

# Scotland needs more vocational colleges

30 Jan 2017



The Scottish Conservatives are calling for Scottish Government to get behind community efforts to promote vocational education, Ruth Davidson said on a visit to Newlands Junior College in Glasgow today.

The brainchild of entrepreneur and philanthropist Jim McColl OBE, the college supports young 14-16 year-olds who are not learning well in the mainstream education sector – and instead gives them a chance to develop and learn new skills.

The college is the only one of its kind in the country – but the Scottish Conservatives are now calling on ministers to work with both the private and voluntary sectors, as well as other philanthropists, to set up similar colleges across Scotland.

Such a network would ensure thousands of youngsters who are in danger of dropping out might instead learn skills and be re-motivated.

## **Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:**

“Too many youngsters across Scotland either drop out of mainstream education, or leave without the skills needed to make the most of their lives.

“Newlands Junior College is a shining beacon which shows that, with the right ideas and support, we really can ensure every child makes the most of their abilities.

“Jim McColl is to be applauded for the extraordinary work he has begun.

“But it is hugely regrettable that it took such a fight to make Newlands Junior College happen, and that it is the only example of its kind in the country. This simply must change.

“After years of under-performance and a stubbornly persistent attainment gap, I believe Scotland’s failed one-sized-fits-all education system needs reform.

“We simply cannot allow Scottish education to continue to stagnate. It is time to open ourselves up to new ideas and bring in the support of Scotland’s business community and voluntary sector where they can contribute.

“The Scottish Government is putting together its governance review as we speak.

“We would encourage it to consider great initiatives like Newlands Junior

College and focus on what works.”

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## People want SNP to focus on the day job

29 Jan 2017



A Sunday Times poll has found that support for another referendum on independence prior to Brexit has fallen to just 27%.

It represents another drop in enthusiasm for a second vote, from 43% last June to 32% in September.

The poll also showed that a majority (51%) do not want another independence vote held within the next few years.

Writing in the Sunday Times, former senior SNP adviser Kevin Pringle admitted that many people viewed the prospect of another independence referendum ‘with weariness and distaste’, and that it would bring ‘unpleasant attitudes’ to the fore.

### **Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:**

“Scotland is now sending a very clear message to Nicola Sturgeon – we don’t want your second referendum.

“As her own former spokesman says today, many people view the prospect of such a vote with ‘weariness’ and ‘distaste’ because of the ‘unpleasant attitudes’ it will bring to the fore.

“He is absolutely right. People desperately want the SNP to focus on the day job, not yet more division and uncertainty.

“Nicola Sturgeon should now act on behalf of all of Scotland, not just the SNP, by ditching her unwanted and unnecessary plans.

“Only by doing so can we pull together as a country and confront the challenges we all face.”

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The Sunday Times poll found that enthusiasm for a pre-Brexit independence referendum has fallen away – from 43% last June to 32% in September and only 27% now, and a majority (51%) do not want another independence vote held within the next few years.

In his article in today's Sunday Times, Kevin Pringle writes:

*"Referendums don't create unpleasant attitudes in society but they do bring them to the fore."*

*"I know that many people view the prospect with weariness and distaste."*

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## [SNP'S low growth Scotland has cost £1300 per household](#)

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- SNP'S low growth Scotland has cost £1300 per household

29 Jan 2017



New analysis by the Scottish Conservatives has shown that the SNP's failure to boost growth has cost the equivalent of £1300 per household.

The data is published today ahead of the stage one budget debate at Holyrood this week – when the Scottish Conservatives will oppose the SNP's damaging plans to tax families and firms more than elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

The analysis reveals that, had Scottish growth matched UK figures since 2007, our gross domestic product would have been £3.1 billion higher over the last ten years.

It equates to £1,291 per Scottish household.

The Scottish Conservatives will this week call on the SNP to ditch its plans to use new powers to turn Scotland into the highest taxed part of the UK – saying this will only cut growth even more in Scotland, leaving us all worse off.

### **Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:**

"This week's budget should prioritise growth, by setting competitive taxes that help support jobs and the economy.

"Instead we have an SNP Government which is going to cut growth even further, by turning Scotland into the highest taxed part of the UK.

"The consequence of the SNP's low growth Scotland is laid bare in our figures. If we had matched UK growth over the last ten years, Scotland would have earned an extra £3bn – the equivalent of £1300 per household.

