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| <b>Progress Report</b>  | <b>Project End Report:</b> 6.3 Increase by 10% the rate of completion of NPA/FA/HNC courses available to young people across the city by June 2024. |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>     | Eleanor Sheppard – Chair of Children’s Services Board                                                                                               |
| <b>Report Author</b>    | Mark Jones, Aberdeen City Council                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Date of Report</b>   | 05.02.25                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Governance Group</b> | CPA Management Group – 26 <sup>th</sup> February 2025                                                                                               |

### **Purpose of the Report**

This report presents the results of the LOIP Improvement Project 6.3 which sought to increase by 10% the rate of completion of NPA/FA/HNC courses available to young people across the city by 2024 and seeks approval to close this project as the aim has been achieved.

### **Summary of Key Information**

#### **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Attainment in National Qualifications (NQ) is and will continue to be a very important part of the way in which young people in Aberdeen City secondary schools demonstrate a culmination in their learning. However, NQs form just a part of the way in which young people can have their learning recognised through certification at school. National Progression Awards (NPA), Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) and Higher National Certificates (HNC) form some of the wider qualifications that are also recognised through SCQF.
- 1.2 For example, secondary schools in Aberdeen City contributed towards 114 out of the total national picture of 4430 Level 6 NPA awards in session 2021-22. More widely, improving the number of completed NPA, FA and HNC awards at Levels 4 to 7 allows young people in the local authority to better demonstrate a complete picture of their success also allowing our secondary schools to demonstrate an improved attainment picture against virtual comparator data.
- 1.3 With this in mind the aim of this project was to expand the curricular offer available to our young people across the city. Working with schools, further and higher education establishments and wider partners by better supporting parents and staff to understand the full offer available to young people as well as expand that offer through the development and roll out of ABZ Campus
- 1.4 ABZ Campus was developed to support the work of schools towards a positive and sustained destination for every young person in an Aberdeen City school, by exemplifying and providing equitable access to the citywide curriculum for all our pupils regardless of school, with a further focus on those young people who are either care experienced or who have a context that places them in Quintile 1 (lowest 20%) of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). Activities to support these two groups were intended not only benefit them but will also have a positive impact on the overall Positive Destination figure for Aberdeen City schools.

#### **2. IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AIM**

- 2.1 The CPA Board approved the project charter for the initiation of an improvement project which aimed to Increase by 10% the rate of completion of NPA/FA/HNC courses available to young people across the city by 2024.

2.2 This multi-agency project team agreed to focus a number of approaches with a view to:

- Expanding the knowledge, awareness of and accessibility to NPA, FA and HNC Courses throughout the city
- Providing increased support to schools and target groups of vulnerable young people to with a view to improving their course options and postschool opportunities
- Working to learn about and share resources and expertise of the wider curriculum

### 3. WHAT CHANGES DID WE MAKE?

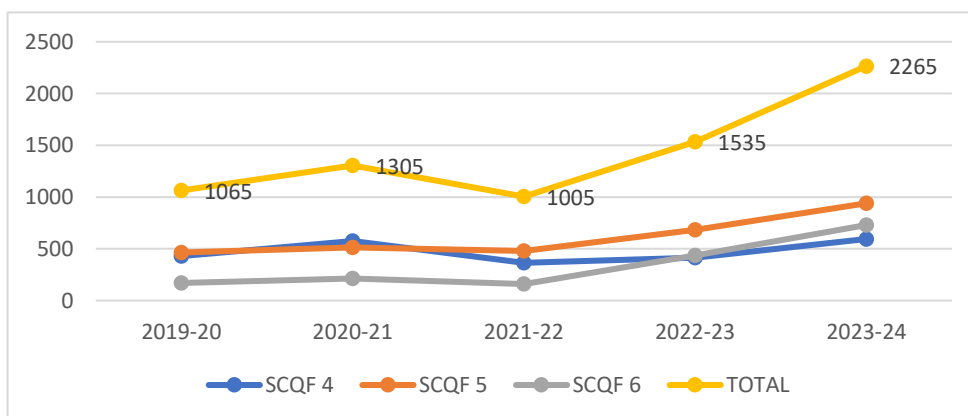
3.1 The following changes were tested by the project:

