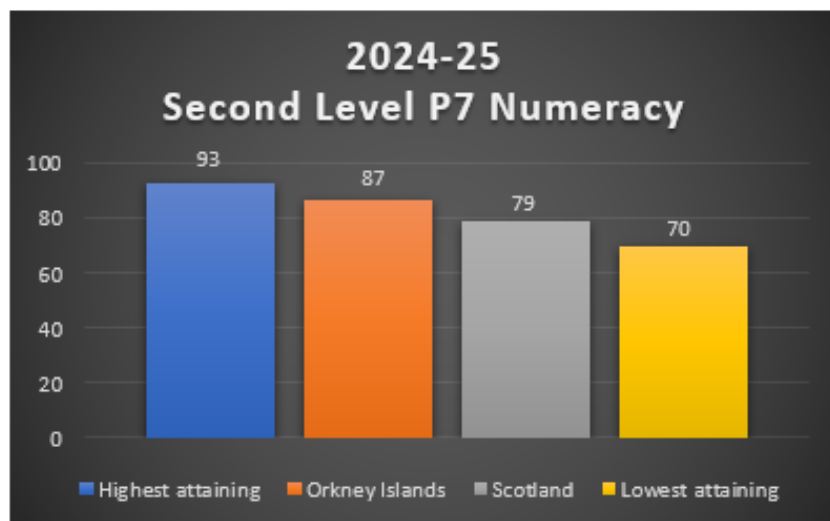
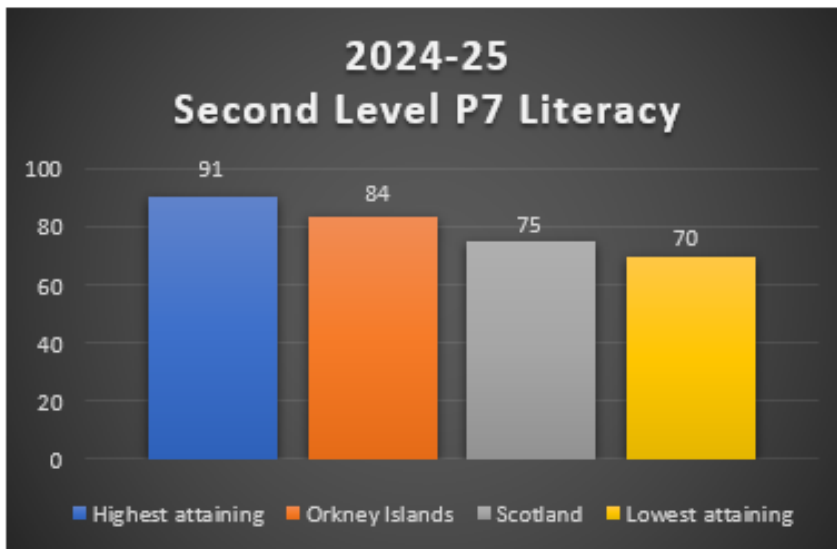
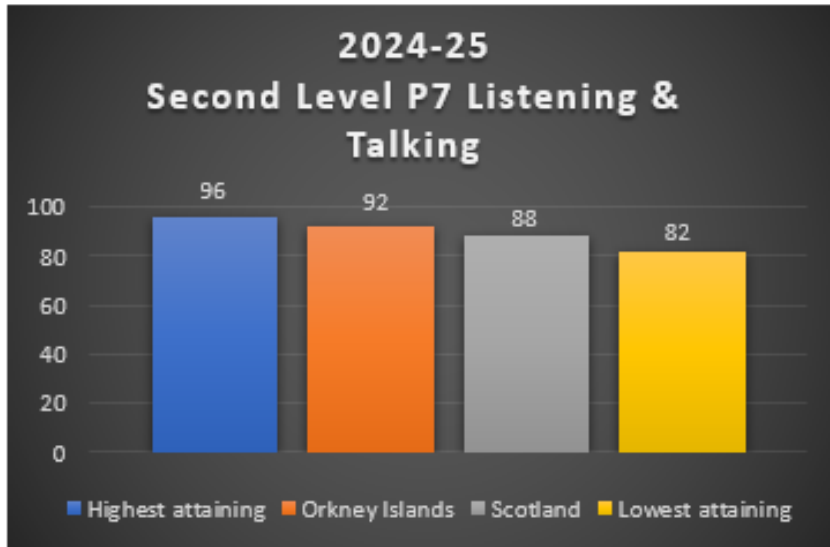




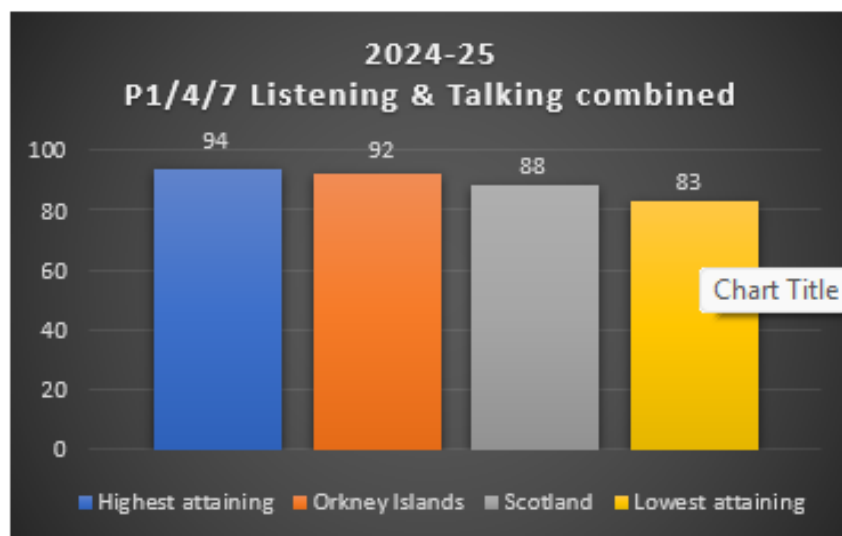
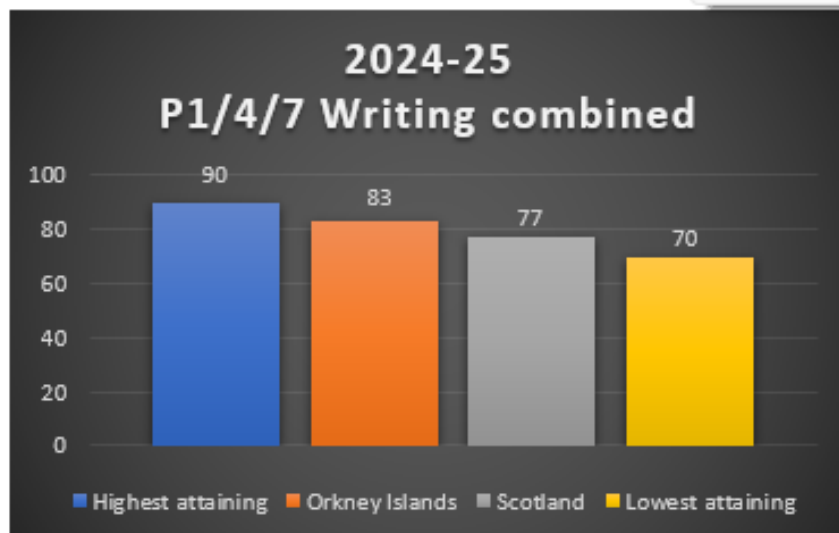
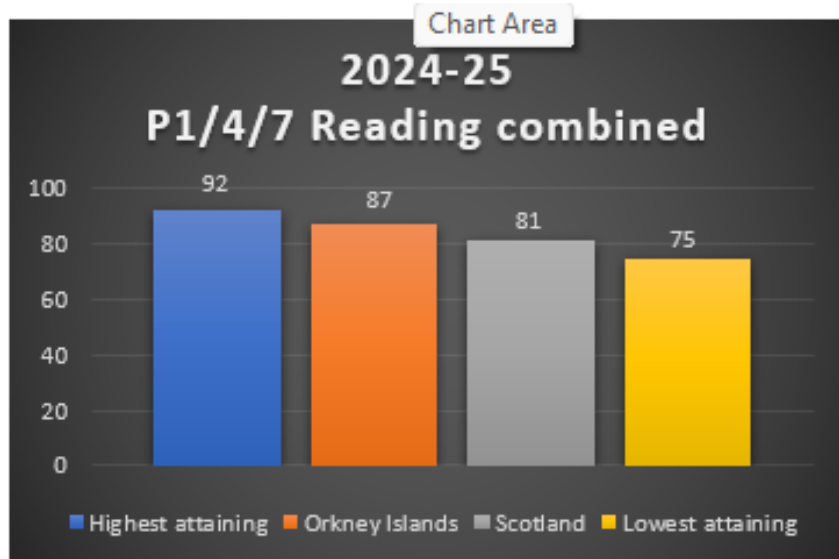


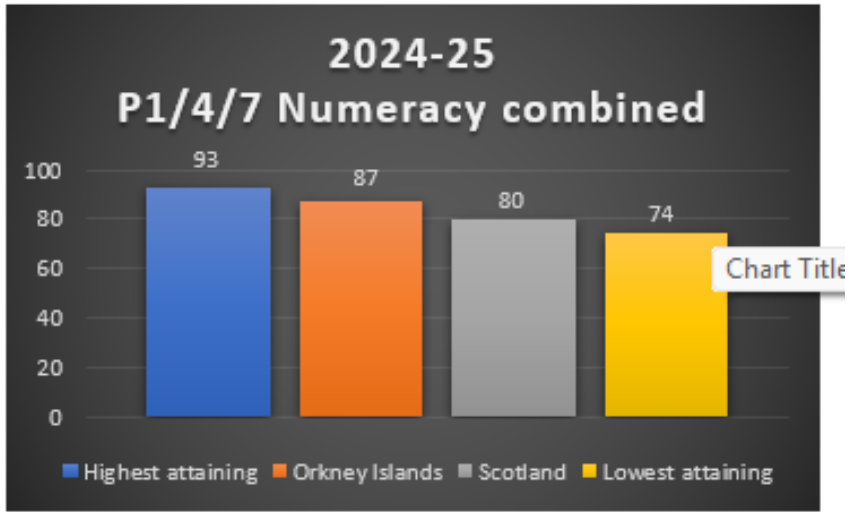
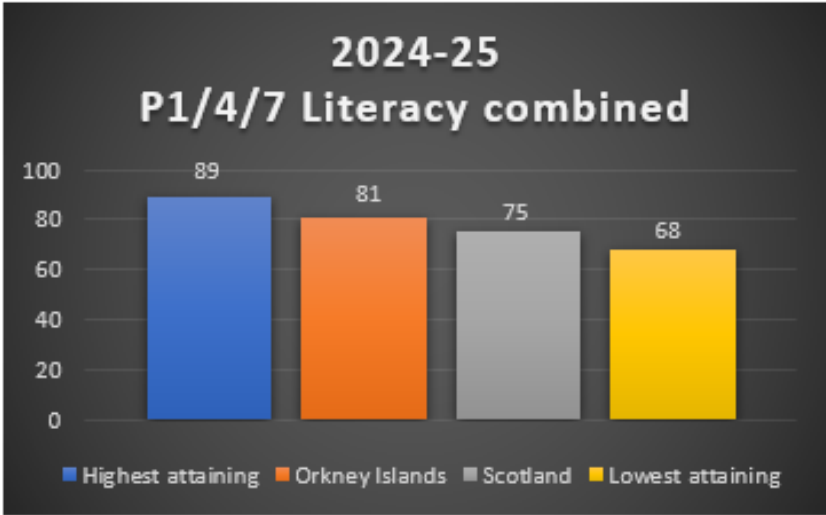
P7 - Second Level



