

Scotland's £1750 Union dividend revealed

23 Aug 2017



People in Scotland benefited from a Union dividend of £1750 per head last year, according to new figures released today on Scotland's finances.

This is an increase on the £1600 boost set out in last year's Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS) figures.

The annual GERS analysis reveals that, in 2016-17, public spending per person in Scotland was £13,175 – compared with £11,739 for the whole of the UK, a difference of £1437.

In addition, the average raised in taxes per head for the whole UK is £11,035, compared with £10,722 in Scotland, a gap of £312.

It means the Union dividend is the greatest since GERS records began in 1998.

The new figures also expose the scale of the SNP's deception prior to the 2014 referendum, when it insisted a Yes vote would boost prosperity.

In fact – for the first year of what would have been independence Scotland ran a deficit of 8.3% – higher than any EU member state, and double that of Spain, the next highest.

The SNP claimed that, in 2016-17, Scotland would earn between £6.8 billion and £7.9 billion from oil taxes, helping to sustain spending on schools and hospitals.

The true figure, today's figures show, was £208 million.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"Today's figures confirm the facts – Scotland is better off as part of the United Kingdom.

"All of us last year received a Union dividend of £1750 per head.

"The truth is that when times are tough – as they have been in Scotland over the last few years – we can rely on the weight of the whole UK to ensure schools, hospitals and public services remain decently funded.

"These figures also confirm just how wrong the SNP got it during the referendum campaign.

"In 2014, Alex Salmond and Nicola Sturgeon looked Scottish families in the eye and insisted we'd be better off.

“In fact, in the first year of independence, Scotland would have been staring at the biggest deficit in Europe.

“The task ahead is clear.

“Rather than banging on and on about independence, Nicola Sturgeon must focus on using the huge powers at her disposal to try and build up Scotland’s economy, so we close the gap between the amount we spend and the amount we earn.

“And she should have the humility to accept where she got it wrong.

“These figures confirm that her independence day – set for March 2016 – would have been our insolvency day.

“That is the bullet we dodged by voting No.”

To see the full document, visit:

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/08/7201>

[Business rates system ‘needs overhaul, not tinkering round the edges’](#)

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- Business rates system ‘needs overhaul, not tinkering round the edges’

22 Aug 2017



A review into business rates merely tinkers round the edges when the overhaul of a broken system is required, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

The Barclay Review, released today, sought to address concerns from businesses of all sizes across the country about the current regime.

It follows a revaluation earlier this year which sent various firms to the brink, with some facing astronomical increases in tax.

And while the report by Ken Barclay contains some welcome measures, shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said the changes don’t go far enough for many.

He said the hospitality sector would require more assistance, and with the current 15 per cent rates rise cap running out in March, many could find

themselves in the same difficult position in 2018, meaning the prospect of closures and job losses in the industry.

Concern was also expressed about proposals to levy rates on sports clubs and council arm's-length bodies, which hardly tie in with Scottish Government plans to get people more active.

Moves to levy rates on independent schools could also harm economies in certain parts of the country, and impact the quality of education at some of Scotland's best facilities.

However, the suggestion to bring the large business supplement in line with the rest of the UK has been welcomed, with the Scottish Conservatives having called on this move for some time.

Other proposals to encourage business growth and keep shops in town centres are also worthy inclusions, the party said.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“There are many welcome proposals within this report.

“But many firms will feel this is tinkering round the edges of a broken system, rather than the fundamental overhaul that's required.

“The hospitality sector, whose safeguard of a 14.9 per cent cap runs out in March, will be worried that history will repeat itself next year.

“If that industry is hit with the kind of increases suggested last time around, it would almost certainly mean the closure of businesses and job losses.

“Proposals around independent schools and sports clubs will also have alarm bells ringing in those sectors.

“But there are also many welcome additions, and I hope the Scottish Government prioritises recommendations to bring the large business supplement in line with the rest of the UK, and the measures to boost town centres and business growth more generally.”

To see the full report, visit:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00523643.pdf>

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- Scotland should pursue volunteer tuition to close attainment gap

20 Aug 2017



The Scottish Government should back volunteer programmes which provide tuition for pupils from deprived backgrounds, the Scottish Conservatives have said today.

Elsewhere in the UK, government-funded schemes sign up volunteers from the local community to provide extra tuition for children from low-income families.

Tuition is accepted as one of the most effective ways to improve pupil attainment – but can cost anywhere between £20 to £40 an hour.

Charities such as Action Tutoring – backed by funding from the Cabinet Office – have recruited volunteers in London, Liverpool, Birmingham and Sheffield to provide tuition free of charge.

With the Scottish Government having set up its own attainment fund, there is an opportunity for support to be given to projects in Scotland to see if it can help boost performance.

One such scheme – the Volunteer Tutors Organisation in Glasgow – recently issued a call for more support.