- Developed and introduce Phase 1 and 2 of ABZ Campus, increasing the number of collectively offered courses (including NPA, FA and HNC):
- Created a termly professional learning offer for staff in curriculum development to encourage a continuation in the broadening of pathway options for young people in Aberdeen
- Develop and offer programme of support (informed by young people) (including induction) for young people taking ABZ Campus courses that will enhance their experience and reduce withdrawals.
- As part of the duty and desire to ensure that all young people in Aberdeen City Council achieve their potential, a new post of Pathways Advocate was created for each of the eleven secondary schools through Scottish Attainment Challenge funding. To support care experienced and vulnerable young people with a particular focus on their choices, careers and ultimately positive destinations.

### 4. HAVE OUR CHANGES RESULTED IN IMPROVEMENT?

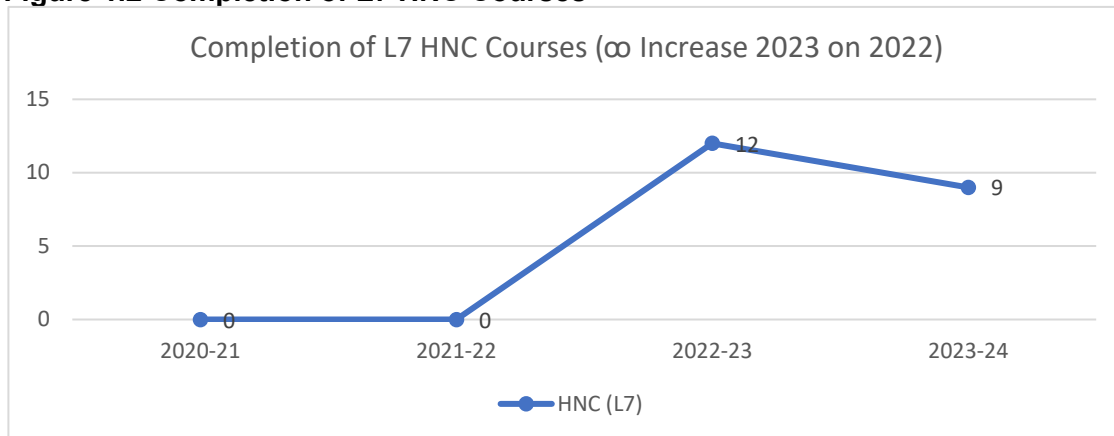
4.1 Since the approval of the project charter in June 2023, the changes have resulted in an improvement with an increase 56.6% completion rates of SCQF/NPA from the baseline of 1005 in 2021/22 to last academic year to 2265 (2023/24)

