

Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP
Scottish Parliament
(via email)

8 May 2025

Dear Ms Duncan-Glancy,

Thank you for your letter of 21 March outlining concerns around the First Minister of Scotland's use of statistics about the poverty-related educational attainment gap. At First Minister's Questions on 27 February, he said: "the overall poverty-related attainment gap [in Scotland] has reduced by 60 per cent since 2009-10".

The Scottish Government monitors the attainment gap through a series of thirteen key measures as part of the National Improvement Framework (NIF)¹. Taken together, these are the data by which the Government measures the poverty-related attainment gap and the impact of its education policies.

Scottish Government officials confirmed to us that the 60 per cent figure used by the First Minister was taken from statistics on follow-up leaver destinations. Chart 4 of the supplementary tables shows that the difference in the percentage of school leavers in a positive follow-up destination (nine months after leaving school) between the most deprived and the least deprived has reduced by 60 per cent since 2009-10².

These statistics are not one of the thirteen measures included within the NIF. The Framework does include a similar measure – initial positive destinations of school leavers – which also shows a reduction in the gap between the most and least deprived students since 2009/10. However, both of these statistics measure outcomes once students have left school, not their educational attainment whilst in school.

When making claims about a reduction in the 'overall' attainment gap, we would expect the Government to use the NIF to help evidence this, and that this assertion would reflect a reduction in more than one measure relating to attainment. The First Minister should have been clearer that he was referring to a specific set of statistics

¹ [Education and skills - National Improvement Framework 2025: improvement plan, Scottish Government](#)

² [Summary statistics for Follow- Up Leaver Destinations, No. 6: 2024 Edition, Scottish Government](#)

to evidence his claim, particularly as it was based on data which is not part of the NIF.

To maintain trust and confidence in their statements, Ministers should take care that when they claim progress of their policies it is by their own defined measures, or otherwise clearly explain the source of separate data so that it is readily accessible for policy experts and the public to understand. We have raised these matters with the First Minister's office.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sir Robert Chote', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sir Robert Chote
Chair