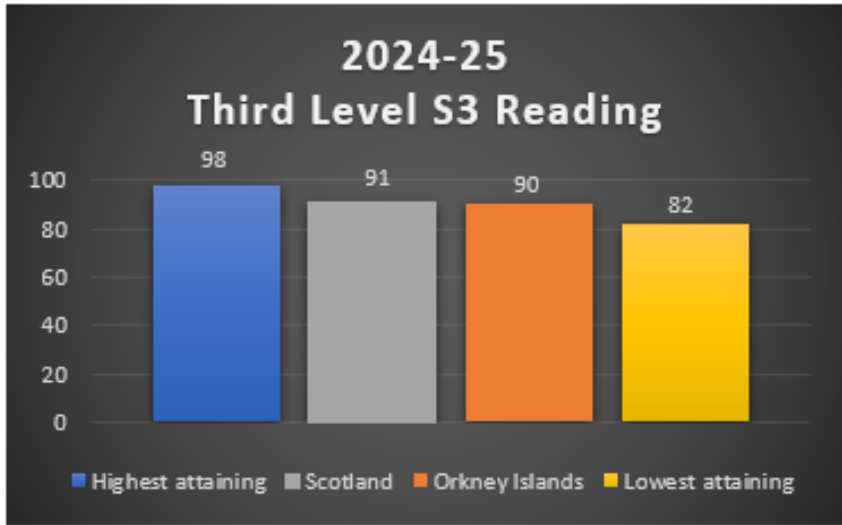


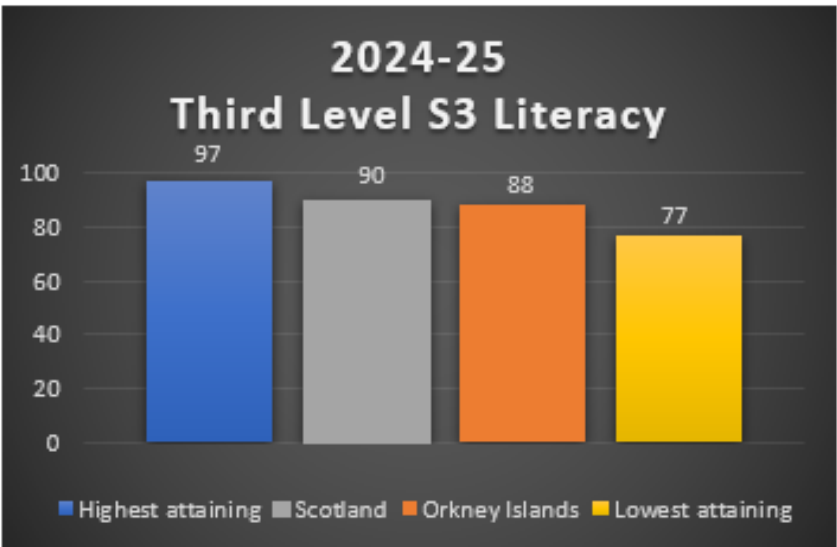
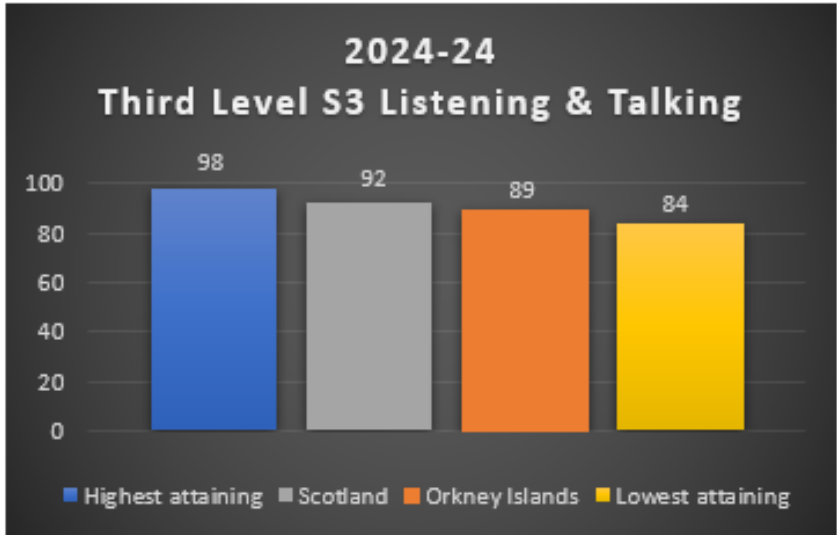
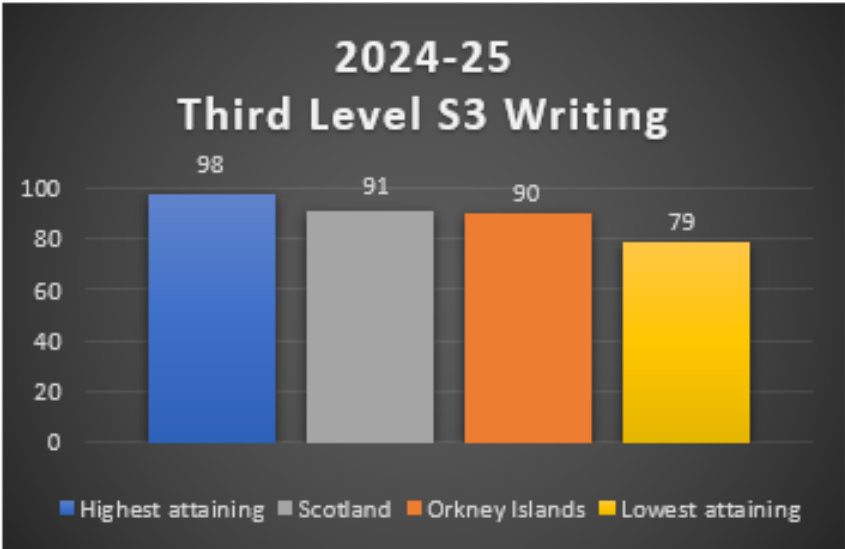
P1/4/7 Literacy combined

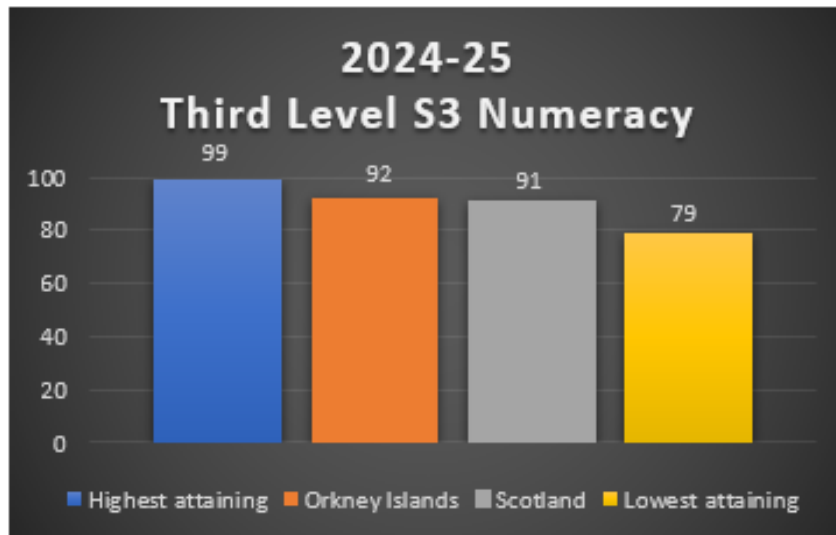




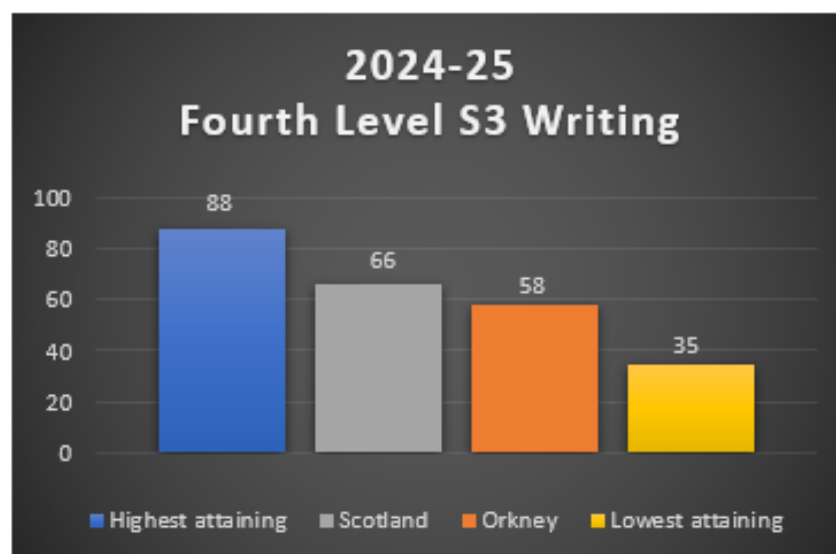
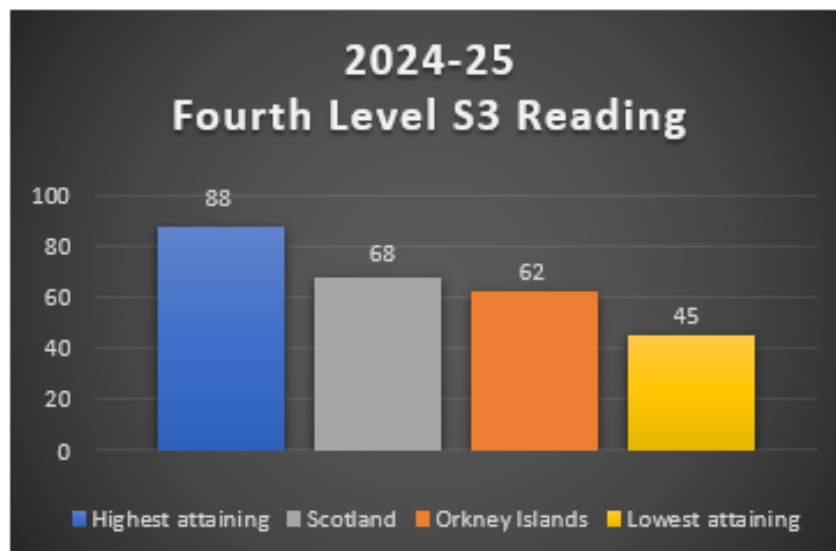
S3 - Third Level

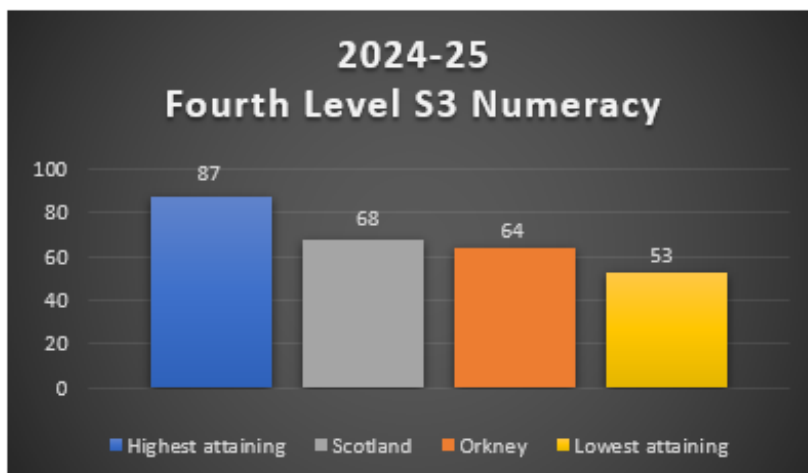
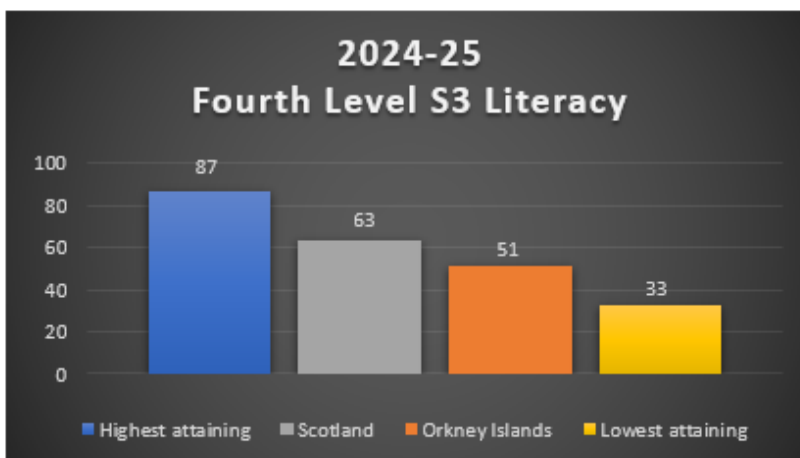
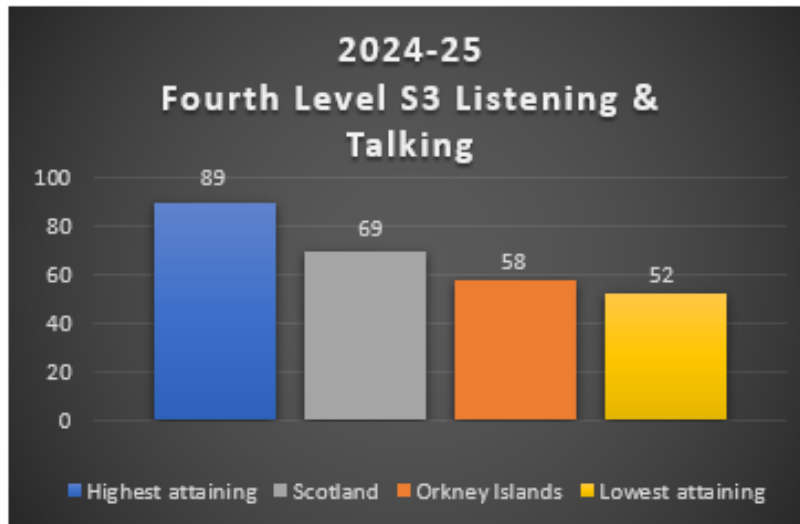






S3 - Fourth Level





Next steps

- Continue to make tracking and monitoring attainment within S1-S3 a priority.
- Continue to support primary schools in attainment through robust monitoring and tracking processes.
- A continued clear focus on the attainment of children eligible for free school meals and those who have experienced care.

3. Levels of Achievement in National Examinations

3.1 Senior Phase Tracking and monitoring process

Each year young people in secondary schools in Orkney are presented for National Courses, Awards and Units certificated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), as well as a smaller number presented for a range of qualifications and awards accredited by bodies other than SQA.

3.2 The Education Service monitors the following measures for Senior Phase pupils' attainment:

- Percentage of entered pupils passing National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher.
- Percentage of pupils in S4 achieving 5 or more level 5 qualifications.
- Percentage of pupils in S4 achieving level 4 and level 5 Literacy and Numeracy.

These measures are calculated three times a year using data from school reports, giving figures for young people's current and predicted performance based on teacher judgements. Schools use this data to plan interventions to raise attainment.

At the end of the school session the same measures are calculated using the actual SQA attainment data. An initial version of this data is calculated in early August when young people receive their results and finalised in late September, when it is published in Education Scotland's Insight data tool.

Whilst SQA attainment for pupils in Junior High Schools is not published in this report, due to the confidentiality risk of small cohort sizes, their data is tracked and interventions to raise attainment are agreed using the same process as the secondary schools.

