



Education

HOW YOUR COUNCIL PERFORMED IN 1995/96

Introduction

Each year, councils publish a range of information to show people how well they are providing their services in comparison with previous years and how they compare with other councils.

For 1995/96, councils were required to report information about 11 performance indicators for their education service. This leaflet contains information on five of those indicators relating to:

- pre-school education
- the size of primary school classes
- the occupancy levels of primary schools
- the occupancy levels of secondary schools
- the assessment of special educational needs.

The information in this leaflet covers the years 1993/94 to 1995/96 and is important for two reasons. Firstly, it shows what performance standards have been achieved in the years leading up to local government reorganisation in April 1996. Secondly, it shows standards against which to measure the work of the new councils following reorganisation.

The Commission has published a comprehensive report on the information for all the services for which there are performance indicators. This provides more detailed analysis of the information over the three years 1993/94 to 1995/96.

Using the information

For each activity we have set out why some of the differences in performance may have arisen. We also highlight particular features of the information - for example, the range in performance achieved by different councils. However, we do not explain why a council has achieved a particular level of performance or what should be regarded as 'good' or 'bad' performance.

Several factors affect the way a council performs its activities. You need to be aware of these in order to understand why results may vary. Some of these factors are outwith the control of the council - for example, population size and density, geographical area, and the mix between urban and rural settlements. Others may be specific to a particular service or the groups of people it serves. These local factors may mean that a council with a performance which, at first sight, appears to be worse than that of another has, in fact, done better given the more difficult circumstances it faces.

Before the reorganisation of council services in April 1996, education services were provided by the nine regional councils and three islands councils.

The Commission required them to publish information on pre-school (nursery), primary and secondary education. However, councils are

not required by law to provide pre-school education and Western Isles Islands Council did not do so during 1995/96.

The Scottish Office publishes a range of information about examination pass levels and absenteeism for each school, in accordance with the requirements of the Parent's

Charter. Therefore, the Commission does not duplicate this.

Some of the information referred to in this pamphlet is not shown in either the tables or the charts. It is, however, available in the Commission's full national report.

INDICATOR 1

The percentage of pupils enrolled in Primary 1 with experience of Education Department pre-school education.

What the indicator reports

This indicator highlights the extent to which a pre-school education service was provided by each council's Education Department.

Pre-school education offered by councils is generally in nursery classes attached to primary schools or in separate nursery schools. Both cater mainly for four-year-olds due to enter primary school in the following year. However, for a variety of reasons, places may also be available for younger children.

Points to bear in mind

The experience offered by councils may vary widely in:

- educational quality
- the length of time for which a child has a place
- the hours per week for which a child attends.

It may also vary between different parts of a council's area.

A pre-school place comprises five morning and five afternoon sessions. Typically each place is shared between two or more children.

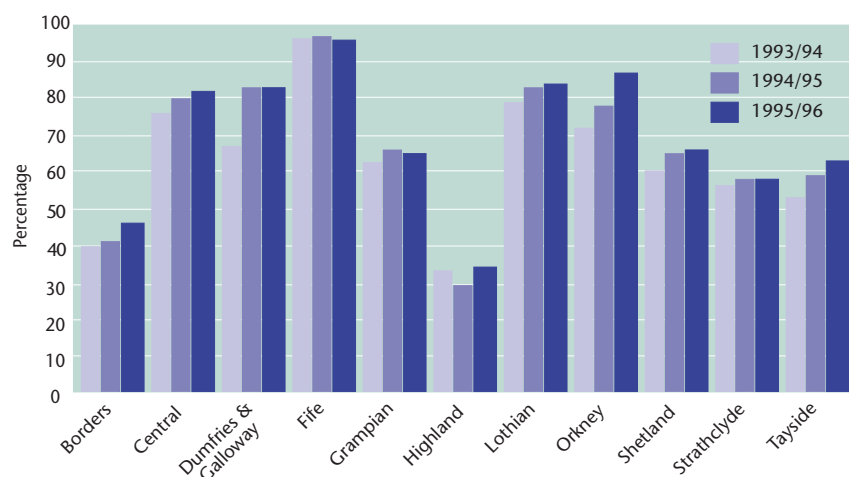
Information on the percentage of Primary 1 pupils who received pre-school education from non-council providers is not available to the Commission.

Commentary

Eleven councils provided a pre-school service in 1995/96. Within these councils the proportion of children entering Primary 1 with experience of Education Department pre-school education varied from 34% to 96%.

