

Education, not separation, must be SNP's focus as Ruth publishes new education plans

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30 May 2017



The Scottish Conservatives are today publishing fresh plans to improve standards in Scotland's schools – and demanding Nicola Sturgeon focus on “education, not separation”.

As the SNP launches its election manifesto, Ruth Davidson will set out a detailed programme to improve Curriculum for Excellence, following warnings by leading experts that its roll out has led to a slump in core skills.

The Scottish Conservatives are also stepping up their attack on the SNP's broken promise to make education its “number one priority”.

Instead, Nicola Sturgeon has spent the last year putting her unwanted plan for a second independence referendum front and centre – and ignoring the day job.

The SNP's chaotic handling of education was underlined on Sunday after SNP MSP John Mason said Scotland had “moved on” from the need to focus on literacy and numeracy.

Today's paper is built on extensive consultation with schools, parents and business and makes recommendations in five key areas.

1. **Clarity, Accountability and Measurement**
2. **A Clear Focus on Core Skills**
3. **Teacher Numbers, Workforce Planning and Teacher Training**
4. **Reforming the Education Agencies** 5. **Extending School Autonomy**

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Nicola Sturgeon asked to be judged on education.

“Standards are down, there is a teacher shortage, we have a curriculum in crisis and our poorest children are being let down. The judgement is in and

it is damning.

“The truth is Nicola Sturgeon has made independence her number one priority.

“And while standards fall, her MSPs casually dismiss parents’ concerns by declaring we have ‘moved on’ from the need to teach literacy and numeracy.

“Scotland has had enough. Education, not separation, needs to be the focus now. “The SNP must act immediately – empty promises of jam tomorrow will not do.

“This paper sets out the simple, clear and vital reforms we need to see in our schools.

“But as long as the SNP bangs on about independence, our schools will suffer.

“This election is the last chance to send the SNP a message to get back to the day job. Only the Conservatives can stand up to them and only the Conservatives have the answers.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“The Scottish Government has been quick to remind us that, in its recent review of Scottish schools, the OECD applauded Scotland for having the foresight to put in place such an ambitious reform as the Curriculum for Excellence.

“That’s true, but the OECD also made clear that there was a long way to go before Scotland could live up to its full potential and realise excellence and equity right across the country.

“The Scottish Conservatives believe we owe it to every parent, teacher and young person to deliver that excellence and equity.

“Simply hoping things will improve is not an option.”

For a copy of the publication, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CfE-Interim-Report-FINAL.pdf>

On the morning of the SNP’s manifesto, the Conservatives are calling for radical improvements to the Scottish education system, with reforms focused on five key areas:

A Clear Focus on Core Skills

- The urgent priority within the Curriculum for Excellence must be to address declining numeracy and literacy standards
- Teaching of literacy and numeracy has to combine traditional methods

with good quality diagnostic assessment

- Broad general education should be reset so that its main focus is on traditional subjects and on the necessary core knowledge which defines them
- National 4 needs to be much more focused around the testing of basic skills and there must be a much better link-up with vocational training

Teacher Numbers, Workforce Planning and Teacher Training

- We need more investment in teacher numbers, especially in additional support for learning
- Routes in to teaching should be more flexible, with allowing teachers with non-Scottish qualifications to teach in Scottish schools with minimal restrictions
- A Scottish equivalent of TeachFirst should be introduced
- Postgraduate bursaries should be introduced, attracting talented graduates into key subjects, especially STEM
- Tests for trainee teachers to identify weaknesses in literacy and numeracy teaching should be introduced

Reforming the Education Agencies

- A reformed Education Scotland should be completely separate from an independent inspectorate and linked more effectively to SQA, government, local authorities and schools
- Schools should be free to make use of advice and CPD training available from independent bodies
- The Scottish Government needs to commission independent research which will provide regular, detailed and rigorous quantitative and qualitative analysis
- For the SQA, there must be better resourcing, more transparent decision-making which draws on teachers' classroom experiences, clearer lines of responsibility, much greater clarity of purpose and better communication with schools.

