

Scottish exports to UK four times higher than to rest of EU

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- Scottish exports to UK four times higher than to rest of EU

25 Jan 2017



Official Scottish Government figures have today revealed that Scotland's trade to the UK is four times the sum exported to the European internal market.

The figures show that, in 2015, Scotland's trade with England, Wales and Northern Ireland amounted to £49.8 billion. This compared to £12.3 billion for the EU internal market.

The figures show that the USA is Scotland's top international trading partner, with £4.6 billion exports.

Responding to the figures, Scottish Conservative Finance spokesman Murdo Fraser said:

"Once again, the facts are making it clear that our own Union of nations is Scotland's essential union on which our prosperity depends.

"Europe is a vital market place for us too – which is why we want to see a comprehensive free trade deal with the EU following Brexit.

"But these figures show that to prioritise the EU market before our own Union – as the SNP wants – is absurd.

"Quite simply, thousands of jobs depend on our ability to trade within the UK without any barriers in our way.

"These are the Scottish Government's own figures – which makes it all the more astonishing that the SNP is determined to ignore them by continuing its ideological pursuit of separation.

"The Nationalists would put jobs and trade at risk simply because they don't like the United Kingdom.

"We have had it confirmed again: the UK is four times as important to Scotland as the EU in trade, and the SNP must recognise this immediately by ditching its unwanted and divisive plan for a second referendum on independence."

The figures are available here:
<http://news.gov.scot/news/scotlands-exports-increase>

[Student numbers plummet under SNP](#)

24 Jan 2017



Figures out today have revealed that there are 150,000 fewer students in further education in Scotland since the SNP came to power.

The Scottish Funding Council revealed that there were 227,258 college students in 2015/16, compared to 379,223 in 2007.

Part time courses have almost halved from 398,606 to 185,133 between 2007 and 2016, a decrease of 54 per cent.

The figures continue a trend that has seen college places slashed as a result of the SNP's dramatic cuts to college funding in recent years.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

"Colleges play a pivotal role in our education system, so it's deeply concerning that student numbers have dropped to this level.

"Each year colleges help prepare thousands of people for the world of work by giving them the skills they need to get on in life, yet the SNP have chosen to implement huge cuts to the sector.

"Even places in part-time courses have dropped by over half, which will be a huge blow to those trying to balance work and study.

"The SNP's record on education since they came to power is shameful, and they need to reverse their draconian cuts to college funding as soon as possible.

"Scotland's colleges are among the best in Britain at equipping our youth with the necessary skills to succeed, and we have to support them."

The report from the Scottish Funding Council is available here:
<http://www.sfc.ac.uk/communications/Statisticalpublications/2017/SFCST032017.aspx> The figures are in table B, figures 1, 4 & 11

[Matheson urged to sort out 'misleading' crime figures](#)

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24 Jan 2017



Scotland's justice secretary has been urged to sort out the Scottish Government's reporting of crime figures, after they were branded 'confusing and misleading'.

In a letter from Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross, Michael Matheson was told it was almost impossible to gauge violent crime because of the disparity in figures used.

The SNP has been criticised in recent weeks for boasting there were less than 7000 violent crimes in Scotland last year, even though data recorded by the police suggested there were close to ten times that.

It said there were 6775 instances of violence, but when incidents such as broken noses and cases where a victim loses consciousness are included, the toll rises to 68,482.

The disparity is caused by the distinction between 'crimes' and 'offences' in the recorded crime statistical bulletin, which ministers argue has been made since the 1920s.

But Mr Ross pointed out that the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey – which is also used to record violent crime – makes no such distinction.

And Derek Penman, HM Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, said last week that figures combining violence with and without injury offer "a better overall measure of violent crime".

Mr Ross argued that ministers should therefore create a clearer system of recording and publishing, adding it would increase the public's confidence in policing.

Earlier this month, the SNP was accused of "fiddling" crime figures after offences including punching, kicking and brandishing a weapon were left out of statistics.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said: "The

inconsistent use of 'violent crime' by the Scottish Government is at best confusing and at worst misleading.

"The SNP should consider implementing a joined-up, common sense and transparent approach on this issue so that the public can have full confidence in crime statistics.

