



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP
Member of the Scottish Parliament for Glasgow Region

Sir Robert Chote
UK Statistics Authority
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Friday 21st March, 2025

Dear Sir Robert,

Scottish Government Attainment Gap Statistics

I am writing to seek the assistance of the UK Statistics Authority in establishing the accuracy of claims made by the First Minister of Scotland, John Swinney MSP, regarding the Scottish Government's progress on closing Scotland's poverty-related attainment gap. These claims appear to be at odds with the statistical evidence available and now risk misleading the Parliament and general public.

At First Minister's Questions on 27 February 2025, Mr Swinney stated that "the overall poverty-related attainment gap has reduced by 60 per cent since 2009-10". The statement has drawn attention from the public and the media and gives the impression that overall educational inequality has significantly improved — an assertion which has since been publicly challenged.

The Ferret Fact Service has investigated this claim and concluded it to be "mostly false", noting that there is no agreed overall measure of the attainment gap in Scotland and that the First Minister's claim is based solely on the measure of "positive destinations" — a metric which refers to the number of school leavers going on to further education, training, or commencing employment. This means the claim fails to account for progress, or lack thereof, in other key areas of educational attainment, such as National 5 and Higher exam results, achievement against Curriculum for Excellence levels, and performance against key literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

In many of these other measures, the gap between pupils from the most and least deprived backgrounds has either narrowed only modestly or remained largely unchanged. As such, I believe it to be highly misleading to describe a 60% reduction in one narrow metric as reflecting an "overall" closure of the attainment gap.

When statistics are used to justify policy decisions that directly affect the lives of children and young people, they must be presented with accuracy and honesty. Misrepresenting such data — intentionally or through omission — undermines public confidence, risks eroding trust in our

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public institutions, and undermines the serious work required to tackle long-standing inequality in our education system.

I would therefore welcome your views on:

1. Whether the First Minister's claim that the "overall" attainment gap has reduced by 60% is a misleading use of official statistics; and
2. Whether the Scottish Government has sufficiently justified its use of this figure, especially given its decision to use a single outcome measure rather than a comprehensive overview of educational attainment.

I would also welcome any guidance you may wish to offer to ensure that statistics relating to sensitive and multi-dimensional issues, such as the poverty-related attainment gap — where public trust in government data is paramount — are not presented in a misleading way.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pam Duncan-Glancy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Glasgow Region (Scottish Labour Party)
Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Education