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3 Feb 2017



A prominent Holyrood Committee has today published a report highlighting the importance of Scotland's domestic trade with the rest of the UK.

The Scottish Parliament's Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee, which has cross party representation, has today issued its report entitled: 'The Economic Impact of Leaving the European Union'.

The committee has taken evidence on many issues including possible impacts and opportunities for Scotland's exporters arising from the UK's vote to leave the European Union.

Expert evidence given to the Committee has stressed the importance of Scotland maintaining unfettered access to the rest of the UK market, and also more needs to be done to support and encourage Scottish businesses to export to the EU and beyond'.

This comes only a week after Scottish Government export statistics confirmed that trade with the rest of the UK is four times more important to Scotland than trade with the rest of the EU.

Scottish Conservative shadow secretary for the economy, Dean Lockhart said:

'This report is a welcome addition to the debate on the EU and Scotland's trading relationships.

"The committee heard from several expert witnesses who stressed the importance of Scotland retaining a free trading relationship with the rest of the UK, as it is over four times more important than our trade with the rest of the EU.

'This report also highlights the need to better equip our companies to deal in foreign markets, especially with significant opportunities to expand our trade in China and India.

'As the report itself concludes: it is clear from evidence received that more needs to be done to support and encourage Scottish businesses to export

to the EU and beyond.

“It is now up to this SNP Government to work together with the UK Government in the upcoming negotiations to make sure that we get the best possible deal for Scotland and the UK.”

The report can be accessed here:

http://www.parliament.scot/S5_EconomyJobsFairWork/Reports/EJFWS052017R02.pdf

Professor R. Bradley MacKay, Chair in Strategic Management, University of St Andrews Management School provided evidence that:

“For the foreseeable future, the UK will be Scotland’s most important trading relationship and trading partner. Anything that comes between that will have a challenging impact on the Scottish economy. If we combine that with potentially being out of the EU, too, it is not a scenario worth thinking about—to be frank with you.

“Scotland’s number 1 priority must always be to keep that trade relationship with the rest of the UK open and fluid”.

Neil Francis, International Operations Director, Scottish Development International commented:

“Why would we try to make it more difficult to trade with our largest trading partner or reduce the amount of trade that we do with the rest of the UK? Whatever circumstances play out, it will be paramount that we protect free trade or the open market with the rest of the UK.”

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2 Feb 2017



Hundreds of thousands of Scots face paying more income tax after the SNP and the Greens conspired to vote through a high-tax budget.

Under the plans announced by the Scottish Government, 374,000 people will pay

more than they would if they lived south of the border.

They include train drivers, nurse consultants and some teachers.

It is confirmation that finance secretary Derek Mackay's budget will make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

The blow comes on top of additional rates being charged to businesses, another measure that will damage the economy and punish hardworkers.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser pointed out that the SNP used to believe low taxes would encourage growth and therefore provide more money for public services.

He added in today's Holyrood stage one debate that the SNP had been persuaded of a left-wing agenda by the Greens, who will provide the support necessary to get the budget through.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"Derek Mackay could drop his plans to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK and work with us to deliver an ambitious budget focused on growing the economy.

"Instead, he's turned hard left and embraced the anti-growth, anti-business agenda of the Greens.

"The SNP was well-warned by the business community as to the consequences of going further on tax than he originally intended. The Chambers of Commerce described it as 'highly dangerous'.

"But the nationalists have shown contempt for the views of Scottish business, and have demonstrated they have zero interest in trying to help grow our under-performing economy.

"This is a weak, hesitant and dismal set of measures.

"The budget will see local services slashed while council taxes are being hiked, and cut funding to enterprise networks and reinforce reductions in college places when we should be doing the opposite.

"It sends out the message that the risk-taker, the wealth-creator, the entrepreneur, and the successful are not welcome here.

"Only the Scottish Conservatives champion the Scottish economy, are on the sides of businesses, taxpayers and hard-working families."

In Scotland, there are 2,560,000 taxpayers in total, of which:

2,150,000 pay the basic rate (84.0 per cent);
356,000 pay the higher rate (13.9 per cent) and

18,000 pay the additional rate (0.7 per cent)
(HMRC, *Table 2.2 Number of income taxpayers, by country*, 18 May 2016, [link](#)).