**Figure 1.1 Numbers of Young People Completing SCQF/NPA Courses:**



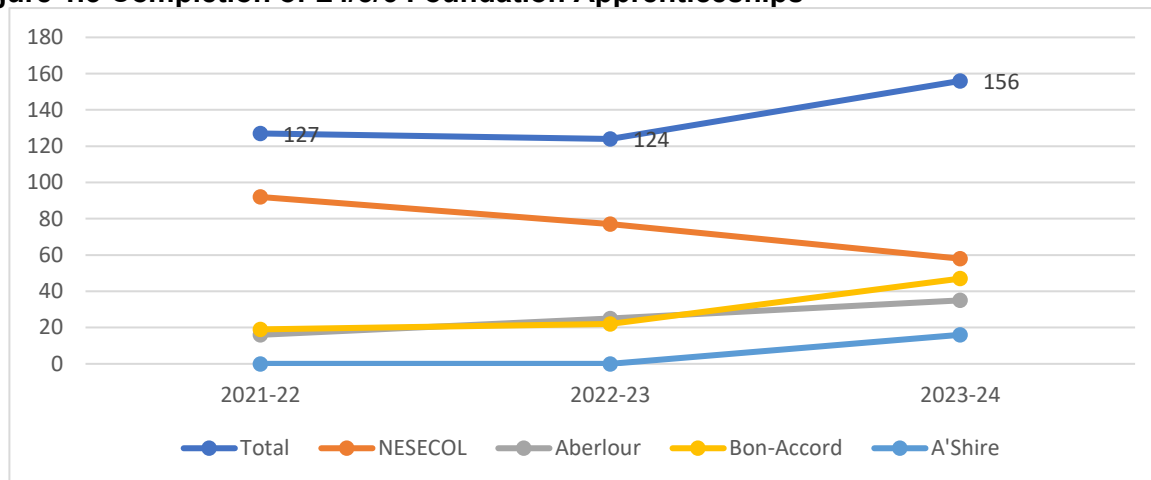
4.2 Though there has been a smaller increase in the number of young people from schools taking on HNCs. Before the project began these opportunities were not being offered and so a small but significant improvement in uptake has also been seen

**Figure 1.2 Completion of L7 HNC Courses**

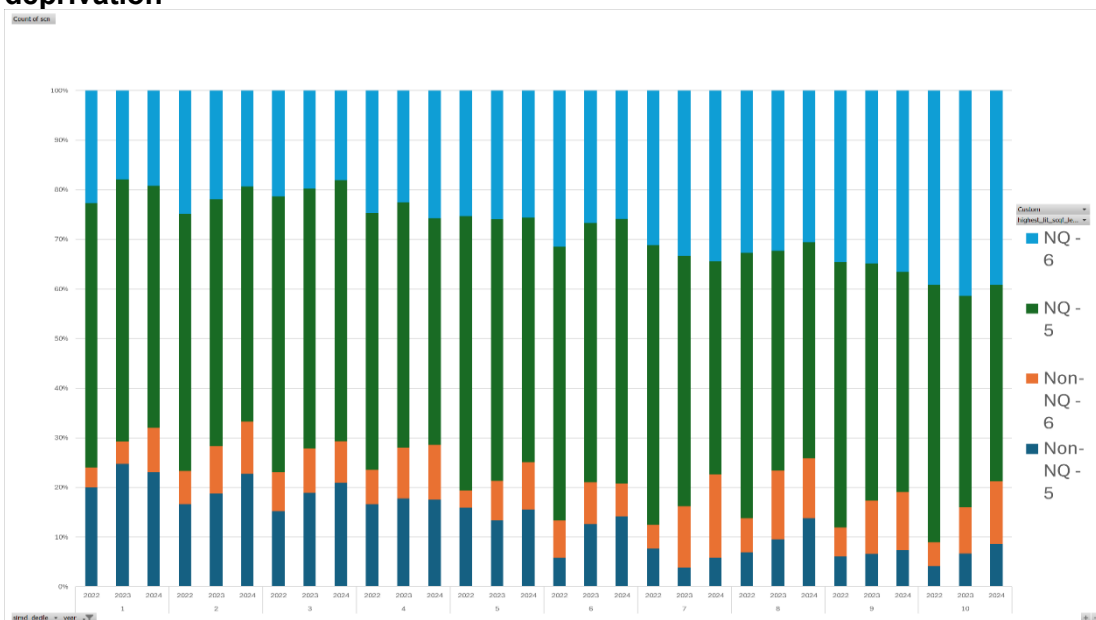


4.3 There has also been an increase in the number of young people competing Foundation Apprenticeship, 19% from 127 in 2021/22 to 156 in 2023/24.