3.3 In addition to the measures in 3.2 above, the following measures are reported annually.

- Percentage of young people aged 16-19 who are in education, employment or training (known as the Annual Participation Measure).
- Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more level 5 qualification.
- Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more level 6 qualification.
- Percentage of school leavers attaining 5 or more level 5 qualifications.
- Percentage of school leavers achieving 5 or more level 6 qualifications.
- Percentage of school leavers achieving level 4 and level 5 Literacy and Numeracy.

The Annual Participation Measure is published in August for the preceding calendar year, whilst data on school leavers' attainment is published in February of the year after examinations were taken.

3.4 Some of the annual measures are reported to Education Scotland as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. “Stretch Aims” have been set for these measures for Orkney attainment by 2025/26 as follows:

Measure	2025/26 Stretch Aim
Annual Participation measure	97.0%
Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more level 5 qualification	95.0%
Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more level 6 qualification	68.0%

[Scottish Attainment Challenge Stretch Aims](#) information is published nationally by the Scottish Government.

3.5 Impact of COVID-19 on SQA examinations

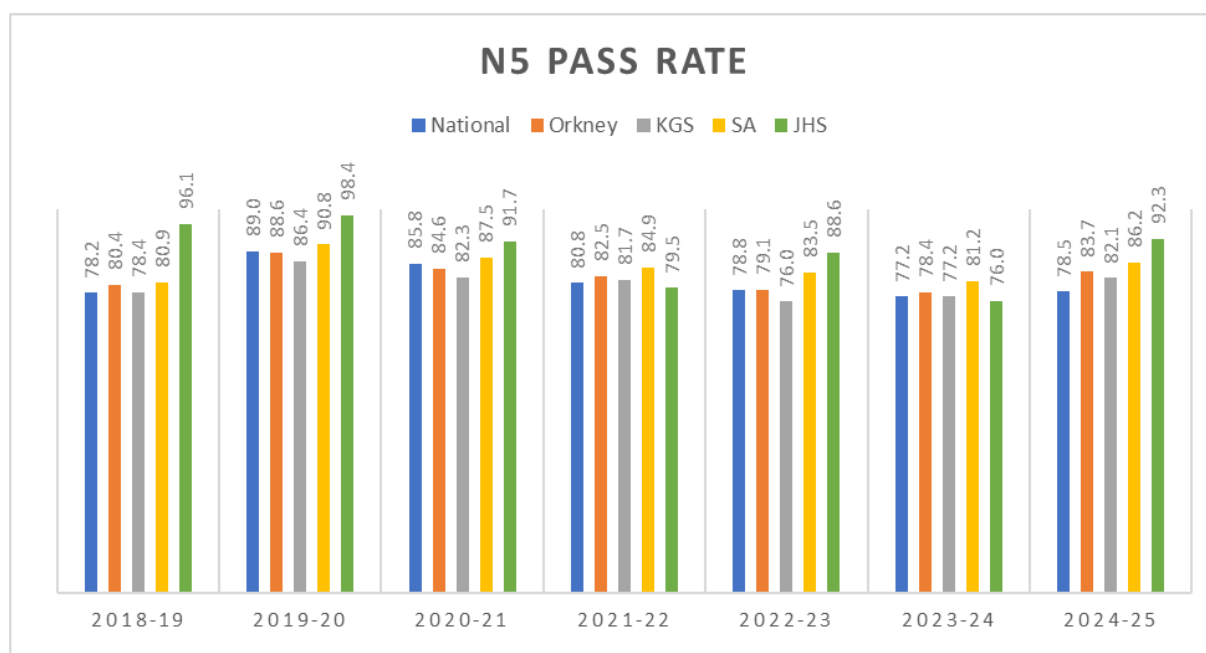
Historic data is presented in each of the measures below. It should however be noted that, due to the Covid pandemic, there were alterations to the examination process making it inappropriate to compare results across years:

- In session 2019-20 there was no SQA examination diet; grades were awarded based on teacher judgement, with courses modified to reduce content.
- In session 2020-21 there was no SQA examination diet; grades were awarded based on an alternative certification model involving teacher judgement of evidence and moderation across schools; courses continued with the same modifications to content as in 2019-20.
- Examinations were held in session 2021-22 and some modifications to content continued; there was an enhanced appeals procedure allowing teachers to present evidence to support an appeal where a pupil’s awarded grade was lower than expected.
- Increased pass rates in the Covid years when examinations were not held are evident, particularly in 2019-20 when cross-school moderation was not required.

3.6 Pass Rates (grades A-C)

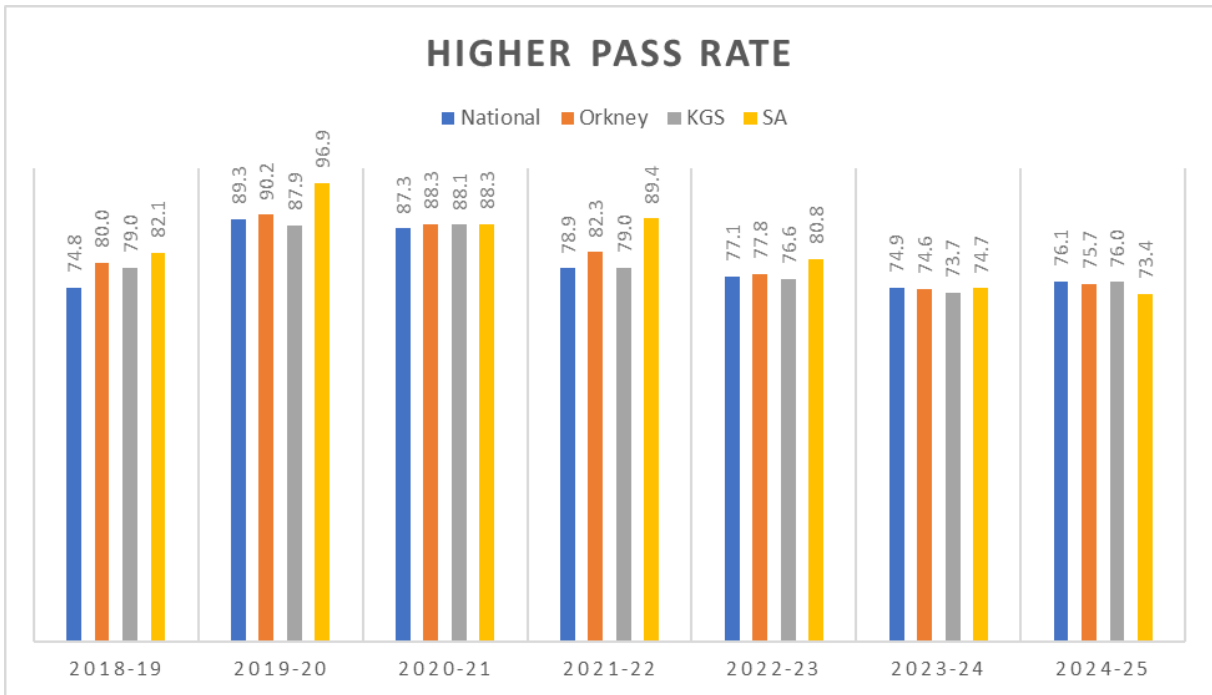
In the pass rate charts for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher presented below:

- The national % pass rate is shown in blue, with the Orkney rate shown in orange, Kirkwall Grammar School (KGS) in grey, Stromness Academy in yellow and, in some cases, an aggregate figure for Sanday, Stronsay and Westray Junior High Schools in green.
- Direct comparisons between KGS and Stromness Academy should not be drawn given the significant differences in their cohort sizes and demographic characteristics, as well as KGS's status as the resourced school for pupils with complex additional support needs.
- Caution should also be exercised when comparing a school's data across years, given that each year represents a different cohort of young people.
- Pass rates of Junior High Schools are provided as an aggregated figure, since providing separate rates for each school would risk identifying individual pupils in these small cohorts. Note that there were no National 5 presentations for Stronsay for 2024-25 as there are no S4 pupils in this cohort.
- These rates include the outcome of appeals and for that reason may differ slightly from any data seen in August 2025.



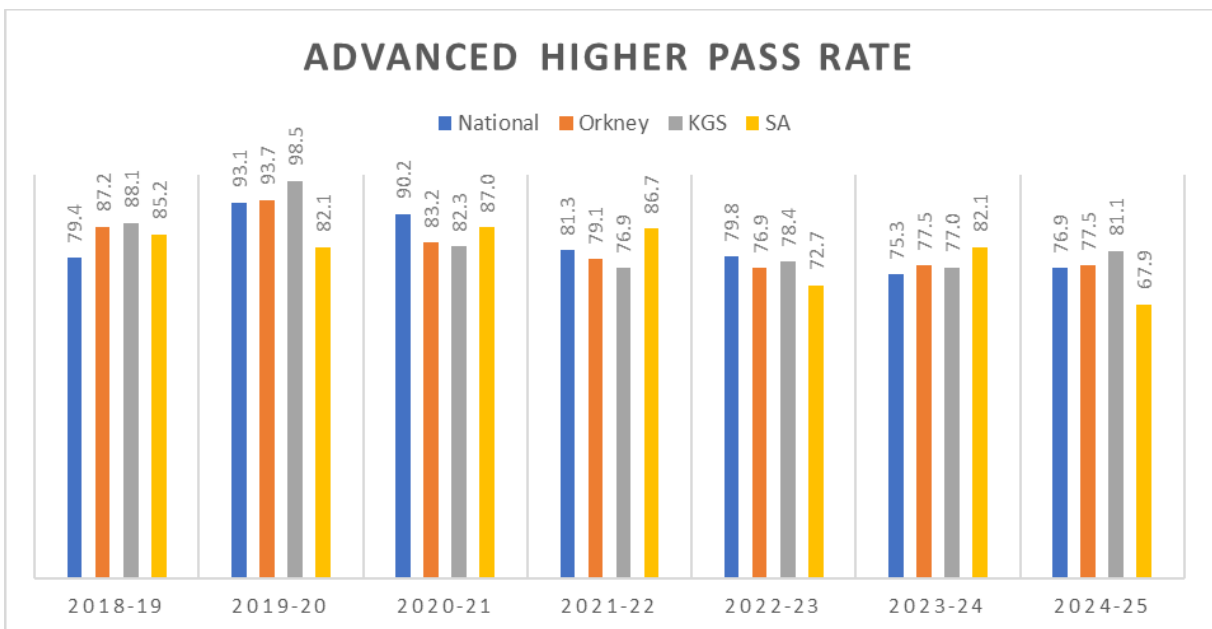
Analysis – National 5

National 5 pass rates in Orkney in 2024-25 are higher than the national rate by 5.2 percentage points, a greater margin than the previous 2 years. Both National and Orkney rates have risen compared to the previous year.



Analysis – Higher

The Orkney Higher pass rate continues to be just below the national average, as it was in the previous two years. Both National and Orkney pass rates show a small rise compared to the previous year.



Analysis – Advanced Higher

The Orkney Advanced Higher pass rate is unchanged compared to the previous year. It is 0.8 percentage points above the national rate.

Next Steps

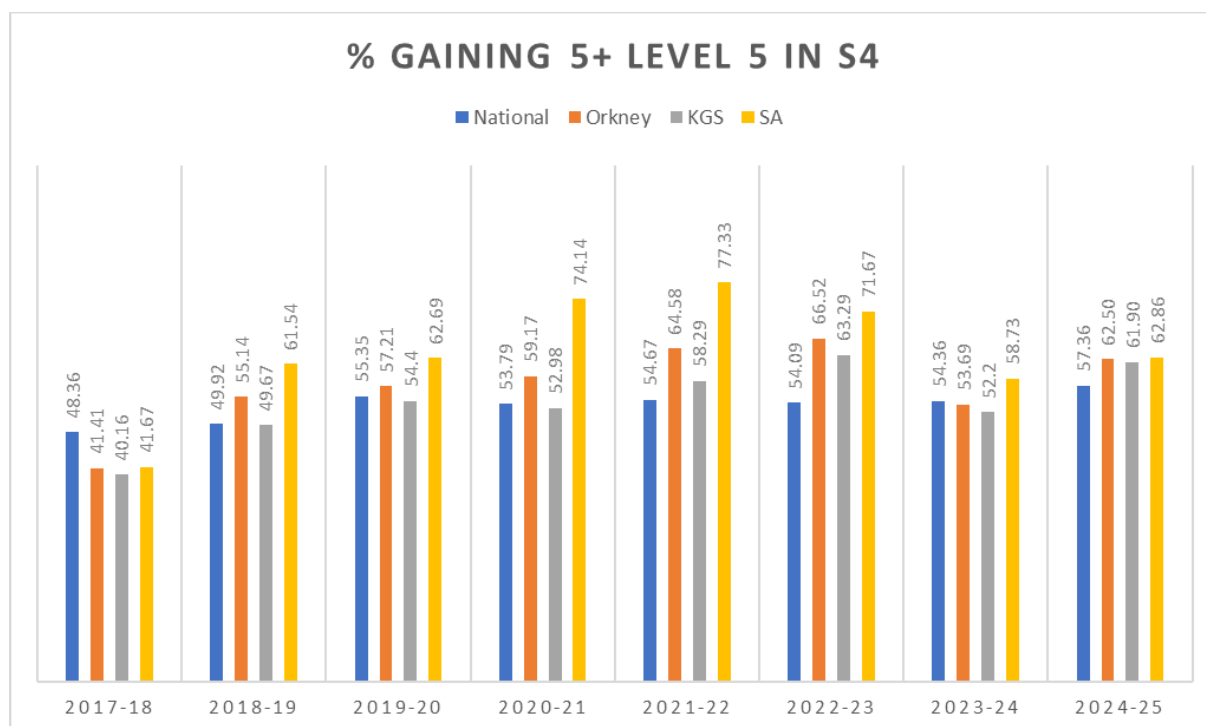
Pass rates, whether at N5, Higher or Advanced Higher, are a percentage of entries. A local authority which sought to increase its pass rate could easily achieve this by withdrawing from the examination all pupils where there is any doubt over their ability to pass. This is not the approach taken by Orkney schools; our aim is to find a balance between giving young people opportunities to achieve and concentrating their and their teachers' efforts on those areas most likely to yield success.