The plan comes with the Scottish Conservatives using pupils' return to school this week to set out a series of ideas that may boost attainment in Scottish education.

Scottish Conservative further education spokesman Oliver Mundell said:

“Extra tuition is recognised as one of the best ways to give students an extra leg up.

“But for too many children from low income families, they are simply priced out of the market.

“Across the UK, charities which provide volunteer tuition for disadvantaged children are doing fantastic work levelling out the playing field.

“All parties in Scotland want to reduce the attainment gap, and we believe the Scottish Government could look to see what help it can provide to do more.

“Rather than spend yet more public money on bureaucracy, the SNP government might consider giving support to charities which can ensure disadvantaged pupils get the tuition they need, but can’t currently afford.”

There are projects up and running in England which have been part-funded by the Cabinet Office:

<http://actiontutoring.org.uk/>

<http://www.nesta.org.uk/centre-social-action-innovation-fund-young-people>

However, volunteer programmes in Scotland have recently warned they are struggling for funds.

<http://www.vto.btck.co.uk/>

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- Blow for rehabilitation as fewer inmates involved in purposeful activity

18 Aug 2017



More than 1000 prisoners in Scotland aren’t engaged in work or purposeful activity, new figures have revealed.

It means 17 per cent of inmates aren’t taking meaningful steps towards rehabilitation.

According to the Scottish Prison Service, there are currently 6266 inmates north of the border.

Of those, 3696 are enrolled in work programmes with a further 2338 carrying out what guidelines deem “purposeful activity”.

Such programmes have been shown in the past to have a significant positive impact on reoffending and prospects of rehabilitation.

Once the 215 signed off sick are stripped out, that leaves 1118 doing

nothing, despite the SNP government saying it wanted to improve activity in jails.

Analysis has also revealed a reduction in those putting their time in prison to good use.

In the space of two years, the number of hours taken up by work or activity has fallen by 300,000, with inmates now doing an average of an hour less per week.

And some prisons have far more inmates than they do spaces for work and activity.

At HMP Edinburgh there are 541 work and activity spaces for 888 offenders, while at the newly renovated Low Moss, 755 inmates have to make do with 343 slots.

The Scottish Conservatives – who obtained the data through Freedom of Information – have repeatedly called for prisoners to be given work or education in jail, both to boost the chances of rehabilitation and pay something back to society.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Liam Kerr said:

“Every prisoner should be compelled to either work or take part in some kind of meaningful activity while they’re in jail.

“Evidence shows that this will boost their chances of successfully reintegrating upon release no end, and forces them to pay back something to society in the process.

“But these figures show more than 1000 criminals are not doing this and, in some parts of the country, there simply aren’t enough spaces for them.

“This will do nothing to reduce reoffending for those who are simply sitting inside twiddling their thumbs, watching TV or playing computer games at the taxpayer’s expense.

“Prison is there to keep the public safe and to act as a deterrent to anyone considering criminal behaviour.

“But in addition to that its role in rehabilitation is critical, and we have to make sure every single inmate is involved in that vital process.”

To see the full FoI responses from the Scottish Prison Service, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/HQ17078-Data.pdf>

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/HQ17078.pdf>

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- Deprived Scots pupils less likely to get to university than rUK counterparts

17 Aug 2017



The number of Scottish pupils from deprived areas winning a place at university is significantly behind the equivalent statistic for England.

Today, youngsters south of the border received exam results, and figures from UCAS have revealed that 16.5 per cent who secured a place at university are from the least wealthy areas.

In comparison, the same number for Scotland is just 11.9 per cent.

And for those from the second poorest backgrounds – deemed to be in the 20-40 per cent bracket – 22 per cent secured university places on results day.

However, the same figure for Scotland was just 17.8 per cent.

It's the latest set of statistics showing the SNP government is doing less than its Westminster counterparts in getting those from most deprived backgrounds into higher education.

It also calls into question the nationalists' policy of universal free tuition, which is now shown to be unsuccessful in closing the attainment gap.

In today's *Scotsman*, former senior SNP minister Kenny MacAskill even acknowledged that Scotland would have to move towards some kind of tuition fees approach, and that the Scottish Government's way has "hit support for the poorest".

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"These figures show clearly that it's much easier for a pupil from a deprived background in England to get to university than it is in Scotland.

"The SNP has had more than a decade to address this, but it has failed.

"This SNP government now owes generations of disadvantaged youngsters an

explanation – why are their contemporaries south of the border significantly more likely to get to university?

“This also blows a hole in the SNP’s policy of universal free tuition.

“It blatantly is not working, is harming universities financially and – as Kenny MacAskill has now admitted – is reducing opportunity for those who need it the most.

“We need a radical rethink from the Scottish Government, or more children from the poorest backgrounds will be placed at a stark disadvantage to those just a few hundred miles away.”