**Figure 1.3 Completion of L4/5/6 Foundation Apprenticeships**



**Figure 1.4 Impact of improvement on young people with a context of higher deprivation**



4.4 Data analysed shows that 'non-NQ' (this means wider SCQF courses such as National Progression Awards (NPA) and Foundation Apprenticeships (FA) plays a more significant role in the certification landscape for SIMD 1-4 (Quintiles 1&2) than for young people with less deprivation. As the number of wider courses has increased, meeting the Project Aim, this has disproportionately positively impacted on young people with a greater context of deprivation.

## Figures 1.5 & 1.6 Number of NPA/FA/HNC Courses taken by young people in Quintiles 1 & 2.

| Number of students in each decile |      |                        |  | Number of students with at least one Non-NQ Award |      |                        |                                              |
|-----------------------------------|------|------------------------|--|---------------------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| SIMD                              | Year | Number of Young People |  | SIMD                                              | Year | Number of Young People | Percentage taking at least one Non-NQ Course |
| 1                                 | 2022 | 481                    |  | 1                                                 | 2022 | 164                    | 34%                                          |
|                                   | 2023 | 476                    |  |                                                   | 2023 | 164                    | 34%                                          |
|                                   | 2024 | 362                    |  |                                                   | 2024 | 140                    | 39%                                          |
| 2                                 | 2022 | 1840                   |  | 2                                                 | 2022 | 532                    | 29%                                          |
|                                   | 2023 | 1776                   |  |                                                   | 2023 | 605                    | 34%                                          |
|                                   | 2024 | 1501                   |  |                                                   | 2024 | 597                    | 40%                                          |
| 3                                 | 2022 | 2655                   |  | 3                                                 | 2022 | 722                    | 27%                                          |
|                                   | 2023 | 2679                   |  |                                                   | 2023 | 871                    | 33%                                          |
|                                   | 2024 | 2238                   |  |                                                   | 2024 | 793                    | 35%                                          |
| 4                                 | 2022 | 2385                   |  | 4                                                 | 2022 | 633                    | 27%                                          |
|                                   | 2023 | 2258                   |  |                                                   | 2023 | 708                    | 31%                                          |
|                                   | 2024 | 1989                   |  |                                                   | 2024 | 738                    | 37%                                          |

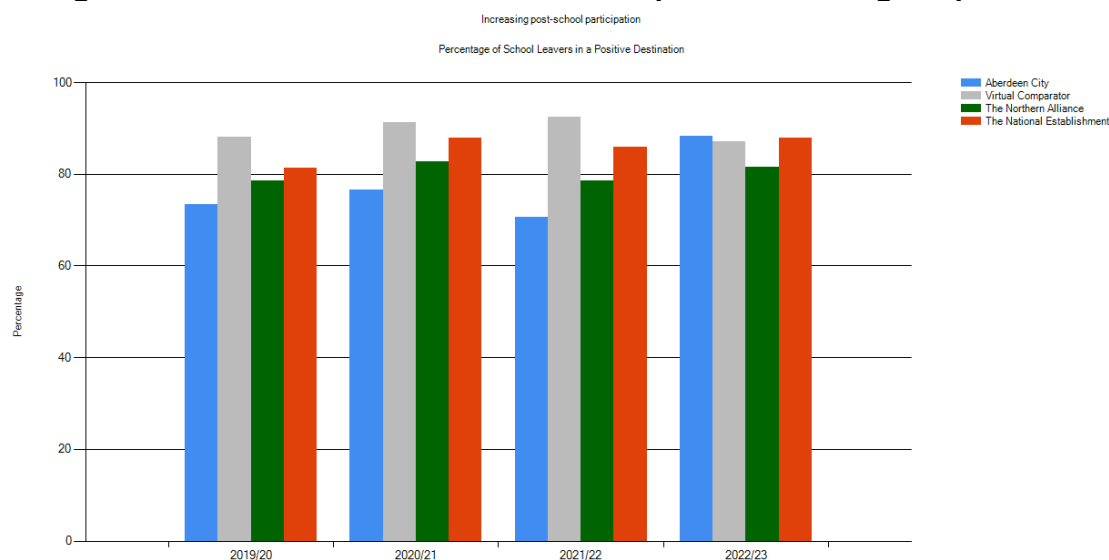
  

| Total Non-NQ (e.g. Wider Course) Completions in ACC |     |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Year                                                | Q1  | Q2  |
| 2022                                                | 149 | 289 |
| 2023                                                | 167 | 351 |
| 2024                                                | 187 | 399 |