Schools are continuing to explore alternative qualifications to ensure that the curriculum offer meets young people's needs and interests. Not all of these are National Qualifications. Alternative qualifications are comparable with National Qualifications using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, and count towards a young person's overall attainment, including the 1+ and 5+ level 5/6 measures in this report. There are already many examples of these courses delivered for Senior Phase pupils by UHI Orkney.

Increased use of alternative qualifications may cause an increase in the pass rates for Nationals going forward, as young people have options to choose a qualification that suits their needs and/or interests.

3.7 5 or more level 5 passes in S4

This measure is important because it demonstrates that pupils are successful across a broad range of subjects and supports progression to further study. Achieving this breadth in S4 is important for pupils who intend to leave school at 16 and go into employment, as they may not have opportunities to continue to enhance their qualification portfolio. Achieving this solid foundation is also key for those aiming to progress to Higher Education as it facilitates pupils taking 5 Highers in S5 to support university applications.



Analysis

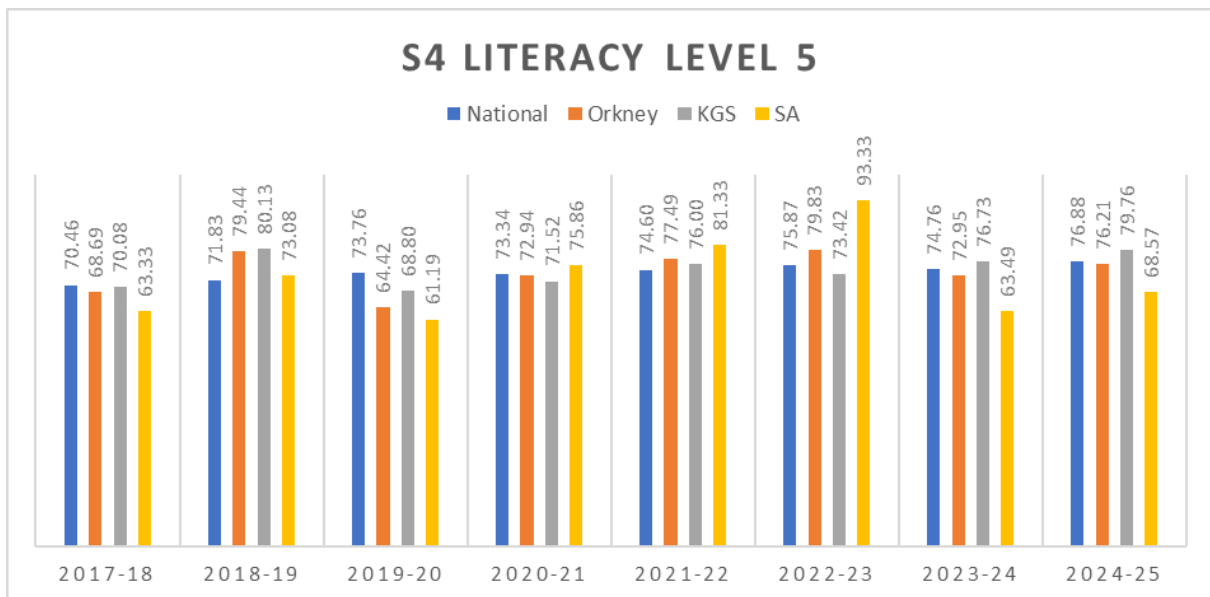
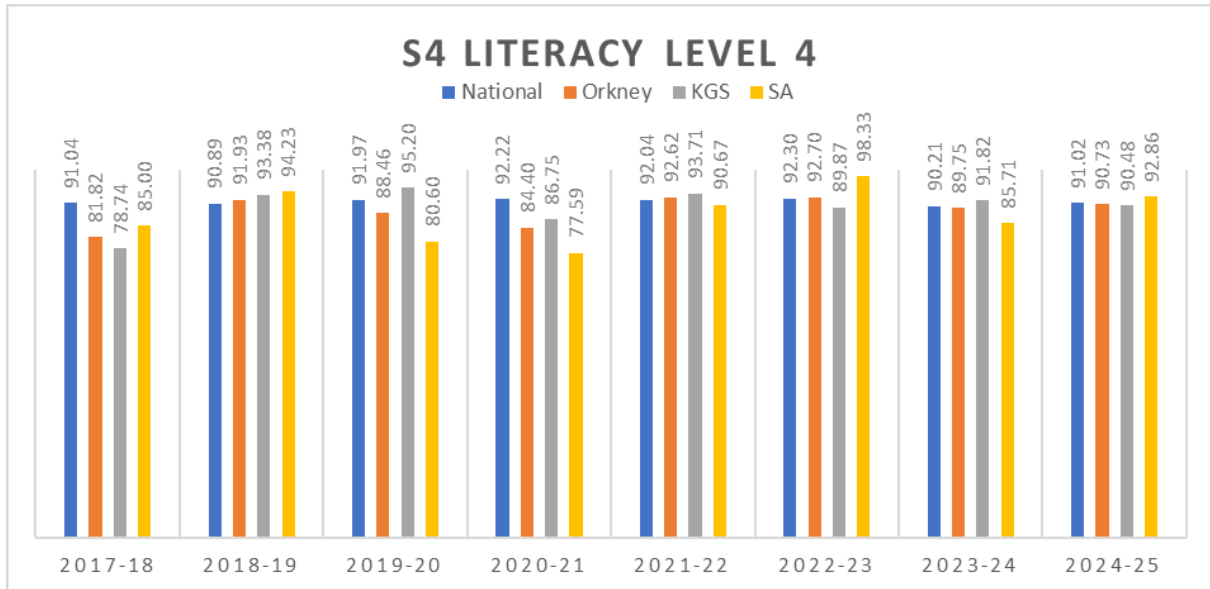
Both Orkney and National attainment in this measure have risen compared to the previous year, with Orkney attainment 5.14 percentage points above National. After a dip last year, Orkney's performance has returned to being above pre-covid levels.

Next steps

Efforts to diversify the course types on offer to young people, as described under Next Steps for National Qualification pass rates, should in the long term impact positively on this measure. The Orkney Offer provision of level 5 courses for Senior Phase pupils at UHI Orkney is a key part of supporting attainment in this measure.

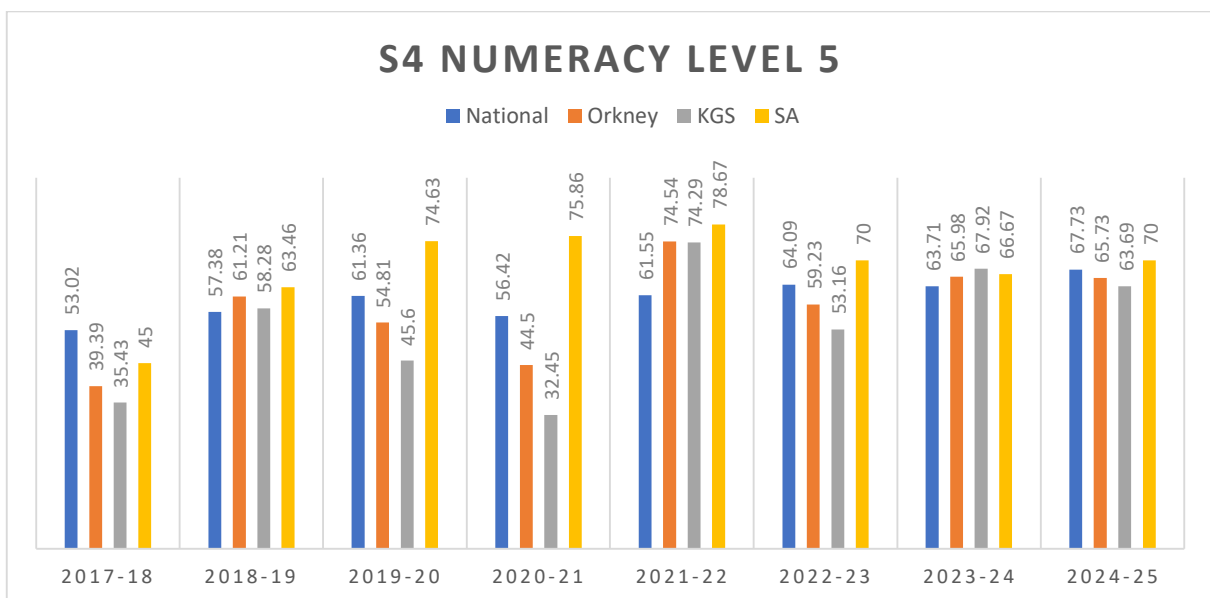
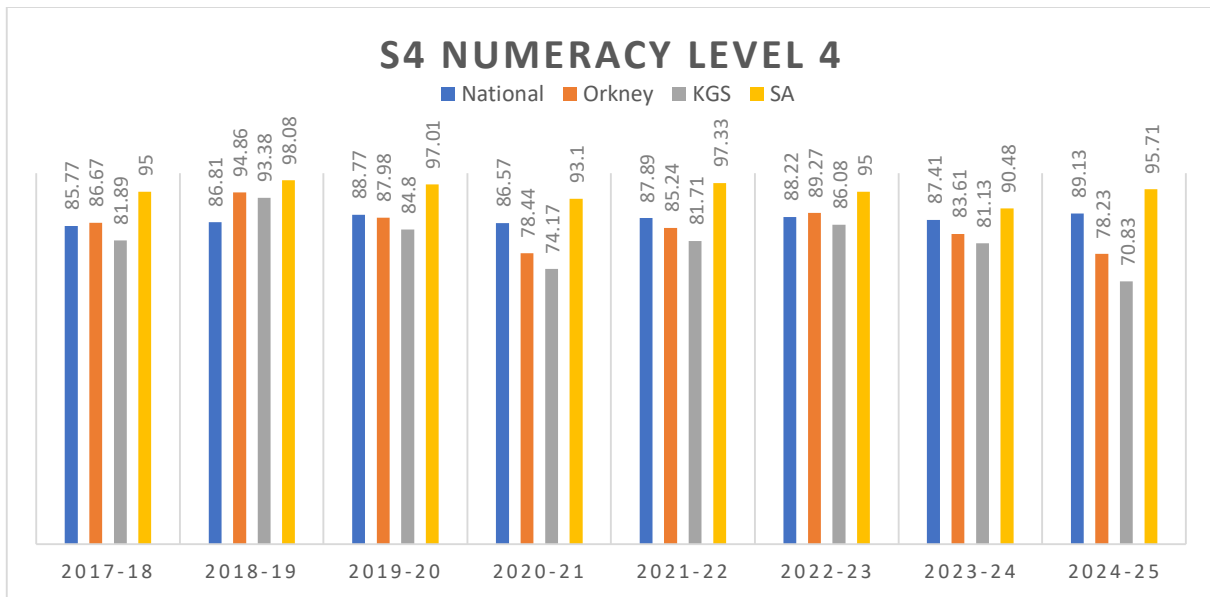
3.8 Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy in S4

Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy can be achieved through a national qualification in English/Maths/Applications of Maths, or through standalone Literacy/Numeracy units.



Analysis - Literacy

Both Level 4 and level 5 literacy attainment of Orkney pupils in S4 are slightly behind the National level. Level 5 attainment at Stromness Academy has risen compared to the previous year but remains below the National level.



Analysis - Numeracy

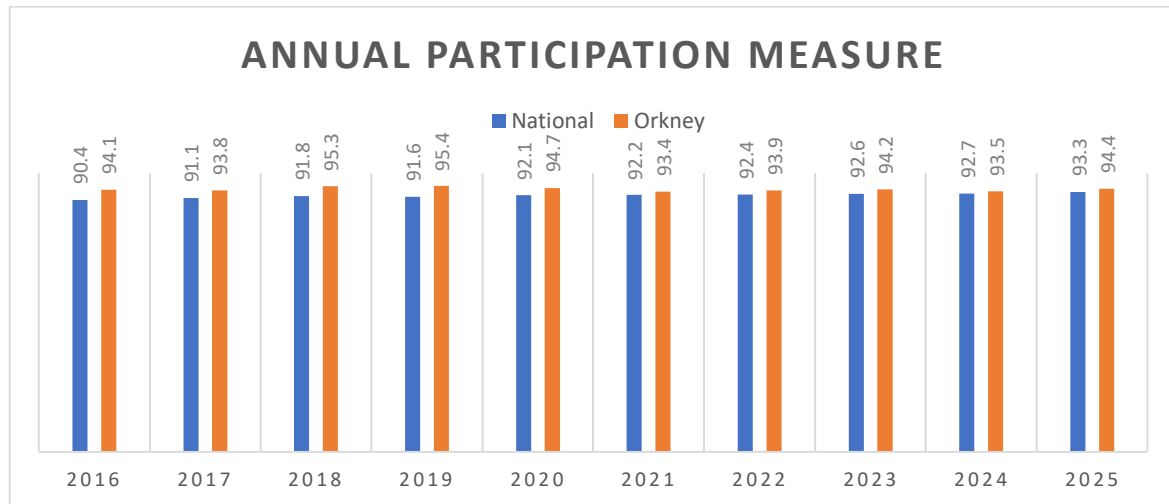
Attainment in Numeracy by S4 pupils at level 4 shows a 3-year downward trend and is 10.9 percentage points below National. Attainment at level 5 is on a par with the previous year but has been overtaken by the national level.

