

## **Flexible Pathways at Linlithgow Academy**

Linlithgow Academy is a non-denominational secondary school situated in West Lothian with a catchment area including Linlithgow and surrounding villages. The roll is currently 1230 young people. Most young people attending the school live in SIMD areas 7–10 with low numbers of young people living within SIMD bands 2-5. One of our associated primary schools is a Scottish Attainment Challenge school.

The senior phase curriculum is delivered through a 33 period asymmetric week, which includes 10 minute registration each morning. The structure of the senior phase supports our particular context and delivers our curriculum aims which include:

- ensure progression for all pupils;
- maximise attainment and achievement; and
- increase sustained positive destinations for all our learners.

Our full curriculum rationale can be found on [our website](#).

### **Senior Phase Pathways**

At the end of S3 pupils select six courses. These can be combinations of the routes below.

- One-year route to National 4 (presented at end of S4).
- Two-year route to National 5 (N4 in year 1, presented at end of S4, exit from subject possible).
- Two-year route to Higher (H) (N5 in year 1, bypass possible , exit possible).

In the two-year routes, work is enhanced during year 1 with work from the SCQF level above.

- N4 courses are blended with N5 work where appropriate and possible.
- N5 courses are blended with H work where appropriate and possible.

Flexibility is built into the two-year routes.

- Young people starting at N4 and excelling early can achieve units at N5 by the end of S4.
- Young people starting at N4 or N5 in a subject can be presented at the end of S4 and then request to change to another subject in S5. This would allow certification in the subject at the end of S4 before leaving it to study a different subject.

We use performance data along with teacher recommendations to support choices. Support staff discuss the best starting point to secure the strongest possible end-point, using assessment information about each pupil's academic profile together with

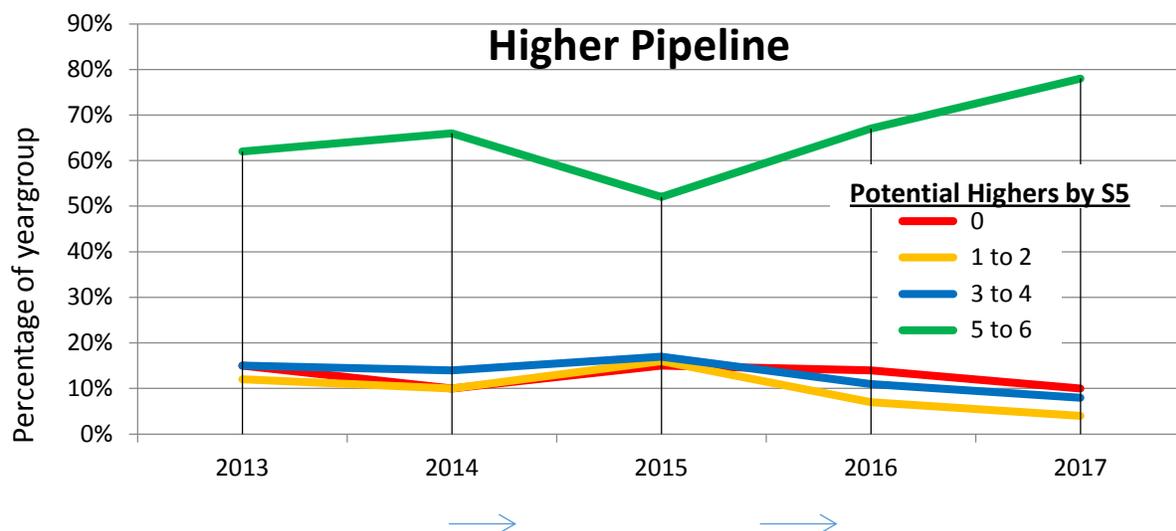
teachers' professional judgement. An academic profile provides a summary of a young person's progress through the broad general education based on a range of evidence including standardised assessments and periodic assessment (see below).



### A pupil profile may suggest

- 6 x N5 at end of S4 is possible but that 6 x H at the end of S5 is unlikely. In this case, we would agree an aspirational target of 2H or 3H or 4H at start of S4 and, towards the end of S4, review the assessment evidence to agree which subjects to take forward to H in S5.
- During S4, progress would be tracked and the pupil would be advised either
  - to sit all six N5 courses in order to select the strongest subjects to continue to Higher based on an actual N5 result
  - or
  - to bypass N5 in their very strong subjects and continue straight on to Higher and be presented at N5 in S4 in the subjects where there is less confidence of a pass.