- 4.5 It is important to note that the focus of this Project has been particularly for SCQF Levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 (see Figure 1.1 and 1.2. However, a raw count of all non-NQ courses (of any level) by Quintile shows that Quintiles 1 and 2 have increased year-on-year, both well in excess of the 10% target set within this Project. Going a little deeper into the data, when a count is made of the number of young people expressed as a proportion of their decile, who have taken at least one non-NQ award of any level in each year, the evidence shows that the percentage impacted has increased both in SIMD 1&2 (Quintile 1) and SIMD 3&4 (Quintile 2).
- 4.6 During the application process, approximately 900 applications were made to *ABZ Campus* courses, with selection taking place into the 31 courses available in Phase 1 thereafter. 392 places were taken by 372 young people from Aberdeen City secondary schools, this equates to approximately 36 places per school. For graded courses (e.g. Higher and Advanced Higher), those young people on *ABZ Campus* courses were, on average, sitting at between a C and a B during the February 2024 tracking period. This evidences that there is no notable difference in performance progress for those who are engaging in courses through *ABZ Campus* compared to those engaging with courses in their own school. For ungraded courses (e.g. a National Progression Award or Foundation Apprenticeship where the result is either a 'pass' or 'fail'), 80% of participants were 'on track'. Again, this suggests that progress is in keeping with peers undertaking courses in their own school.
- 4.7 The employability pilot currently contains 13 young people who are engaging with various services within Aberdeen City Council, including Roads, PCS and City Development and Regeneration. Although small in number, these young people are gaining valuable experiences both within school and workplace settings and, where they complete the course, will have a guaranteed job interview to look towards. Officers will track these 13 young people to judge the long-term success of this initiative.
- 4.8 During session 2023-24, the Pathways Advocates were involved in tracking and supporting 248 vulnerable young people. Of these young people, 202 were care experienced. The number of young people supported in each of the 11 schools has differed according to identified need with the number supported ranging from 9 to 57 per school. As the Pathways Advocate role is currently 0.2FTE for all schools, prioritisation has been required for those schools with greatest need, there may require to be consideration of an allocation that is proportionate to need as we move forwards. Of the current total of 248 young people, 58 received intensive or regular support, with Don locality (total of 114 supported with 23 intensive or regular) having the greatest number followed by Dee locality (total of 74 supported with 22 intensive or regular). Through the termly quality assurance visits, discussions about young people have resulted in bespoke and tailored interventions

including support for families and advice on the appropriateness of current plans. Attendance, positive relationships and progress in school were included in tracking for each young person, with these fluctuating across the session for differing reasons and often signalling a need for intervention. Of the 27 young people who have been closed to the Pathways Advocate, 25 have moved into a positive destination with the other 2 who have been identified as moving into a negative destination, having identified supports beyond school through Skills Development Scotland. Given the role is limited (0.2 FTE), there have been staffing changes for a number of the schools and, understandably, the impact has been best where there has been consistency of staffing, there is learning here for consideration as part of a fuller evaluation. One of the principal ways to measure the impact of Pathways Advocates would be to see improvements in positive destinations figures which are published in February each year as part of INSIGHT (the national attainment dashboard that provides schools with information about progress it is making). Although it would be too early to be definitive that Pathways Advocates have made all of the difference, there has been a 17.65% improvement in the figure for positive destinations for care experienced young people between 2022 and 2023. This can be seen in Figure 1.5 below. Given the relational aspect of supporting our most vulnerable young people, it is proposed that a full review of the Pathways Advocate role is provided for committee in 2025 to help inform how this provision dovetails with our emerging model of Family Support.