Seven councils increased the proportion of children with such experience, compared with 1994/95 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The percentage of Primary 1 children with Education Department pre-schooling



The percentage of single-year and composite primary school classes with pupil numbers of:

- 15 or less
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31 or more.

What the indicator reports

This indicator shows the proportions of classes of different sizes in primary schools and the extent to which each council uses composite classes.

Composite classes are those where at least two year groups (e.g. Primary 4 and 5) are taught in the same teaching area or class at the same time. Councils use composite classes where there are low numbers of pupils or where the school has to adjust class sizes to meet the number of available teachers.

Maximum class sizes for single-year and composite classes in primary schools are subject to a national agreement in Scotland. The maximum is 33 pupils for single-year classes and 25 pupils for composite classes. Table 2 shows information on single-year classes of more than and less than 30 pupils and on composite classes of more than and less than 25 pupils.

Points to bear in mind

Changes in the number of children starting school each year will result in some variation between years in:

- the total number of classes
- the balance between composite and single-year classes.

Commentary

In 1995/96 there were 17,620 classes in council primary schools. Of these, 12,756 (72%) were single-year classes and 4,864 (28%) were composite classes.

There was wide variation between councils in the proportion of classes within each of the defined bands. For example:

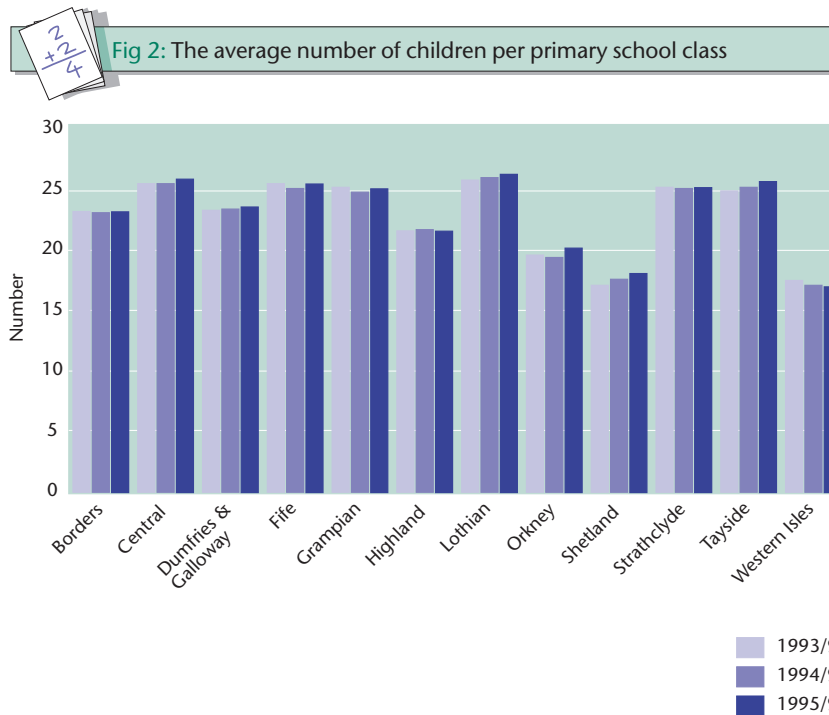
- the percentage of all classes with 15 pupils or less varied from 1% to 41%
- the percentage of classes with between 16 and 20 pupils varied from 9% to 30%
- the percentage of classes with 21 to 25 pupils ranged between 19% and 41%
- the percentage of classes with 26 to 30 pupils ranged between 4% and 37%
- the percentage of classes with 31 pupils or more ranged between 1% and 19%.

Nine of the 12 councils had a small proportion of composite classes with more than 25 pupils, i.e. greater than the nationally agreed maximum number for composite classes.

The average number of pupils per class of any type varied from 17 to 26 and has not changed significantly since 1993/94 (Figure 2).

Table 2: The proportion of single-year and composite primary classes of different sizes

Council	Single-year classes		Composite classes	
	0-30 pupils (%)	31 or more pupils (%)	0-25 pupils (%)	26 or more pupils (%)
Borders	50.9	7.1	40.2	1.8
Central	57.6	17.6	24.4	0.4
Dumfries & Galloway	39.7	11.3	48.6	0.4
Fife	59.4	12.0	28.4	0.2
Grampian	52.9	12.5	34.4	0.2
Highland	40.6	6.0	53.2	0.1
Lothian	62.4	19.1	18.3	0.2
Orkney	58.5	2.1	39.4	0.0
Shetland	53.0	1.0	46.0	0.0
Strathclyde	64.1	14.4	21.2	0.2
Tayside	54.7	16.1	28.6	0.6
Western Isles	13.0	3.0	84.0	0.0



INDICATOR 3

Occupancy. The percentage of primary schools where the ratio of pupils to available places is:

- 40% or less
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- 81% or more.