The graph below shows how the number of students starting on two-year routes to Higher has changed over the last 5 years. Through a rigorous monitoring and tracking process the presentation levels are managed on an individual basis. This maximises opportunity for attainment and flexibility during S5 and also maintains aspiration. The dip in numbers in 2015 was due to dip in confidence of staff during S3 recommendations and also the much lower predicted performance of the year group (based on CAT tests). The graph on the following page shows how the 2013 and 2014 cohorts performed in 2015 and 2016 respectively.



- During S4, staff will ensure that exit via N5 presentation is possible but will also be blending in Higher material where possible and appropriate to maximise attainment in S5.
- There is potential for pupils to continue with only 5 subjects to Higher with the expectation of securing accreditation in one or more wider achievement courses or work experience relevant to their target destination.

Further [examples of learning pathways](#) can be found within our curriculum rationale on our website.

### **Benefits of two year programmes of study at Linlithgow Academy**

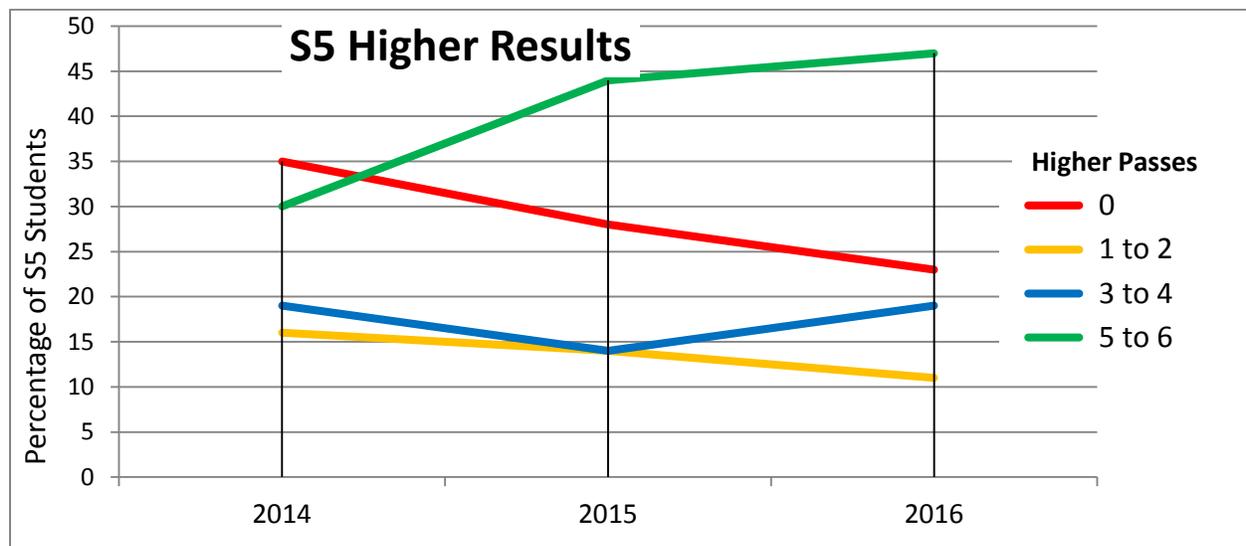
Two year pathways have resulted in strong attainment for the highest achievers at Linlithgow Academy. However, the flexibility of our model appears to be supporting attainment across a wider group of learners. Factors influencing improvements in the breadth and depth of qualifications young people achieve include robust school-wide monitoring and tracking and evidence-based course choice recommendations.

Early signs indicate that pupils with a range of attainment profiles are taking advantage of the shift to less traditional and more flexible pathways within the curriculum. For example, pupils studying at Higher are also incorporating other accredited awards at SCQF level 6 into their timetable or benefitting from opportunities for wider achievement

through work experience. The increased engagement with flexible routes across all SCQF levels is creating a parity of esteem across the range of different pathways that was not previously there.

Maintaining six subjects in S4 and S5 allows for real flexibility and opportunity for increased attainment at all levels. The choice of six courses in S5 allows those leaving school at this stage to achieve five qualifications along with some work experience or to embark on HNC courses during S5. Our model encourages and celebrates individual pathways.