**Figure 1.7 Positive Destinations for Care Experienced Young People**

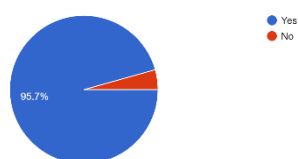


## **5. HOW HAVE OUR COMMUNITIES/PROTECTED GROUPS PARTICIPATED IN THE PROJECT AND THE IMPACT OF THIS**

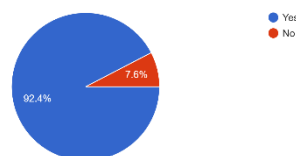
- 5.1 At the mid-point of Phase 1 of *ABZ Campus*, a survey of young people participating in courses was taken, and 97 responses were received. An early question was asked about the accessibility of the course information, and pleasingly almost all respondents reported that they found course information clear and easy to understand and almost all young people said the application process was straightforward. In relation to questions around welcome and value for courses, most young people were positive about their welcome and induction, and almost all felt immediately valued as part of the class. Most young people felt they received regular feedback on their progress and most rated the quality of the learning and teaching as good. In addition to the survey, a series of focus groups underlined the overall positive experiences being felt by young people in *ABZ Campus* courses with face-to-face conversations with the young people offering the opportunity to have a two-way dialogue which confirmed the responses from the young people's written responses.
- 5.2 A summary of some of the graphics relating to the voice of the young person in this survey is shown in figure 5. Clearly the desire of all connected with *ABZ Campus* is that our 'almost all' and 'most' returns are as close to 'all' as is possible, and we will continue to work with partners and schools to make the experience as positive as it can be.

## Figure 1.8 Feedback from young people participating in ABZ Campus

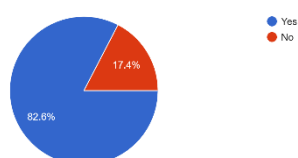
Question 2 Course Choice information was available on the ABZ Campus website and in the Course Choice booklet. How did you find the course...nformation - was it clear and easy to understand?  
92 responses



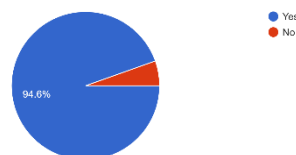
Question 3 How did you find the application process – was it straightforward?  
92 responses



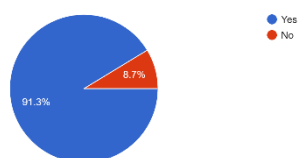
Question 4 On arrival to a new school or other provider, were you welcomed into the building and given an induction?  
92 responses



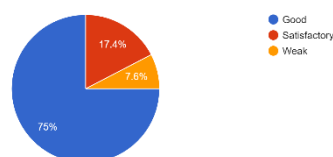
Question 5 Did you feel like a valued member of the class – were you treated equally?  
92 responses



Question 6 Did you get regular feedback on progress in their learning – in class learning conversations, reports?  
92 responses



Question 7 How did you find the quality of the learning and teaching?  
92 responses