Next Steps

Tracking and Monitoring data in February 2025 is being used to target interventions during study leave for pupils at risk of not attaining an appropriate level in these key skills. Efforts will also continue to ensure our Mathematics Departments are fully staffed.

3.9 Annual Participation Measure

The participation measure gives the percentage of young people aged 16-19 who are participating in education, employment or training. It is published by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) in the [Annual Participation Measure](#) in August each year.



Analysis

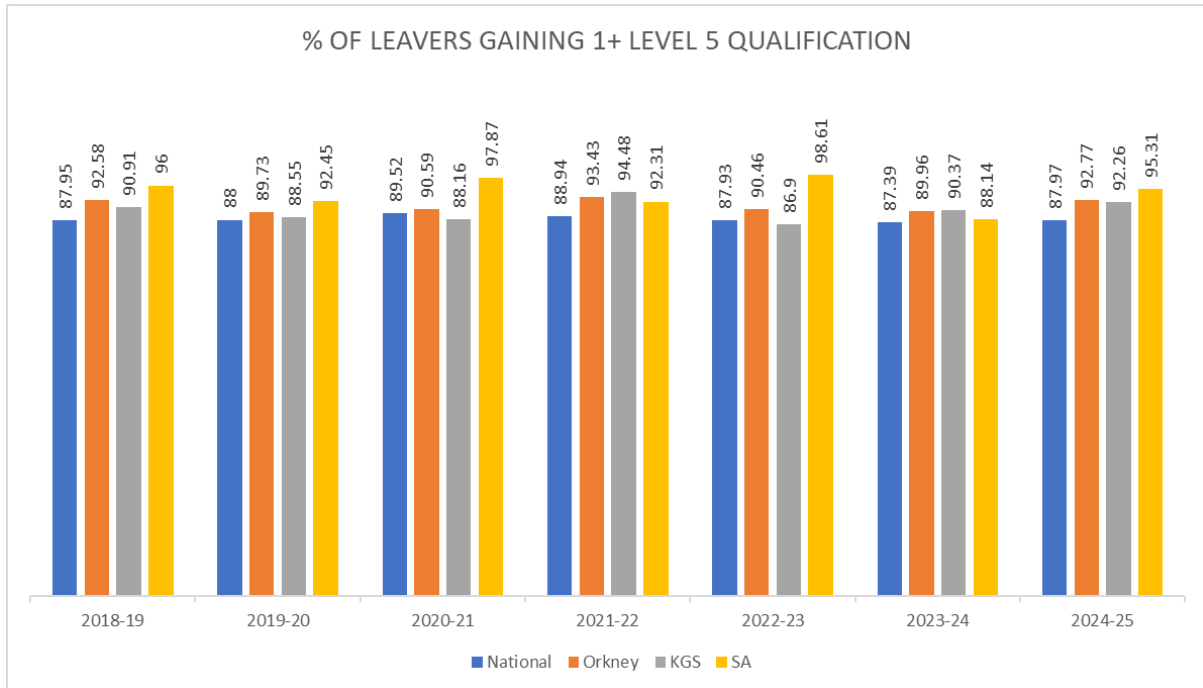
Orkney is consistently achieving above the national average in this measure. The 2023-24 rate of 93.5% ranks us as 11th Local Authority, up from 16th in 2024.

Next Steps

The key focus of this measure is not those who are participating but those who aren't. A new "Participation Portal" has been introduced which allows staff to see individuals' participation status in real time. Work is underway to train school Guidance Teachers, Skills Development Scotland and Community Learning and Development Officers to use this portal to ensure information on young people's status is accurate and identify those needing support to transition to a positive destination.

- **Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more level 5 qualification**

This is one of the core measures tracked by the Scottish Government as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, with the intention of reducing the number of young people leaving school with few qualifications.



Analysis

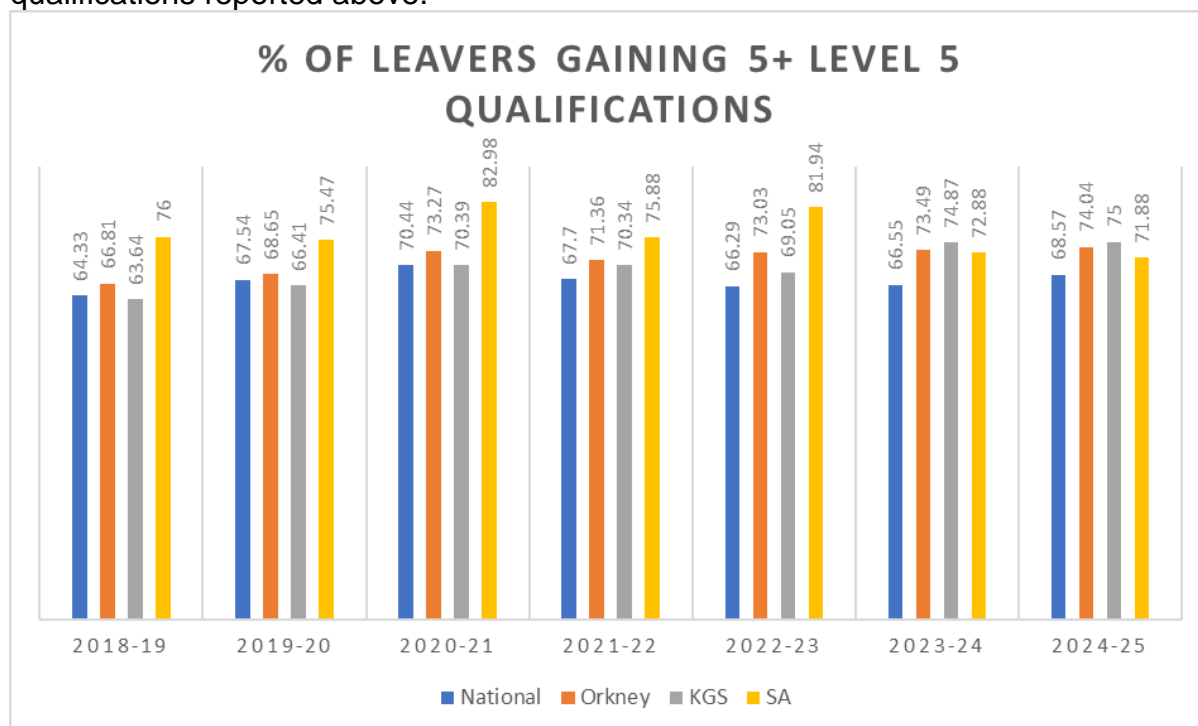
Orkney is performing almost 5 percent points above the national average in this measure with an upward trend.

Next steps

Ensure that this upward trend continues for our young people with continued focus on improving literacy and numeracy outcomes at level 5 and above.

3.11 Percentage of school leavers achieving 5 or more level 5 qualifications

The Scottish Government tracking of School Leavers gaining at least one qualification at level 5 as a core measure focuses on reducing the number of young people leaving school with few formal qualifications. Local Authorities are asked to nominate additional measures they wish to track as part of the Scottish Attainment Challenge. For Orkney the percentage of school leavers gaining 5 or more level 5 qualifications has been made a key focus, as a measure of success in providing a breadth of education for the majority of young people. This measure works in tandem with the measure of the percentage of S4 pupils gaining 5 or more level 5 qualifications reported above.



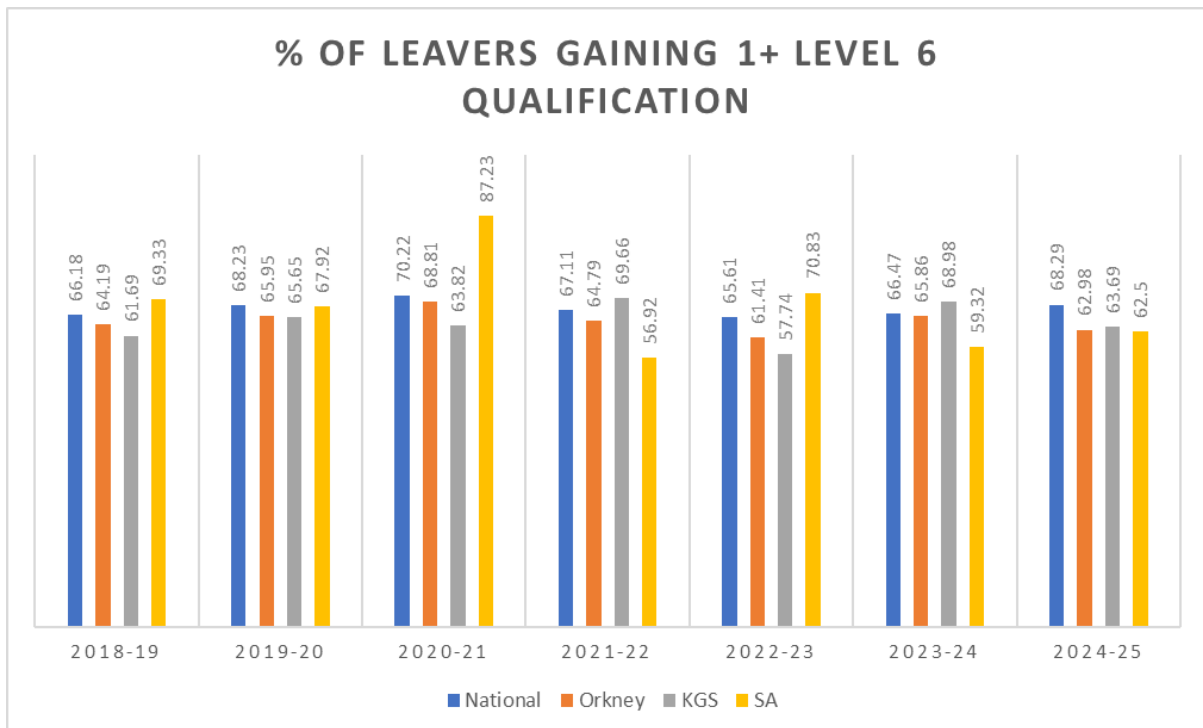
Analysis

Orkney is consistently above the national average in this measure and currently performing above pre-Covid levels. KGS maintained the rise in attainment in this measure for 2024-25 compared to 2022-23.

Next steps

A review of the Senior Phase is continuing, looking at pathways that allow pupils to achieve more Level 5 options through improved subject choices. Maintaining the provision of Skills for Work programmes for Senior Phase pupils via UHI Orkney will be a key part of maintaining attainment of this measure.

3.12 Percentage of school leavers achieving 1 or more level 6 qualification



Analysis

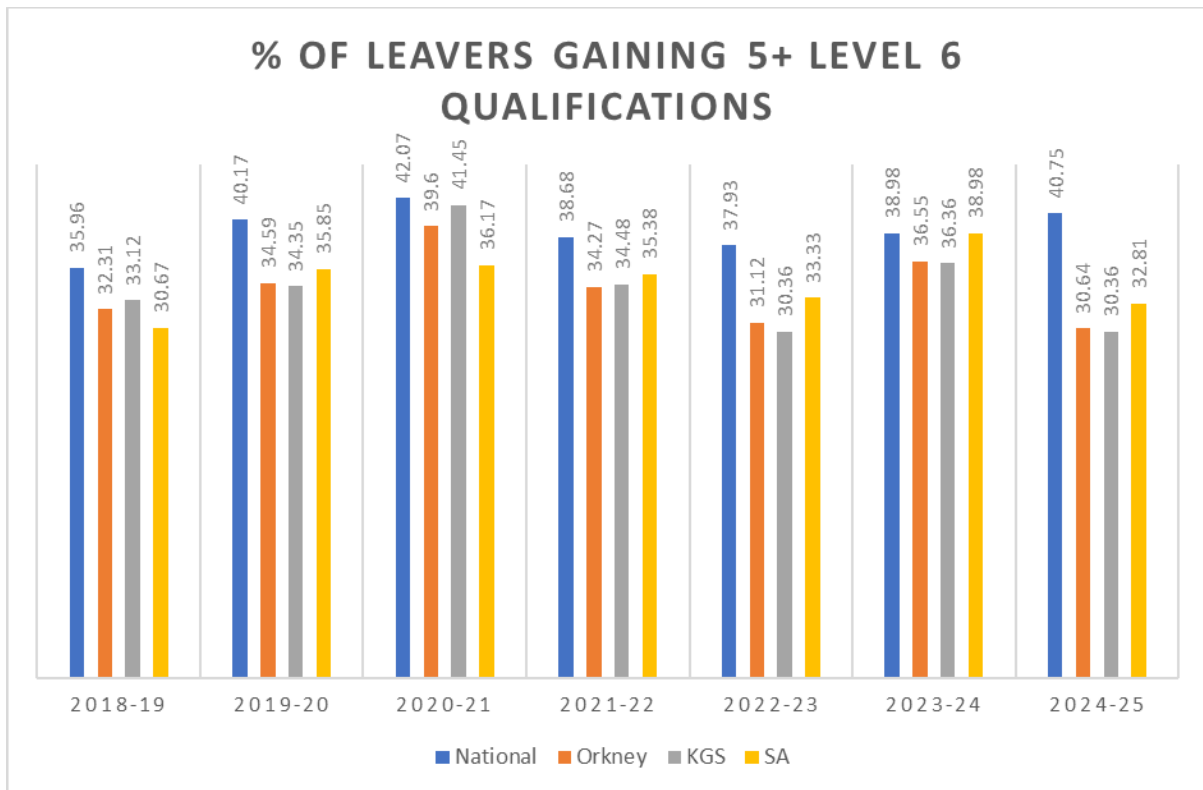
Orkney is below the national average in this measure. The Orkney rate has fallen by almost 3 percent points. Stromness Academy's rate has risen to be almost in line with KGS.