The graph below shows the impact on Higher passes as a result of the increased numbers entering the Higher pipeline in S4 outlined in the previous graph. In 2013 we started with 62% of pupils on 5 or 6 two-year Higher routes. When presented in 2015 you can see that 43% of S5 attained 5 or 6 Higher passes. The other important trend shown is reduction in the number of pupils gaining fewer than 3 Highers and in particular those gaining none. We believe this can be attributed to the aspirational choices of two-year routes followed by the flexibility of our model which allows pupils to identify and continue with the strongest subjects at Higher level.



There can be a greater depth of study when pupils have committed to the subject for a two-year period. Blending learning at different SCQF levels maintains the level of challenge and prepares pupils for the next level in a two-year course.

## **Features Linlithgow Academy found essential for delivery of two year programmes of study**

### **Monitoring and tracking**

Two year courses require reliable and robust monitoring and tracking to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved for young people.

Sound understanding of national standards and the consistent application of these when assessing progress are essential. This ensures interventions can be planned in a timely manner. As a result, pupils are presented at the most appropriate levels in subjects.

Rigorous and reliable monitoring and tracking must be embedded into the broad general education to ensure that the assessment information leading to S3 recommendations is robust and that pupils start out on a pathway that will allow maximum achievement and opportunity to excel.

A validated self-evaluation review within the school confirmed feedback already received from pupils and parents. All agreed that that our S3 course was preparing pupils for the rigour required in the senior phase. Staff reviewed S3 to ensure that it was sufficiently robust and provided the platform for pace and challenge in the senior phase.

### **Parental engagement**

Our highly engaged Parent Council asked searching questions and provided valuable feedback from the wider parent body as the model developed. Confidence regarding the presentation model was built through regular and clear communication with pupils and parents. Information was bespoke to year groups to reduce confusion caused by dialogue across the school community.

Pupils and parents reported that there was a high level of anxiety before the SQA diet among pupils who had not until that point undertaken any formal exams, particularly among girls. Allowing flexibility to sit one or two exams in a diet at the end of S4 through personal choice has resolved this issue.

A number of factors are taken into account before decisions are taken about presentation. This includes:

- academic progress over the course of S4;
- the combined demand on young people when the number and level of the courses they have undertaken is considered together;
- teacher professional judgement;
- indications from S3 standardised testing; and
- the views of the pupil and their parents.

Agreement is reached between pupil, parents and school staff ensuring there is a shared understanding of the reasons for the chosen pathway.

The academic profile of pupils who have bypassed qualifications can look unusual to some employers, colleges or universities. To reassure parents and pupils, Linlithgow Academy pastoral staff outline the presentation model when writing college, UCAS or employment applications and references. This ensures that outside parties are fully informed about why the candidate has no S4 qualifications and they can consider the applications alongside more traditional pathways.

### **Planning to maximise use of time**

At Linlithgow Academy, staff created timelines to make maximum use of the two years available while ensuring that pupils can exit with either full course accreditation or a combination of unit passes. This may have to be revisited in light of recent changes to NQ courses.

A recurring issue for parents was around making the most effective use of time in lessons when some pupils are sitting qualifications while others are bypassing. Motivating and challenging young people in the same class who are on different routes can be challenging. Initially this was addressed through skills development, for example, the use of open-ended tasks that required skills that would be used in the next level of course. The expectation is that all pupils should be in a position to be presented for a qualification at the end of S4 although not all will be. A timeline that involves preparation for possible presentation at the end of S4 ensures that pupils refocus on entry to S5 even if they do not sit the N5 exam.

Over the period of the two year course, time available is above the suggested time needed for completion of the NQs.

Occasionally pupils decide to change pathway or leave school before the end of the two year course. By ensuring exit pathways are in place, pupils can change their plans and be rewarded for work they have completed. Staff need to have a solid understanding of assessment procedures and SQA requirements to allow exit points **with accreditation** for pupils on two year routes.

### **Commitment of staff**

Staff are engaged in an on-going cycle of evaluation and refinement of course materials, timelines, assessment and moderation of their own professional judgement to ensure the best outcomes for our learners. Staff commitment is central to the success of our presentation model.