## 6. HOW WILL WE SUSTAIN THESE IMPROVEMENTS?

- 6.1 Head Teachers in Aberdeen City Council Secondary Schools are committed to continuing their individual journeys towards a broad curriculum that meets the needs of all young people.
- 6.2 For ABZ Campus, work continues on a rolling cycle of development with preparations being made for young people to make choices ahead of Phase 3 of delivery in Session 2025-26. The role of ABZ Campus Curriculum Manager continues to play a key role in overseeing the operational delivery of courses, quality assuring this delivery, engaging with existing curriculum partners, and seeking out opportunities for collaboration with new partners. Over the past six months, five other local authorities have contacted the ABZ Campus Curriculum Manager to engage in discussions about the model of delivery and to explore whether there might be ways to work together. It is through collaboration that sustainability will be found.
- 6.3 Schools continue to work on ensuring a broad and relevant curriculum offer and, understandably, our schools are at different stages of this journey. To ensure sustainability, continued professional learning is planned and delivered by central officers and school senior leaders with expertise. For example, the process of effective timetabling is a crucial skill in delivering an efficient and creative curriculum. Central Officers have now delivered two annual training courses in effective timetabling, with the most recent course attracting delegates from Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Council school staff. Other bespoke curriculum professional learning takes place on a regular basis. Recently, four schools with investment from the Wood Foundation through the *Excelebrate* initiative showcased their developments in both curriculum and learning and teaching to all primary and secondary Head Teachers.

## 7. HOW WILL WE MONITOR THESE IMPROVEMENTS?

- 7.1 The role of the ABZ Campus Curriculum Manager in maintaining a strategic and operational oversight of delivery and development is fundamental to monitoring these improvements and will continue to do so.

7.2 Additionally, all secondary schools have engaged with a new monitoring and tracking programme, *PupilTracking*. This new system will allow schools to monitor the progress of young people sitting courses both in their schools and as part of ABZ Campus or consortium arrangements and will increasingly allow central officers to have a clear overview of progress collectively and across our schools.

## **8. OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALE UP AND SPREAD**

8.1 A broad curriculum must be balanced. This means that the focus for curriculum offers in all of our schools must continue to prioritise the 'highest and best' attainment that a young person can achieve. This means that exponential growth of new courses such as NPA, Foundation Apprenticeships and HNCs is not necessarily desirable if it is at the expense of National Qualifications (NQ). Therefore, although there is undoubtedly a need to continue this graduated increase in new courses, care will be taken to ensure this is meeting the test of 'highest and best'.

8.2 Scale up and spread can only take place where appropriate courses are available and can be funded. For example, there is a finite funding figure for our partners in delivering Foundation Apprenticeships and this means it is likely that our increase in FAs will shortly reach a ceiling based on that funding.

8.3 As mentioned in the section on sustainability, given the challenges over funding and balance, the real opportunity for further breadth and efficiency will come through seeking out opportunities to collaborate creatively with new and existing partners.

### **Recommendations for Action**

It is recommended that the CPA Management Group:

- i) Agree to recommend to the CPA Board in March 2025 that testing is concluded and that this Improvement Project is ended on the basis that the figures to date show that the aim has been achieved with a 56.6% increase from the baseline in 2021/22 and that systems are in place to continue to adapt and expand the curricular offer to meet pupil needs; and
- ii) Note that the dataset for the overall aim will continue to be reported via the Children's Services Board and through the annual outcome report to ensure progress is monitored.

### **Opportunities and Risks**

Opportunities:

- The continued collaborative approach taken by our eleven secondary schools should provide opportunities for further collective 'wider' SCQF courses to be offered.
- Reaching further out to our neighbouring local authorities could extend this opportunity for a further increase in 'wider' SCQF courses.
- As raising attainment is an 'outcome' of all that is done in school to improve learning, teaching and the curriculum, improvements in attainment often follow behind changes in schools. Therefore, the continued hard work of our secondary schools should continue to yield benefits as these outcomes are realised.

Risks:

- A reduction to the funding of providers of Foundation Apprenticeships would place a ceiling on the potential for any further increase in these particular courses.
- With the publication of reviews of curriculum and qualifications (for example Hayward & Withers) underlining the importance of a *parity of esteem* between traditional and newer courses, any change to this intention would be likely to cause young people and families to hesitate before opting for these courses as part of their basket of qualifications.

### **CONSULTATION**

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6.4 Project Team<br>Stretch Outcome 6 Subgroup<br>Children's Services Board |
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