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The SNP Government have been forced into an embarrassing u-turn on their plans to abolish the boards of several enterprise and skills agencies.

Keith Brown had announced plans to replace the boards of Scottish Enterprise, Highlands & islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and the Scottish Funding Council with an overarching statutory board controlled by ministers.

However in today's statement he announced that all boards would be remaining in place, although there are still questions over the role of the strategic board and what powers it will have.

It follows sustained pressure to reverse the decision, which culminated in the parliament voting to reverse the plans following a Scottish Conservative debate in January this year.

Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary Dean Lockhart said:

"This is an embarrassing u-turn from the SNP Government and shows that they have finally caved after the sustained criticism these plans received from all sectors.

"The vote following the Scottish Conservative debate earlier this year proved that there was no political will for this move either, and it was clear it needed to be stopped.

"We need to see a step-change in the performance of the economy, but abolishing these boards would have only hindered our ability to deliver an economic strategy and to grow.

"What is totally unacceptable is the SNP's attempts to bury this news on the last day of the parliamentary term.

"Placing it amongst several other important statements is a crude way of trying to hide this from the Scottish people, and it just shows the extent that the SNP is willing to go to in order to hide their incompetence.

"This latest u-turn from Keith Brown comes after a woeful week for the Cabinet Secretary.

“Earlier in the week he had to announce a second delay to the completion of the Queensferry Crossing, and this was followed by having to make a humiliating apology over last year’s potential investment by Chinese investors, which was dubbed a ‘Shambles’ in China.’”

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“It’s welcome that the economy secretary has finally seen sense on this issue.

“Their proposals had the potential to do a lot of harm, and experts throughout the sector had warned them against it.

“However there are still several question marks over the role of the strategic board and what powers it will have.

“Until the SNP provide more detail on this many people will still be cautious about what this means for the future autonomy of these agencies.”