Next steps

A review of the Senior Phase curriculum is included in the Education Service Plan, and this will need to include the provision of alternative routes to attainment for those pupils for whom traditional Highers are not appropriate to increase the numbers of young people attaining at level 6.

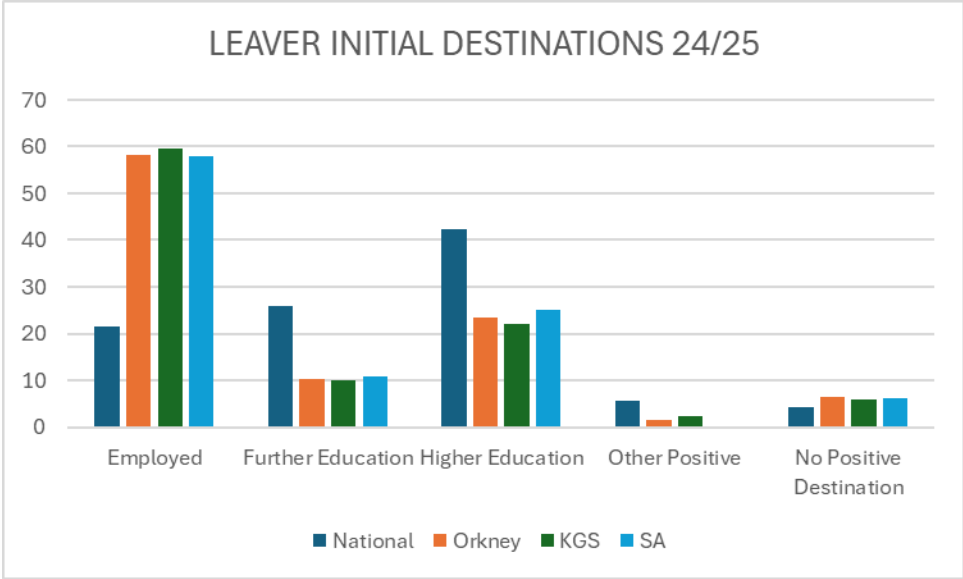
3.13 Percentage of school leavers achieving 5 or more level 6 qualifications

This measure is not reported to Scottish Government but has been included here because it is frequently the subject of media attention.

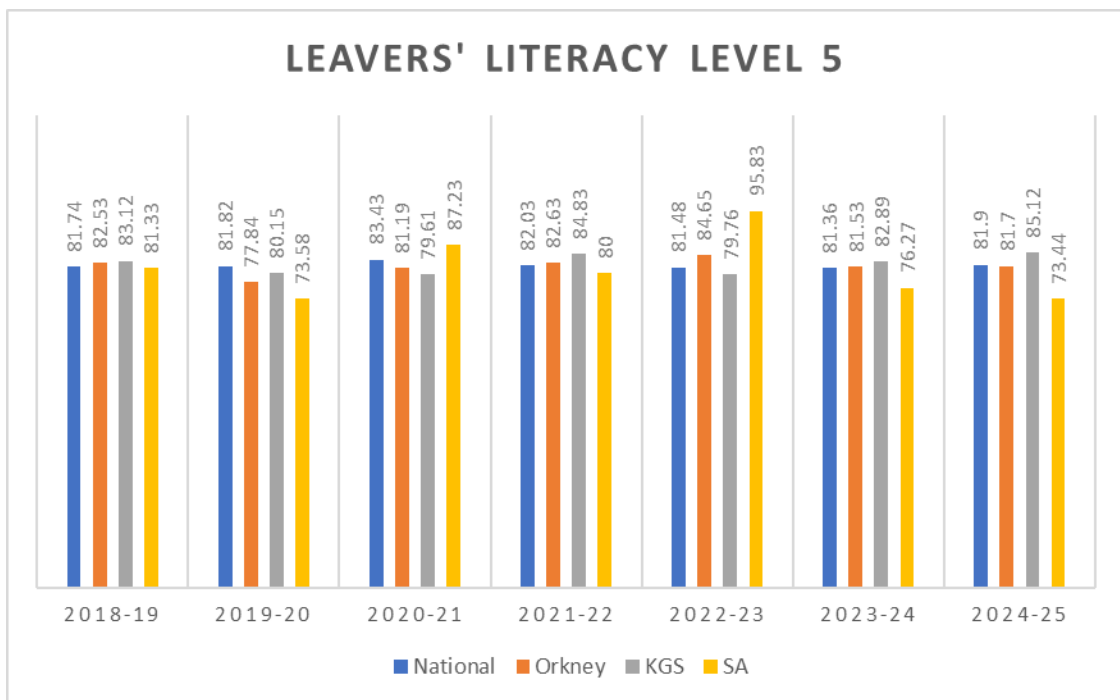
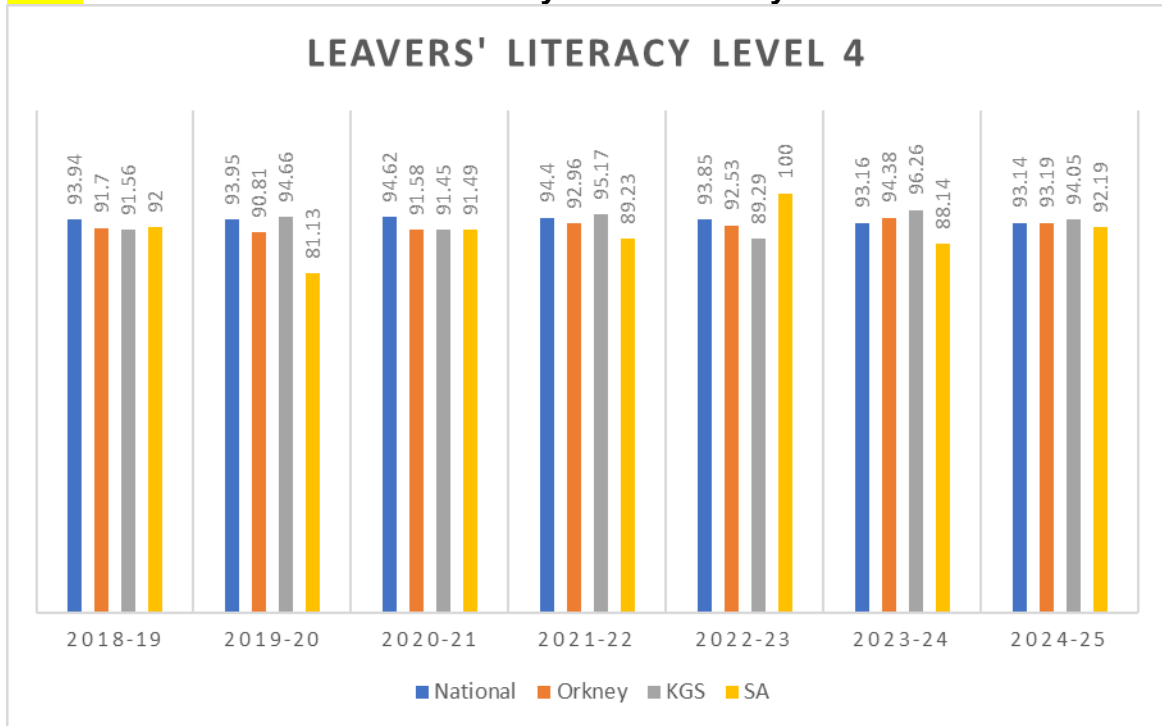


Analysis

Orkney is consistently below the national average in this measure, and there is a 6-point-fall in this measure compared to 2023-24. Gaining 5 or more level 6 qualifications (Highers) is generally understood to be the requirement for university entry, though offers are frequently made on 4 Highers. As can be seen in the chart below of the major destinations for 2025 school leavers, in Orkney we have a much higher percentage of school leavers entering employment than nationally, and fewer entering Higher Education; this is consistently the picture every year, meaning that 5+ level 6 is not a goal for many young people. Similar patterns are seen in the other island local authorities.



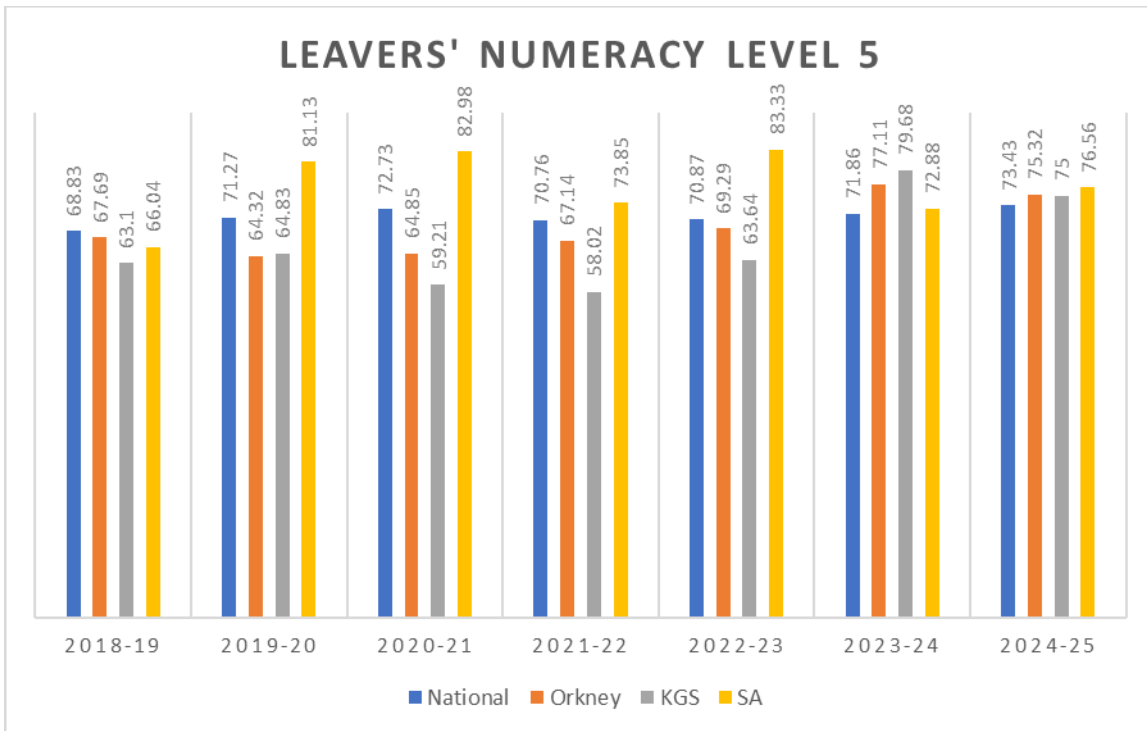
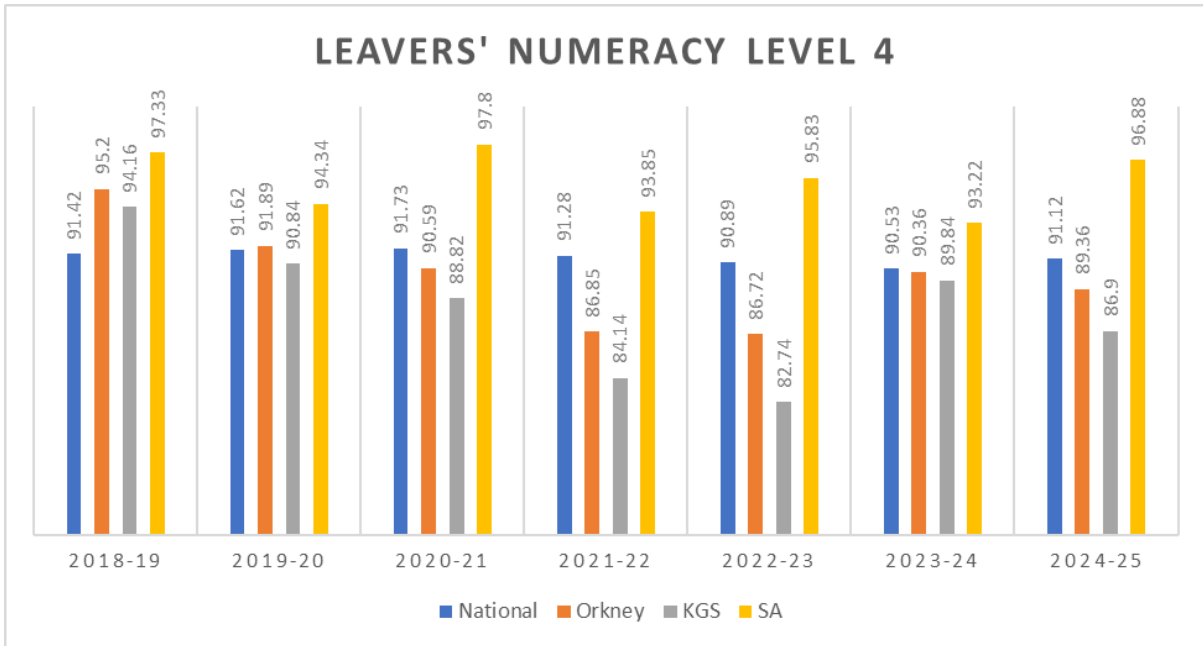
3.14 Leavers' Attainment in Literacy and Numeracy



Analysis – Literacy

Level 4 literacy attainment of Orkney school leavers, whilst high, has been consistently slightly behind the national level, but has edged slightly above in 2024-25.

At level 5, attainment is on par with the national level.



Analysis – Numeracy

At level 4 numeracy attainment of Orkney school leavers remains 2 percent points below national level.

At level 5 numeracy attainment of Orkney school leavers remains above the national rate, although it has fallen by almost 2 percent points.

