

SNP cause 'Scotland-specific economic shock'

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22 May 2018



The economy is facing a 'Scotland-specific economic shock' – a term enshrined in law, used to describe a set of poor economic indicators that only apply to north of the border.

This was confirmed by Andrew Chapman from the Scottish Government Fiscal Responsibility Division at the Holyrood Finance and Constitution Committee this morning.

The 2016 Fiscal Framework states that a 'Scotland-specific economic shock' is when annual Scottish GDP growth is both below one per cent, and one percentage point below GDP growth in the UK.

This can be based on either projections, or the most recent backwards-looking outturn data. The annual growth rate can be based on any four quarters, compared to the next four quarters.

The Scottish Government's most recent GDP statistics state that Scottish GDP grew by 0.75 per cent between the whole year of 2016 and the whole year of 2017 – meeting the first criteria.

In the same period, UK growth was 1.78 per cent, so the full gap between the Scottish and UK growth was 1.03 per cent.

Between 2016 and 2017, the Scottish economy therefore met both criteria for a 'Scotland specific economic shock'.

If these criteria were met for just one more quarter, then additional borrowing powers could be triggered by the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary said:

"This clearly highlights the scale of the economic crisis Scotland is currently in.

"The criteria for a 'Scotland-specific economic shock' has been met.

"There is no room for excuses from Nicola Sturgeon – this is a shock made in Bute House.

“The SNP has failed to energise the economy, preferring to write strategies and create quangos rather than deal with the systemic issues Scotland faces.

“It is absolutely clear that the last thing Scotland’s economy now needs is another divisive referendum.

“The SNP’s independence referendum plan will not distract the Scottish public from Scotland’s grim economic performance.

“Surely now the SNP must wake up, stop penalising Scots with tax increases, focus on productivity and start encouraging businesses.”

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- Subject choice reduction a ‘scandal’ in Scotland’s schools

17 May 2018



The dwindling number of subjects school pupils can choose from should trigger a parliamentary inquiry, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Leader Ruth Davidson described the situation as a “scandal” at First Minister’s Questions today, after it emerged the majority of schools only offer six choices to S4 pupils.

In addition, an inequalities gap has also been revealed.

In schools in wealthy parts of the country, children have a 70 per cent of being able to choose between 12 or more Advanced Highers.

However, just two schools in Scotland’s most deprived zones have those same opportunities.

Instead of addressing the issue today, Nicola Sturgeon spoke about pass rates generally, and refused to engage in the issue of subject choice.

She also failed to back the idea of a parliamentary inquiry into the problem.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“The restriction of subject choice in secondary schools is a scandal.

“This SNP government is curtailing the ability of our young people to pursue the same broad-based education generations before – including the First Minister’s – benefitted from.

“And pupils in our poorest areas are hardest hit.

“The situation is now so serious that we need a parliamentary inquiry to not only expose the failings of this SNP government over the last 11 years, but to enact some solutions too.

“Nicola Sturgeon claims education is her number one priority, but she had no answers for pupils, teachers or parents.

“Her government is failing miserably on this and many other counts, and voters are running out of patience.”

[SNP leant on M&S over country labelling row](#)

16 May 2018



SNP government officials pressured Marks and Spencer amid a “Union Jackery” row over food and drink labelling, it has emerged.

Nationalists were furious when the retailer listed whisky and Scottish gin under the “United Kingdom” section of their website.

And after this was reported by a pro-independence publication, the SNP government immediately contacted M&S to demand an explanation.

Documents obtained under Freedom of Information by the Scottish Conservatives have revealed rural affairs secretary Fergus Ewing was then briefed on the conversation with M&S.

He was told by officials: “Scottish Government officials spoke to M&S to seek clarity on the situation with regard to the status of these products on their website. M&S urgently investigated this and reverted back confirming that this was indeed an error which they immediately rectified and sent out a tweet apologising for their error.”

After M&S agreed to back down, the Scottish Government official then asked: “Do you guys plan to send any tweets (or something) to clarify the situation? Just wondering as I’m sure if you did Mr Ewing would respond positively.”

The FoI response also reveals First Minister Nicola Sturgeon received similar

briefings over Tesco's decision to sell Scottish strawberries under a Union Flag logo in 2016.

Scottish Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser said:

"There's not a person in the world who doesn't know whisky is Scottish.