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2 Feb 2017



The SNP's business rates hike has been slammed by its own party, after a nationalist north east branch was priced out of a hotel it's been using since the 1970s.

The Banff Springs Hotel in Aberdeenshire has been hit with a £50,000 rates rise thanks to Scottish Government changes.

As a result, it's been forced to pass on that additional cost to customers, or face going out of business.

And now it's emerged the Banff and Macduff branch of the SNP is one of those customers refusing to pay the increased rate.

It told the hotel: "The increase in hire fee is excessive to say the least. Should this apply ... I can confirm there will be no further booking and our business will be taken elsewhere."

The embarrassing revelation was raised at First Minister's Questions by Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson, as she attacked the SNP on its increasing of business taxes.

That move, along with income tax hits to be announced in the budget later, makes Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

However, instead of addressing the concerns shared by her north east branch, she merely said the hotel would have an opportunity appeal the rise.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"Even the SNP's own branches are opposing the hike in business rates, so perhaps it's time for Nicola Sturgeon to listen.

"These unfair increases, which see businesses like the Banff Springs Hotel

paying more than double their current rates, could force closures and job losses.

“The SNP won’t listen to reason or hard evidence, so perhaps it will take notice now it’s been embarrassed in the Scottish Parliament.

“If the First Minister’s own party doesn’t support this policy, surely even she recognises it’s time to do something about it.”

To see the letter of complaint by the SNP Banff branch, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Hotel-complaint.jpg>

The SNP organisation has been using the hotel since 1976:

<https://www.facebook.com/BanffandMacduff/posts/1104255902998301>

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1 Feb 2017



A cash injection aimed at cutting the country’s attainment gap should not miss out children in smaller schools who need it, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

Shadow education secretary Liz Smith welcomed news that £120 million was to be released to schools across Scotland as part of Pupil Equity Funding.

However, she emphasised that some schools weren’t getting any money, and sought reassurances as to why.

It was announced today that 114 schools in Scotland won’t receive any cash, out of 2500.

But under a similar scheme in England, 133 schools out of 21,500 miss out, proportionately a far lower number.

Instead, she added, the Pupil Premium approach used by the UK Government

might be more effective.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“This is a welcome move and will hopefully go some way to closing Scotland’s stubborn attainment gap.

“However, it’s essential no pupils who need it miss out on this cash.

“There does appear to be a higher number of schools in Scotland being left out than in England.

“Now the Scottish Government needs to provide assurances that this is because the money there is not needed, rather than a fault in methodology.”

For more on the announcement, visit:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-38816114>

In England there are 133 schools who do not receive any pupil premium at all, that’s out of around 21,500. Here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-2016-to-2017>

In Scotland, there are 114 schools who don’t receive any Pupil Equity Funding and that’s out of around 2,500. Here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Raisingeducationalattainment/pupilequityfund/Schoolallocations>

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1 Feb 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have said they will talk “constructively” with the SNP ahead of the budget process, so long as it drops its plan to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said there were serious concerns within

the business community about plans to increase tax, something backed up today by the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, who described the plans as “dangerous”.

With the introduction of a large business supplement – as well as council tax increases and a refusal to adopt UK Government income tax threshold changes – the SNP will make Scotland’s workers and businesses pay more tax than anywhere else in Britain.

In contrast, the Scottish Conservatives want rates to be the same and, when possible, lower than in the rest of the UK.

The party has consistently argued that lower taxes would increase the tax base, meaning more receipts for government without hitting people in the pocket.

And with new powers arriving at Holyrood, the performance of Scotland’s economy has never been more pivotal in providing cash for public services.

Stage one of the budget process will take place in Holyrood tomorrow.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“We will talk constructively with the Scottish Government’s about its budget plans – so long as it abandons its bid to make Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK.

“Derek Mackay needs someone on board to ensure this vital process goes through.

“It’s the most significant budget in Scottish Parliament history, and we don’t believe he should side with other opposition parties in hiking taxes for workers and businesses.

“Instead, he should come round to the idea that by lowering taxes – or at least keeping them in line with the rest of Britain’s – he will boost the tax base, and help the economy in the process.

“And at a time when the economic performance has never been more significant for public services, the Scottish Government has to prioritise growth ahead of left-wing student politics.”