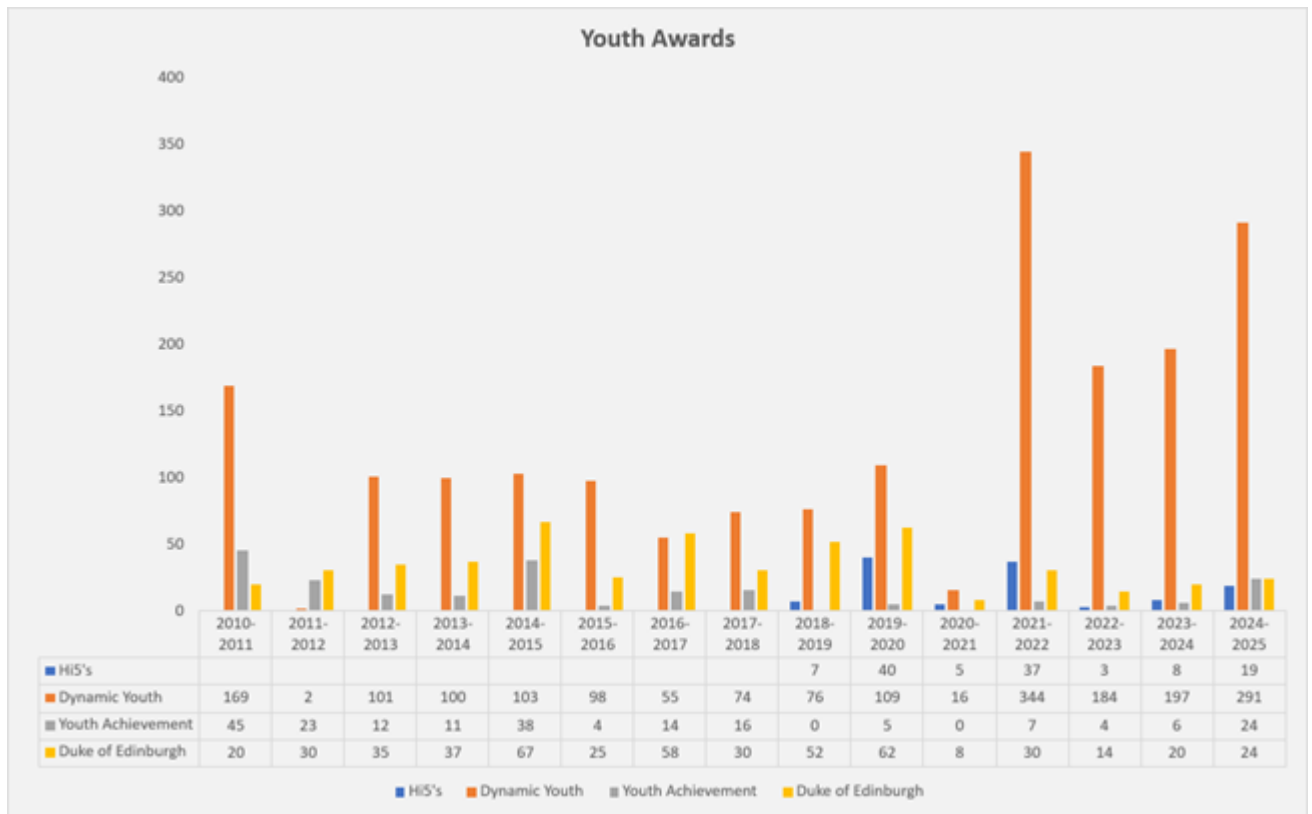
Next Steps

Raising attainment in Literacy and Numeracy in S4 remains a focus going forwards, with Pupil Equity Funding directed towards interventions for young people at risk of not attaining these measures. Work continues to support teachers' moderation of Literacy measures in S3, to enable more accurate targeting of intervention at this pre-qualification stage.

4. Achievement

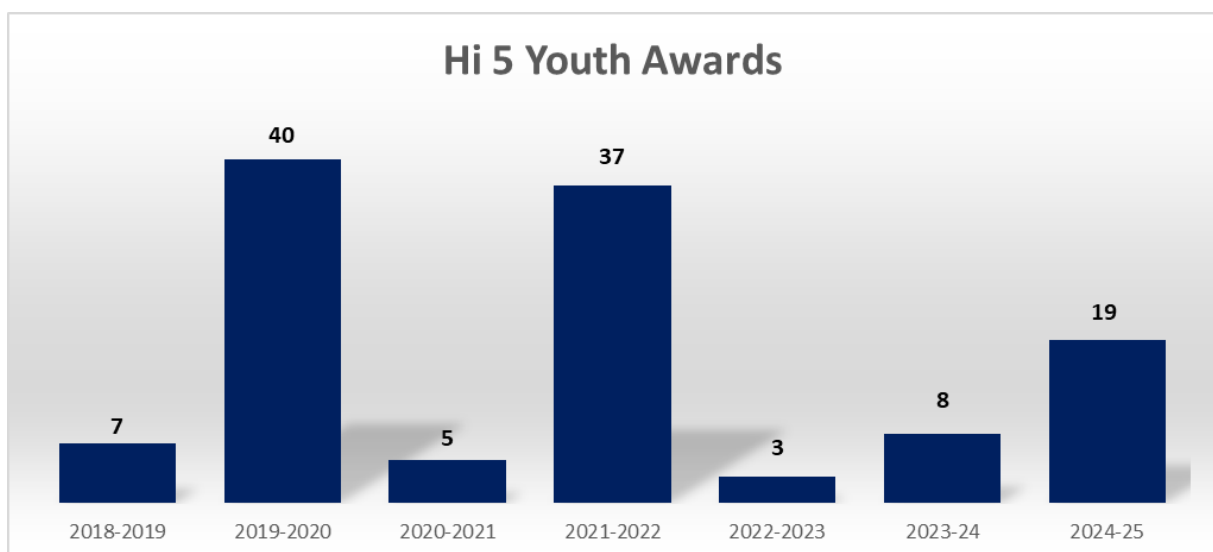
- 4.1. There is a realisation amongst those involved in the education of young people that passing exams is not the only way that young people can get accreditation for their endeavours. The wider achievements of young people, which take place in a variety of settings, are increasingly recognised, and their benefits appreciated.
- 4.2. This can be evidenced through the universal and targeted work currently being undertaken by the Community Learning, Development & Employability (CLDE) Service.
- 4.3. During 2024-25 there was an increase in targeted youth work provision, due to the allocation of the Scottish Government Whole Family Wellbeing Fund and Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) in Papdale Primary School to the CLDE Service. As a result, Youth Services are working to ensure youth and family work is embedded, providing targeted support for children, young people and families.
- 4.4. CLDE also produce a Youth Work in Schools Offer which is sent to all schools and partner organisations; mainly aimed at pupils P7+, offering a range of programmes that can be delivered including Confidence to Cook, iLead money, Cyber Resilience, Youth Loneliness, Imagine a Man and UNCRC training. These training programmes aim to increase confidence, attainment, and engagement within the school community, whilst providing vital life skills for young people.
- 4.5. The CLDE Employability Service, work across several strands of employability funding to support people of all ages into work, further or higher education, training, volunteering or to complete qualifications. 121 people were supported during 2024-25. Despite Scottish Government moving the focus of employability funding away from young people and towards parents, 35 young people aged between 15-24 years of age were supported in this period. 52 qualifications were gained in 2024-25. 53 individuals progressed from the CLDE Employability Service which equates to an 74% positive progression rate.
- 4.6. In addition, the Adult & Family Learning Service (The Learning Link) support people aged 16+ to improve their skills and confidence in literacy, numeracy, digital skills, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Adults can gain accreditation in literacy, numeracy, H&W and ESOL. During 2024-25 staff worked with 148 learners, completing 2166 hours of learning, with 18 learners achieving accreditation.
- 4.7. Below are extracts from the *Community Learning, Development & Employability Service (CLDE) Annual Report 2024-25*, which demonstrates the accredited awards and opportunities for young people taking place through CLDE, in line with curriculum for excellence.

4.8. In 2024-25 young people in Orkney achieved the following:



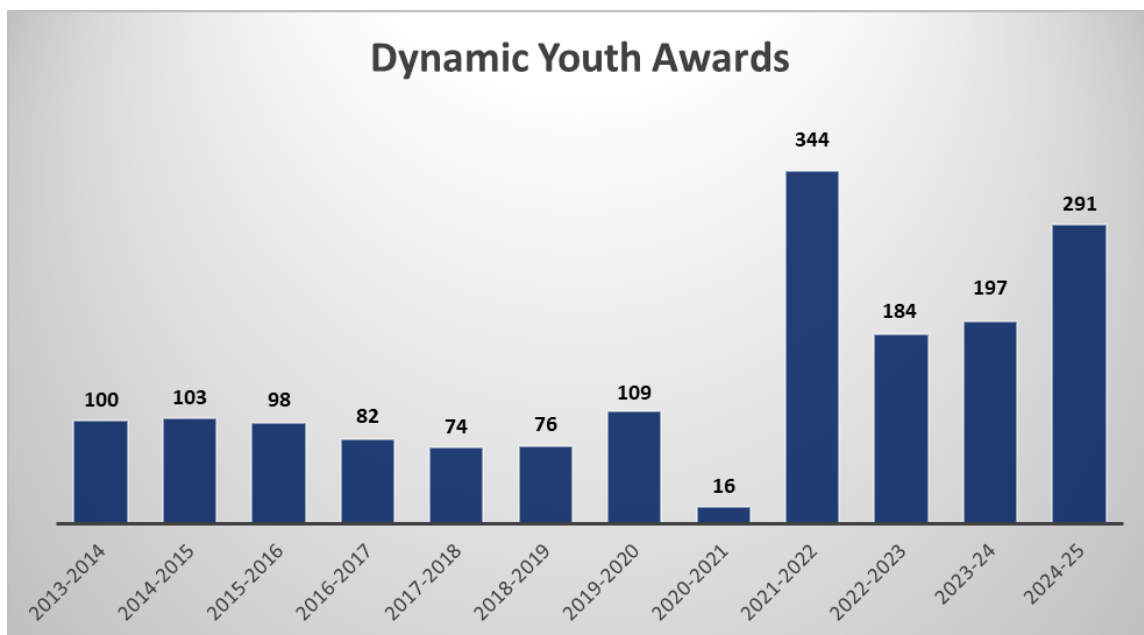
Hi5 Award

Introduced in 2018, the Hi5 accredited award is a nationally recognised award for young people age 5+ that records and recognises wider achievement. The Hi5 Award is credit rated on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) where it sits at Level 2. The awards can be incorporated into existing or planned activities, are inclusive and suitable for young people with a range of interests and abilities and assist in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. During 2024-25 CLDE increased the number of completed Hi5 awards.



Dynamic Youth Awards

Dynamic Youth Awards (DYA) are peer assessed awards for young people aged 10 and over. DYA give young people the opportunity to be recognised and accredited for the activities they take part in either within or outwith the school setting. A Dynamic Youth Award is equivalent to a SCQF Level 3. Additional Covid recovery funding in 2020-21 allowed a significant increase in the number of DYA's achieved. Despite this funding ceasing in 2022-23, CLDE saw the number of DYA's completed remain very high, with the number of Dynamic Youth Awards increasing again this year. Young people completed 7222 hours to achieve Dynamic Youth Awards during 2024-25.



Youth Achievement Awards

Youth Achievement Awards are Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) customised and feature on pupils Scottish Qualifications certificates alongside those formal national qualifications gained in schools and colleges. The awards are gained both within and outwith the school setting and often provide significant benefits for the local community.

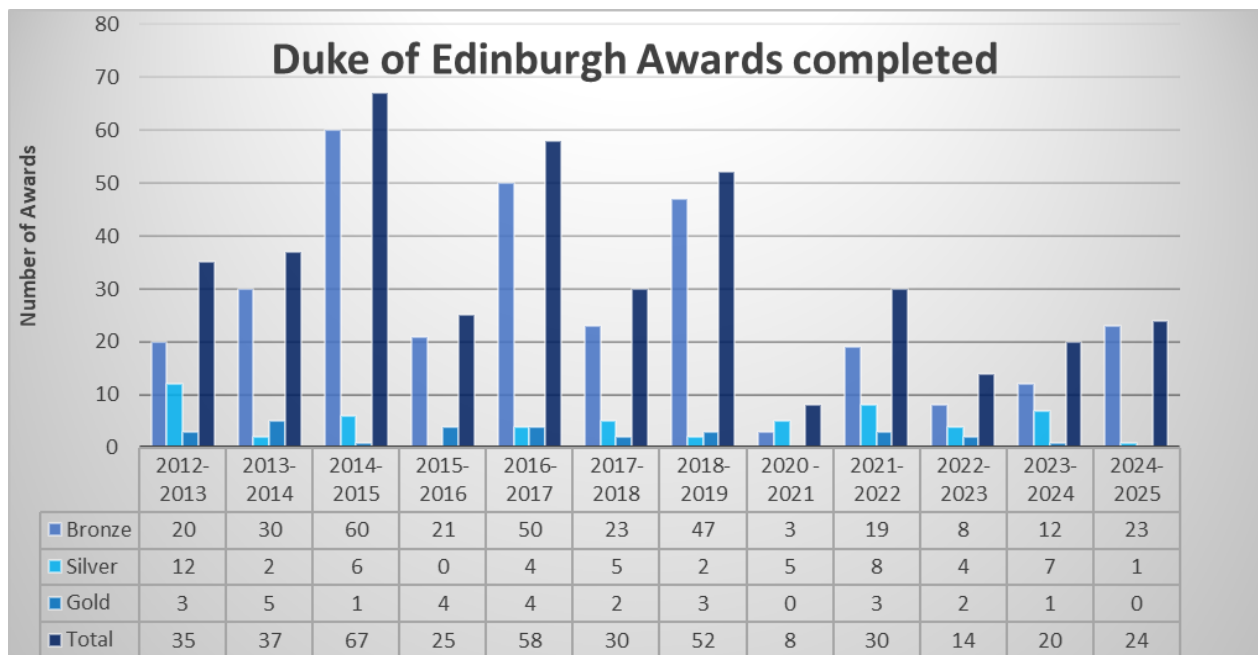
CLDE are currently working with a number of young people on different award levels and are also providing support to other organisations working on Youth Achievement Awards. 24 young people completed a Youth Achievement Award during 2024-25. This is a significant increase from previous years. 13 of the bronze awards are due to the fact that curriculum support within Kirkwall Grammar School delivered the award this year. This is the highest number of youth achievement awards in 10 years, when it was delivered as a subject choice in Kirkwall Grammar School.



Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Awards

Young people achieve an award by completing a personal programme of activities in four sections (five if they're going for Gold). Our ability to offer the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme to young people is dependent on the numbers of staff and volunteers available to assist with the programme.

During the 2024-25 period, Duke of Edinburgh Awards were offered in Kirkwall Grammar School and in the Sanday community. The number of DofE Awards has increased by 20% on last year. Stromness Academy did not complete any awards during 2024-25.



Young Persons Guarantee

The Young Person's Guarantee is a commitment to bring together employers, partners and young people. It aims to connect every 16-to 24-year-old in Scotland to an opportunity. This could be a job, apprenticeship, further or higher education, training, volunteering or enterprise opportunity. 2020-21 was the first year of offering this support with the Employability Service delivering a variety of interventions for young people who were identified as requiring additional support to engage with training, learning and or employment.

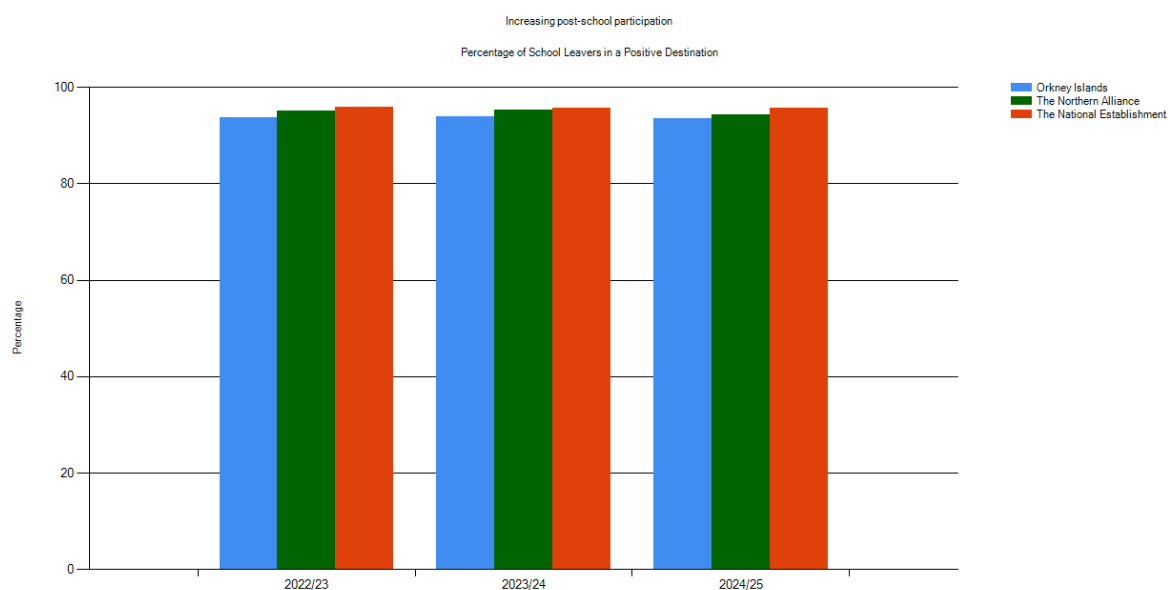
During 2022-23 the amount of funding coming in through Noone Left Behind to work specifically with young people under Young Persons Guarantee was reduced by 66%, from £173,00 to £58,000.

Young Persons Guarantee is no longer a funded element under No One Left Behind. Regardless of this the Employability Team supported 35 young people aged between 15-24 years of age during 2024-25. which is hugely positive.



5. School Leaver Destinations

- The Leaver Initial Destinations measure published in the Insight data tool gives the percentage of all school leavers (S4/5/6) who have progressed to a positive destination. Orkney figures are compared with a “Virtual Comparator” – a group of pupils with similar demographic characteristics – and the rate for the Northern Alliance group of local authorities (Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll & Bute, Highland, Moray, Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles), as well as the national rate. Figures are published in February for the previous academic year.

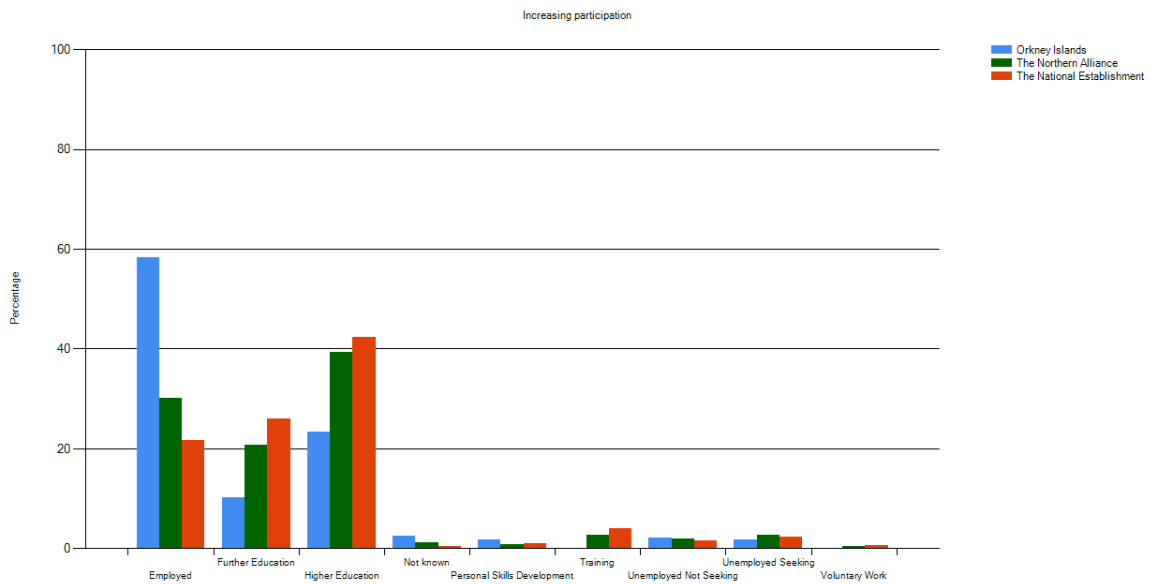


Establishment	Year	% of Schools Leavers in a Positive Destination
Orkney Islands	2024/25	93.62
Orkney Islands	2023/24	93.98
Orkney Islands	2022/23	93.78
The Northern Alliance	2024/25	94.27
The Northern Alliance	2023/24	95.4
The Northern Alliance	2022/23	95.09
The National Establishment	2024/25	95.67
The National Establishment	2023/24	95.71
The National Establishment	2022/23	95.87

Analysis

The percentage of Orkney school leavers in a positive destination has consistently tended to be within 2 percentage points of all comparator measures. There has been a slight dip in Orkney’s rate compared to 2023-24.

- Taking a closer look at the underlying data reveals our school leavers' destinations.

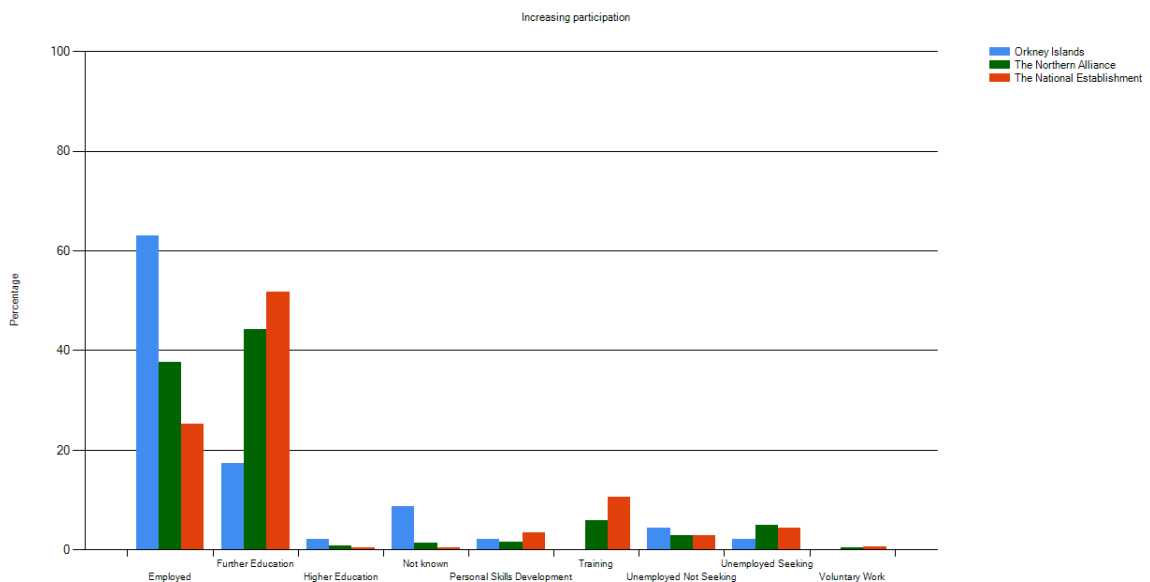


Analysis

The initial leaver destination profile does not follow our comparator trends, with many more leavers going directly into employment and fewer moving into further or higher education. This is a consistent picture for Orkney.

The percentage of 2023-24 school leavers who move into employment is even more marked in S4. For this cohort more than 60%% are in employment:

S4

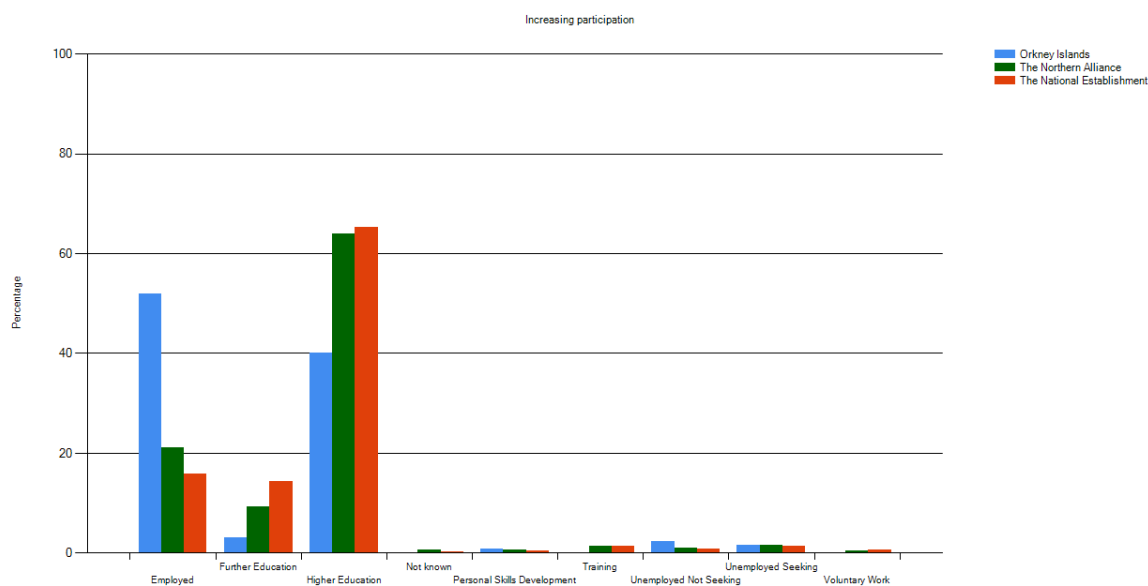


Establishment	% Employed	% Further Education	% Higher Education	% Not known	% Personal Skills Development	% Training	% Unemployed Not Seeking	% Unemployed Seeking	% Voluntary Work	Number in Cohort
Orkney Islands	63.04	17.39	2.17	8.7	2.17		4.35	2.17		46

The Northern Alliance	37.67	44.28	0.88	1.38	1.57	5.91	2.96	4.97	0.38	1590
The National Establishment	25.24	51.81	0.5	0.48	3.37	10.5	2.97	4.46	0.68	7541

Just over 40% of Orkney pupils who stayed on to S6 moved on to Higher Education, though the rate is still lower than comparators. This is a decrease from the last two years of S6 leavers entering HE. The percentage moving into employment, 51.97%, though less marked than for S4 pupils, is still significantly higher than comparators.

S6



Establishment	% Employed	% Further Education	% Higher Education	% Not known	% Personal Skills Development	% Training	% Unemployed Not Seeking	% Unemployed Seeking	% Voluntary Work	Number in Cohort
Orkney Islands	51.97	3.15	40.16	0.55	0.79	2.36	1.57	0.45	0.38	127
The Northern Alliance	21.06	9.31	63.89	0.21	0.64	1.38	1.1	1.62	0.63	5295
The National Establishment	15.8	14.32	65.2	0.44	1.38	0.73	1.29	0.38	0.68	32688

Orkney Education Service staff in schools, CLDE and UHI Orkney work together with our partners in Skills Development Scotland and Developing the Young Workforce to support all school leavers into a positive destination which is appropriate for their abilities and aspirations.