"But for the SNP to actively pressure a leading retailer in this way is petty and, frankly, a waste of public resources.

"It shows just how parochial the SNP government is, that it would sooner berate businesses for daring to refer to the UK, than actually help them create jobs and grow the economy.

"Instead of obsessing about Saltires and pandering to the extreme elements of the Yes movement, the SNP government should be getting on with representing the whole country."

[Sturgeon 'wants a crisis' over Brexit](#)

15 May 2018



Nicola Sturgeon "wants a crisis" over Brexit – after the SNP led a revolt on the EU withdrawal bill in Holyrood today.

The nationalists are expected to be joined by Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens in voting to reject the UK Government's Brexit bill later this afternoon.

This is despite the Welsh Government agreeing terms on the same deal, and senior Liberal Democrat figures hailing the offer.

Now Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins has said the SNP was inviting a crisis on Brexit, as it was the best way for the party to push its own independence agenda.

Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins said:

"A deal is there to be done on Brexit. It is deeply regrettable that the SNP has refused to take it.

"Scottish Labour's position simply doesn't make sense; in Wales, the Labour administration has today backed this deal yet, here in Scotland, Richard Leonard is content to do the SNP's bidding.

"As for the Lib Dems, they admitted today that they weren't even voting on

the Brexit withdrawal deal, but because they don't back the EU referendum result.

"It's patently obvious that Nicola Sturgeon wants a political crisis to provide cover for her independence drive.

"We will stand up for anyone – Conservative, Labour or Lib Dem – who wants to see the SNP challenged and taken on.

"The SNP has taken the wrong path today. It's deeply disappointing that the leaders of Labour and the Lib Dems have helped them do it."

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15 May 2018



The Scottish Conservatives have issued a final plea to Labour and Liberal Democrat MSPs to support the amended Withdrawal Bill when it comes to a vote in Holyrood.

Speaking ahead of the debate on the Bill, constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins has urged the two parties to put aside political interests and support a deal which will both strengthen the Scottish Parliament's powers, and protect the integrity of the United Kingdom.

He will say ahead of Tuesday's debate: "Let's be clear: Labour and Liberal Democrat support would not amount to backing for the UK Conservative Government. They would be supporting our United Kingdom and our established system of devolution."

The amended Withdrawal Bill – changed by the UK Government following cross-party pressure at Holyrood – has now been backed by the Labour Government in Wales.

Several Labour MSPs backed that deal at the time, saying it showed "co-operation" between the UK and Welsh Governments, and expressing

“disappointment” that the SNP had failed to back it.

In addition, Liberal Democrat figures such as former Deputy First Minister Lord Wallace of Tankerness has described the SNP’s government’s failure to sign up to the plan as “regrettable”, while Lord Steel, Holyrood’s first Presiding Officer, has said it is “really quite a good deal”.

The Scottish Conservatives will support the UK Government’s amendments – and are now urging the Liberal Democrats and Labour to do likewise.

Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins said:

“The UK Government has changed the Withdrawal Bill to accommodate fair concerns raised by all parties in Scotland.

“Those changes mean that, when we leave the EU, power will be held closer to people and communities across the UK. The Scottish Conservatives pushed hard for these changes and we are pleased to support them.

“These plans have been backed by the Labour Government in Wales.

“They have received support from senior Labour and the Liberal Democrat figures in Holyrood and Westminster.

“It’s what businesses across Scotland want.

“The Scottish Conservatives will vote to give our consent to the amended Withdrawal Bill today.

“It’s profoundly regrettable that we don’t have a deal in Scotland to allow us to move on.

“The blame for that lies entirely with the SNP. Nicola Sturgeon has refused to compromise. It’s not in Scotland’s interests that the SNP prefers picking fights to making a deal.

“It’s obvious that the Greens will, as always, back the SNP today.

“But we would appeal to Scottish Labour and Scottish Liberal Democrat MSPs to think hard before siding with the nationalists.

“Let’s be clear: Labour and Liberal Democrat support would not amount to backing for the UK Conservative Government. They would be supporting our United Kingdom and our established system of devolution.

“So, we would make a final plea to them today – this isn’t a time for narrow political interests.

“As the Labour Government in Wales has recognised, it’s a time to put the national interest first.

“Labour and Liberal Democrat MSPs have the chance to do that today and I hope they take it.”