What the indicator reports

This indicator shows the proportion of each council's primary schools within each of the four occupancy bands.

The occupancy level is a measure of how many of the places available for pupils in a school have been taken up. For example, if a school has 150 places and 120 are filled, the occupancy level is 80%. Each council determines the number of places that are available in its schools.

Points to bear in mind

Councils have some discretion in the way they measure occupancy levels and there may, therefore, be minor differences between them. Some of the factors which may be important are:

- whether or not gymnasiums are counted as teaching rooms
- how non-teaching rooms are treated
- how rooms used for only part of the curriculum are treated
- whether surplus accommodation is given over to community and other use and is no longer treated as available for school use.

The variation in the number of primary schools between councils means that a small percentage of schools in a large council may represent more schools than a high percentage in a small council. For example, 10% of primary schools in Highland Region is 20, while 50% in Orkney is 12 schools.

Commentary

For primary schools, Table 3a shows that nationally:

- 9% (212) had an occupancy level of 40% or less
- almost a quarter (568) had an occupancy level of 41% - 60%
- approximately a third (767) had occupancy levels of 61% to 80%
- the proportion of schools that had occupancy levels of 81% or more was 34%, an increase of 3% compared with 1993/94.

Since 1993/94, eight councils have reduced the proportion of primary schools with an occupancy level of less than 60%.

The proportion of primary schools in the different occupancy bands varied widely between councils. Half of the councils had at least four out of every ten of their schools with occupancy levels of 81% or higher while two, Shetland and Western Isles, had more than half of their primary schools with occupancy levels below 60% (Table 3b).

Table 3a: The percentage and number of primary schools in each occupancy band

	Occupancy band								Total schools
	40% or less		41%-60%		61%-80%		81% or more		
	%	number of schools	%	number of schools	%	number of schools	%	number of schools	
1995/96	9.1	212	24.4	568	32.9	767	33.7	785	2332
1994/95	8.7	204	23.6	552	34.4	803	33.2	776	2335
1993/94	9.2	216	24.9	583	34.9	816	31.0	726	2341

Table 3b: The percentage of primary schools in each occupancy band

Council	Occupancy band			
	40% or less	41%-60%	61%-80%	81% or more
Borders	2.7	11.0	32.9	53.4
Central	14.0	30.0	38.0	18.0
Dumfries & Galloway	8.6	17.2	47.5	26.7
Fife	2.1	17.2	30.3	50.3
Grampian	5.1	14.7	27.8	52.4
Highland	13.6	28.8	35.4	22.2
Lothian	5.4	21.3	25.9	47.3
Orkney	17.4	8.7	26.1	47.8
Shetland	17.0	40.0	29.0	14.0
Strathclyde	10.3	28.9	36.0	24.8
Tayside	9.7	20.4	25.8	44.1
Western Isles	18.2	52.3	22.7	6.8

The percentage of secondary schools where the ratio of pupils to places is:

- 40% or less
- 41-60%
- 61-80%
- 81% or more.

Commentary

Table 4a shows that nationally:

- 6% of schools (24) had an occupancy level of 40% or less
- one in six schools (66) had an occupancy level of 41% - 60%
- just over a quarter (111) had occupancy levels of 61% to 80%
- the proportion of schools that had occupancy levels of 81% or more was 50%, an increase of 8% compared with 1993/94.

Since 1993/94, six councils have reduced the proportion of secondary schools with an occupancy level below 60%.

The proportion of secondary schools in the different occupancy bands varied widely. Eight councils had less than one in five of their schools with occupancy levels of less than 60% while two, Orkney and Western Isles, had half or more (Table 4b).

What the indicator reports

This indicator reports information on secondary school occupancy levels, similar to the information for primary schools reported in indicator 3 above.

Points to bear in mind

The points to bear in mind for this indicator are similar to those

for indicator 3 above.

The variation in school numbers between councils means that a small percentage in a large council may represent more schools than a high percentage in a small council. For example, 10% of secondary schools in Lothian Region is five, while 50% in Orkney is three schools.