“The SNP now wants make this even worse. By increasing taxes, their plans will act as a ball and chain on growth, leaving us all poorer.

“Unless the SNP signal they are re-thinking their tax plans, we will be voting against this anti-jobs Budget this week.

“If the Budget falls as a result, that will be the Nationalists’ own fault. Instead of using our new powers to set a course, they have been caught in the headlights.

“Time is now running out and they need to make up their mind. Are they for jobs and growth or against them?

“The Scottish Conservatives have a plan to grow Scotland: it is time the SNP listened.”

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The SNP Government has been in charge of the Scottish economy for a decade; yet, Scotland continues to lag behind the UK on a range of economic indicators.

The Scottish Conservatives believe in creating a prosperous, growing economy that works for everyone by investing in education, skills, and creating a thriving business environment to attract investment, not just internationally but also by encouraging domestic businesses to grow.

We believe the SNP’s obsession with the constitution has led to the Government taking its eye off the ball and focusing its resources away from the real policy areas that matter. As a result, Scotland has lacked a coherent and ambitious economic strategy for a decade.

This paper sets out the loss to the Scottish economy, in terms of lost GDP, of consistent SNP inaction.

## **Methodology**

The Scottish Government publishes estimates of GDP growth along with comparable figures for the UK. They also publish monetary values for GDP in its quarterly national accounts. We use the latest available data in both cases. For the 2016 figures, we take Scottish annual growth forecasts from the Fraser of Allander Institute and UK annual growth forecasts for the UK (*Scottish Government, GDP 2016 Q3, 17 January 2017, [link](#); Scottish Government, Quarterly National Accounts, 2016 Q2, Tab B, [link](#); Fraser of Allander Institute, Economic Commentary, Volume 40, No 3, December 2016, [link](#)*).

We take the 2007 figure for nominal GDP and apply the real growth rates for both Scotland and the UK to give a comparison of the actual path of GDP and the theoretical path, had Scottish economic performance matched UK economic performance. These two different paths are set out in the table below.

We then calculate the different between the actual level of GDP and the level

if the Scottish economy had mirrored the UK, and divide this by the number of households to provide an estimate of the lost GDP per household – i.e. the extent to which each household is poorer as a result of the SNP’s failings on the economy.

Estimates for the number of households in Scotland are taken from the National Records of Scotland (*National Records of Scotland, Estimates of Households and Dwellings in Scotland 2015*, 8 June 2016, [link](#)).

	Scottish GDP Growth	UK GDP Growth	Scottish GDP – actual, billion	Scottish GDP – if mirror UK, billion
2007	0.6%	2.6%	£145.0	£145.0
2008	-0.3%	-0.6%	£144.5	£144.1
2009	-2.3%	-4.4%	£141.2	£137.8
2010	0.3%	1.9%	£141.6	£140.4
2011	1.1%	1.6%	£143.1	£142.7
2012	0.0%	1.2%	£143.1	£144.4
2013	2.3%	1.9%	£146.3	£147.2
2014	2.7%	3.1%	£150.2	£151.8
2015	2.1%	2.1%	£153.4	£155.0
2016	1.0%	2.0%	£155.0	£158.1
Difference	□	□	□	£3.1 billion
Number of households	□	□	□	2.4 million
Lost GDP per household	□	□	□	£1,291.93

## [SNP tell those waiting on air weapons licences to store guns at a friend’s](#)

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- SNP tell those waiting on air weapons licences to store guns at a friend’s

27 Jan 2017



The SNP has told people awaiting a new Scottish Government licence for air weapons to store their guns at a friend’s house.

Justice secretary Michael Matheson confirmed 5436 people had applied for a licence under the SNP scheme since November 1.

And he said while police were now processing these “as quickly as possible”, those awaiting a decision “must make arrangements to have their air weapons stored in a safe and appropriate place – either with someone who has an air weapon, firearm or shot gun certificate, or a registered firearm dealer”.

He goes on to warn they must do this “to avoid committing an offence”.

The Air Weapons and Licencing Act made it an offence for anyone to own an airgun without an official licence as of January 1.

The SNP’s bid to do this has been consistently criticised, particularly in rural communities where they are necessary for work.

The answer came following a question in parliament by Scottish Conservative MSP Adam Tomkins.

Shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross also posed questions in Holyrood yesterday on the issue, including on why 500,000 air guns were still unaccounted for.