Extending School Autonomy

- Any straitjackets which prevent or discourage headteachers from using the existing powers they have should be removed
- Headteachers should be free to spend the money received from the Pupil Equity Fund as they think best without edicts from central or local government
- The extension of powers to headteachers should include greater power over staffing decisions

- The percentage of any school budget over which headteachers have direct control should be much higher
- Legislative changes should be considered to provide greater diversity within our schools

Clarity, Accountability and Measurement

- Curriculum for Excellence should be re-launched in line with its original principles but in a greatly simplified and clarified form
- Teachers should have access to short, concise and straightforward advice on content and standards for the main curriculum areas
- Scotland should once again participate in TIMSS and PIRLS and that SSLN should not be abandoned but reformed
- Standardised national testing needs to deliver a better understanding for schools and local authorities of national benchmarks
- There should be formal partnerships between colleges and schools and universities and schools

Over the weekend, SNP MSP John Mason made a series of remarks on social media suggesting standards of education don't really matter. He said society had "moved on" from the need to have literacy and numeracy skills, and that such skills weren't needed across a range of careers:

<https://twitter.com/JohnMasonMSP>

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29 May 2017



Nicola Sturgeon has confirmed her first priority in any alliance with Jeremy Corbyn would be consent for a second independence referendum.

Speaking on television earlier, the First Minister again talked-up the possibility of propping up a Labour government in Westminster.

And should she secure such a deal, the prospect of another divisive vote would be the first thing on the table, she confirmed.

It comes as Corbyn admitted he would “open discussions” with the SNP about another referendum.

He said today when asked about a re-run of the 2014 vote: “I’ll obviously open discussions with the government in Scotland and listen very carefully to what the Scottish Parliament says.”

That marries with Nicola Sturgeon’s position on the issue.

After being asked on Sky News if another referendum would be a condition of any arrangement, she said: “If there’s any chance of a progressive alliance that locks the Tories out I’d want to get as much of SNP manifesto implemented as possible.”

It’s the strongest indication yet that the SNP and Labour are working behind the scenes for a post-election deal.

Corbyn’s insiders said last month they wanted to “cut a deal” with the SNP to put him into Number 10.

And for its part, the SNP thinks a Corbyn government could act as a “midwife for independence”.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Nicola Sturgeon is desperate for a second referendum and will do anything to get it – even putting Jeremy Corbyn into Number 10.

“The Labour leader has already said he’s ‘absolutely fine’ with another referendum – so it looks like a sweetheart deal is in the offing.

“This might suit the two of them but it would be a disaster for Scotland – dragging us back to more division just at the moment when we need to move on, together.

“I will always stand up for the decision we made to stay part of the UK and a vote for the Scottish Conservatives will help me send Nicola Sturgeon a message – no to another referendum.”

Notes to editors:

Nicola Sturgeon appeared live on Sky News earlier today.

Labour sources have already confirmed Jeremy Corbyn wants to do a deal with the SNP after June 8:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/04/reports-state-labour-will-pursue-election-deal-with-snp/>

And the SNP is equally keen on such an arrangement:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/2017/04/snp-says-it-wants-corbyn-alliance-to-act-as-midwife-for-independence/>

Below are words from Jeremy Corbyn today, as reported by PA:

"I'll obviously open discussions with the Government in Scotland and listen very carefully to what the Scottish Parliament says."

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29 May 2017



More than £5 million in unpaid fines have been effectively written off by the Scottish Courts Service, new research has revealed.

Fines which have been outstanding for longer than three years are "archived" by the organisation, with no realistic expectation they will ever be paid.

And between 2008 and 2013 – the most recent juncture for which a fine can be officially archived – £5,547,358 remains unaccounted for.

That figure does not include unpaid fines accumulated since that date, which the SCS still hopes will be recovered.

In 2012/13 alone, nearly £2 million worth of fines were issued, but have now been written off as more than three years have passed.