Table 4a: The percentage and number of secondary schools in each occupancy band

	Occupancy band								Total schools
	40% or less		41%-60%		61%-80%		81% or more		
	(%)	Number of schools	(%)	Number of schools	(%)	Number of schools	(%)	Number of schools	
1995/96	5.9	24	16.3	66	27.5	111	50.2	203	404
1994/95	5.9	24	17.1	69	30.0	121	47.0	190	404
1993/94	7.9	32	16.7	68	33.2	135	42.3	172	407

Table 4b: The percentage of secondary schools in each occupancy band

Council	Occupancy band			
	40% or less	41%-60%	61%-80%	81% or more
Borders	0.0	0.0	11.2	88.8
Central	0.0	11.0	28.0	61.0
Dumfries & Galloway	6.3	31.3	62.4	0.0
Fife	0.0	5.3	26.3	68.4
Grampian	2.6	5.3	7.9	84.2
Highland	3.7	11.1	18.5	66.7
Lothian	6.5	2.2	21.7	69.6
Orkney	16.6	33.4	33.4	16.6
Shetland	12.0	0.0	44.0	44.0
Strathclyde	7.1	23.5	33.5	35.9
Tayside	3.2	16.1	16.1	64.6
Western Isles	20.0	33.3	26.7	20.0

INDICATOR 5

The average time taken to complete an assessment of special educational needs.

What the indicator reports

This indicator reports the average length of time which it takes each council to carry out an assessment of a child over the age of five who may have special educational needs.

A pupil's special educational needs may need to be assessed if the child has some learning difficulty, physical disability, psychological problem, or any combination of these. These needs cannot normally be met from the resources ordinarily available in schools.

Following an assessment, the council must notify the child's parent or guardian as to whether or not it intends to record the child as having special educational needs, and the reasons for its decision. The council is obliged to provide for the special educational needs of a child for whom it creates a record of need.

Points to bear in mind

The key factors which influence this indicator are:

- the efficiency of professional and administrative input
- the number and complexity of the referrals received.

In some cases, an assessment is delayed to allow for a change in a child's circumstances or personal

development. For example, when a child is approaching the move from primary to secondary school, the assessment may be timed to coincide with this event. In other cases, a longer time to complete an assessment is agreed with the parents or guardian of a child, or stems from a request from them for a delay.

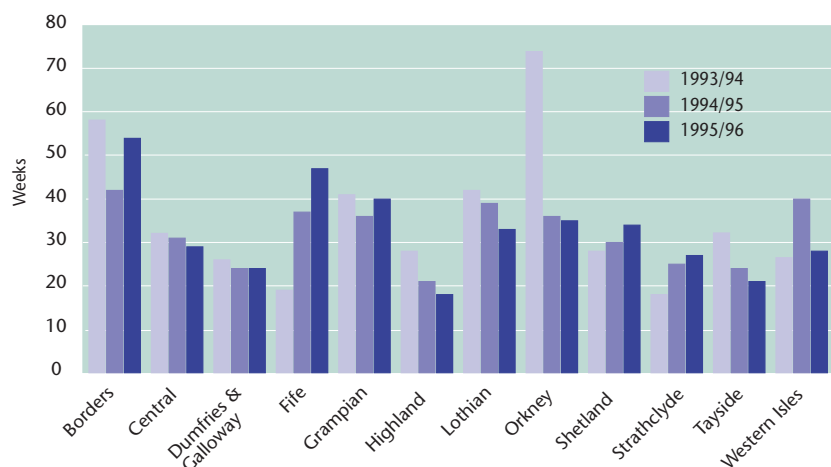
Commentary

Half of the councils completed assessments in an average time of 29 weeks or less, with the others taking an average time of between 33 weeks and 54 weeks (Figure 5).

Six of the councils reduced the average time to undertake an assessment in 1995/96, compared with 1994/95.

Across Scotland, the total number of special educational needs assessments carried out during the year was 2,284, down from 2,674 in 1994/95.

Figure 5: Average time taken to complete educational needs assessments



The Accounts Commission for Scotland is a statutory, independent body which through the audit process assists local authorities and the health service in Scotland to achieve the highest standards of financial stewardship and the economic, efficient and effective use of their resources.

The Commission has published similar pamphlets for other services. These are:

Police and fire services
Housing
Social work
Protecting you and your environment

Copies of all the pamphlets in this series, and the Commission's national report covering all the performance indicators for a wide range of council services, are available from your council office; your library; or the Accounts Commission for Scotland.



18 George Street
Edinburgh EH2 2QU
Telephone 0131 477 1234
<http://www.scot-ac.gov.uk>