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation warned the moves would do nothing to cut crime, and instead place an extra burden on police firearms licencing teams.

It added the six-month timeframe for getting all airguns licenced was too short.

**Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said:**

“This unnecessary process has been a mess from the start.

“Now those who complied with the rules are being told to get rid of their weapon and keep it at a friend’s house.

“This is a chaotic approach from the SNP, and hardly provides any confidence that it’s on top of this issue.

“It’s already a major inconvenience for law-abiding people who need air weapons for work to go through this process, and having to call on the help of a gun-owning neighbour makes it worse still.

“It shows again that the SNP doesn’t know rural Scotland, and doesn’t stand up for its interests.”

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**Below is a copy of the parliamentary answer from justice secretary Michael Matheson:**

Index Heading: Learning and Justice

**Adam Tomkins (Glasgow) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the air weapons licensing scheme.

S50-00575

**Michael Matheson:**

Air weapons continue to account for almost half of all firearms offences recorded in Scotland – 158 offences in 2015-16. The new licensing regime came into effect on 31 December 2016 and will allow the police to better protect Scottish communities by removing air weapons from those who would misuse them.

Ahead of the new law taking effect, Police Scotland received 6,948 applications for an air weapon certificate by 31 October. Certificates, or refusals, have been issued in all but a limited number of cases, for example where further investigation is required or where payment has not yet been received from the applicant.

A further 5,436 applications were received between 1 November and 31 December 2016. Police Scotland are processing these as quickly as possible, but those who are awaiting a decision must make arrangements to have their air weapons stored in a safe and appropriate place – either with someone who has an air weapon, firearm or shot gun certificate, or a registered firearms dealer – to avoid committing an offence.

In addition, by 31 December, 18,935 unwanted air weapons had been surrendered to Police Scotland for secure destruction since the summer.

**The new legislation come into effect on December 31:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-38469556>

**The BASC has been critical of the move:**

<https://basc.org.uk/blog/press-releases/latest-news/airgun-licensing-plans-in-scotland-fail-to-secure-all-party-support/>

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## [Clarity needed on Scottish Funding Council discussions](#)

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26 Jan 2017



Following today's exchanges at First Minister's Questions, the Scottish Conservatives have demanded a full explanation about the circumstances which led to discussions taking place between the Scottish Funding Council and individual universities about how £50 million could be spent on campus projects.

These discussions occurred despite the fact the Scottish Government had already informed the board of the Scottish Funding Council that they wanted the money back.

The Financial Report to the Scottish Funding Council Board dated 20th February 2014 confirms that the Scottish Government advised the Scottish Funding Council not to apply any of the £50 million funds.

Yet beyond that point, until 2nd October 2014 when the Scottish Government issued further confirmation that it wanted the money back, the Scottish Funding Council was in discussions with universities about the appropriate allocation of these funds to their capital developments.

**Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary, Liz Smith MSP said:**

"This is an extraordinary situation, and the SNP must explain why it was allowed to happen and who was responsible for the gross mismanagement.

"The Scottish Funding Council is handling large amounts of taxpayers' money and it clearly has an obligation as a public body to account for how it is spent.

"£50 million is not an inconsiderable sum, especially at a time when this SNP Government has made real term cuts to the higher education budget.

"As such, it was obviously a matter of very considerable concern to those institutions who thought they would benefit from these funds only to find out later that they had been clawed back.

"There is a complete lack of transparency about this and that is why the Scottish Government should publish full details of why the mistake was made and who was responsible."

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The confusion regarding the £50 million was raised in a confidential report prepared by Edinburgh accountants Scott-Moncrieff that was published this week.

The Scott-Moncrieff report states: *"As a result, additional funding was awarded in the 2011 spending review which was not fully spent in the 2012/13 financial year. In February 2014 the Scottish Government advised the SFC not to take action to apply these funds."*

For more information, visit:

[http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/education/15040440.Internal\\_inquiry\\_highlight\\_errors\\_and\\_confusion\\_at\\_heart\\_of\\_Scottish\\_Funding\\_Council/](http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/education/15040440.Internal_inquiry_highlight_errors_and_confusion_at_heart_of_Scottish_Funding_Council/)



When asked during FMQs on this issue, Nicola Sturgeon replied:

*“It was only recouped on the basis of explicit assurances from SFC that all financial commitments to colleges and universities had been met.”*