The statistics emerged following a Freedom of Information request by the Scottish Conservatives, who said the unpaid penalties were placing additional financial strain on the courts.

The sums are also left out of official unpaid fines statistics, which most recently showed the SCS was waiting for £32.3 million to be paid in penalties, £4.3 million of which was deemed to be "in arrears", from the last three years.

Scottish Conservative Central Scotland MSP Margaret Mitchell, convener of the Scottish Parliament's justice committee, said:

“These figures show courts have effectively written off more than £5 million in unpaid fines.

“That sends a completely wrong message to criminals, and creates an impression that if they evade the law for long enough, they’ll get away with it.

“The SNP is increasingly urging courts to turn away from custodial sentences and pursue other options.

“But as it stands, these offenders don’t seem to think they have to comply with alternative punishments, and millions of pounds in fines have gone unpaid.

“This is also having a negative impact on public finances, and amounts to a huge loss of revenue for the UK taxpayer.”

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27 May 2017



Gordon Brown must clarify whether Scottish Labour’s plan for a federal UK would require a referendum before it could be introduced, the Scottish Conservatives have said.

The former prime minister, who is expected to campaign in the General Election today (Sat, May 27) is a driving force behind Scottish Labour’s proposal to loosen the ties between the four nations of the UK.

The Scottish Conservatives are demanding more detail about the plan after Kezia Dugdale, said federalism could be put forward as an option on the ballot paper in a future referendum on independence.

Adam Tomkins MSP, Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman, said:

“To move to a federal UK would mark a historic and monumental constitutional change.

“As a leading proponent of the idea, Gordon Brown has to spell out how it would be achieved.

“Kezia Dugdale has raised the prospect of presenting it as an option in a second referendum on Scottish independence and, as we see Labour cosyng up ever closer to the SNP, that is bound to set alarm bells ringing.

“Gordon Brown and Scottish Labour need to come clean about exactly what they are planning.”

- In a speech to the IPPR think tank last December, Kezia Dugdale said a constitutional convention, based on the long running convention which led to a referendum on the creation of a Scottish Parliament, should be set up to develop plans for a federal UK.
- In February she said there was a “legitimate case” for including a “federalist solution” on the ballot paper in a second independence referendum.
- Gordon Brown said in March the proposals would rest on “popular sovereignty,” suggesting a referendum might be required.
- Also in March, UK Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said he was “absolutely fine” with a second independence referendum. He has previously said he would be prepared to work with the SNP in a future Westminster government.

Scottish Labour have struck deals and entered alliances with the SNP in councils across Scotland since the local authority elections on May 4.

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26 May 2017



New official statistics have revealed patients were left waiting for more than 500 days for various treatments across Scotland’s NHS last year.

People awaiting procedures for a range of problems – including hip replacements, knee replacements and foot and ankle surgery – were on lists for up to 582 days in 2016.

The Scottish Conservatives said the revelations exposed the crisis at the heart of the NHS, with hospitals struggling to deal with challenges brought by an ageing population.

The ISD Scotland figures – obtained by the party through Freedom of Information – showed the longest waits clocked in 2016 across hip, knee and ankle procedures.

Someone requiring a primary hip replacement had to wait 582 days; a primary knee replacement 520 days; and osteotomy surgery 578 days.

The Scottish Government has been warned for years about the impact an increasing and ageing population would have on the NHS.

Public health spokesman Miles Briggs said these latest statistics proved those warnings had been ignored.

Scottish Conservative public health spokesman Miles Briggs said:

“It’s utterly unacceptable that someone should have to wait more than 500 days for this kind of procedure.

“These are operations which can be life-changing, particularly for older patients, and having to wait the best part of two years is precious time wasted.

“The SNP has been told over the last decade just how pressing an issue an ageing population is for the NHS.

“But these warnings have not been heeded, and it’s vulnerable and elderly patients who are paying the price.

“Health is under the complete control of ministers at Holyrood, and they are the ones who must take full responsibility for these failings.”

To see the full statistics, including a geographical breakdown, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/lengthy-waits/>