"The current spin from the SNP does a disservice to tens of thousands of victims of violence and fails to provide an accurate overall picture of violent crime in Scotland."

A copy of the letter is below:

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

General Questions – Thursday 19th January 2017

I wish to follow up in writing on our exchange during General Questions on Thursday, 19th January, when I asked whether the Scottish Government is content with the way it records crime. You will be aware this is an issue the Scottish Conservatives have raised before, and which was reported in the national and local press earlier this month.

The Scottish Government statistical bulletin, 'Criminal Proceedings in Scotland, 2015-16', explicitly states that "violations of criminal law are divided, for *statistical purposes only*, into crimes and offences." Equally, the UK Statistics Authority, to which you referred in our exchange, emphasised in its July 2014 assessment report of the recorded crime statistics that the distinction between 'crimes' and 'offences' is "...made *only for working purposes*."

Nevertheless, the Scottish Government is issuing press releases, such as the release on 27th September 2016, which states that "non-sexual crimes of violence are at their second lowest level since 1974, despite a slight rise over the twelve months from 6,357 to 6,775." In this instance, and in others, the reference to violent crime fails to include weapons offences and common assaults – encompassing a broken nose and loss of consciousness, as well as domestic abuse – which would bring the total closer to 70,000 incidents across the country. This spin from the SNP does a disservice to tens of thousands of victims of violence and fails to provide an accurate overall picture of violent crime in Scotland for the public.

As a defence, and as you mentioned in your remarks last week, the SNP repeatedly argues that the distinction between 'crimes' and 'offences' has been made by consecutive administrations since the 1920s. Yet the Scottish Government's own website says that the recorded crimes bulletin in its current format has only been published since April 1998. Furthermore, you mentioned during our exchange that the Scottish Government records crime using the Scottish crime and justice survey (SCJS) and police recorded crime statistics.

However, and as you will be aware, the SCJS does not make the same distinction between 'crimes' and 'offences': *"...violent crime in the SCJS includes assault and robbery, crimes which are included in Group 1 (Nonsexual crimes of violence) and Group 6 (Miscellaneous offences) in police recorded crime figures."* (Scottish Government, Recorded Crime in Scotland 2015-16, p. 25)

The inconsistent use of 'violent crime' across the Scottish Government's statistical publications on recorded crime is at best confusing and at worst misleading. I am not alone in this view – it was reported last week that HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland has questioned whether it is right that some 60,000 common assaults are not treated as "crimes of violence" in official publications. He further commented that the Crime Survey for England and Wales, which includes violence with and without injury, offers "a better overall measure of violent crime."

The SNP's argument in favour of "continuity for continuity's sake" does not serve the best interests of the public. Above all, the information should be targeted to the audience, even if the status quo better serves the SNP's spin machine. I strongly urge you to consider implementing a joined up, common sense and transparent approach on this issue so that the public can have full confidence in the Scottish Government's crime statistics.

I look forward to receiving your response to the points raised in this letter. Yours sincerely, Douglas Ross MSP

The SNP was accused of fiddling figures earlier this month:

<https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/news/404767/snp-accused-of-fiddling-crime-figures-as-the-shocking-extent-of-violent-incidents-in-scotland-is-revealed/>

The Scottish Government hailed what it said was statistics showing fewer than 7000 instances of violent crime last year:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00506122.pdf> (p1) and
<http://news.gov.scot/news/recorded-crime-at-a-42-year-low>

However, when a range of other violent incidents are included, such as handling offensive weapons, broken noses, loss of consciousness and other common assaults, the figure rises to 68,482. HM Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland Derek Penman said on [Twitter](#) on 19th January that the approach used by the Crime Survey for England and Wales *"includes violence with & without injury and is a better overall measure of violent crime"*.

[Ruth reacts to Article 50 decision](#)

24 Jan 2017



Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson has given her reaction to the Supreme Court decision that parliament must vote to trigger the UK's departure from the EU.

She said the SNP has been using the case "to hold the UK to ransom", and the party must now state if it wants Britain's negotiations to succeed or fail.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"The SNP tried to use this hearing to hold the rest of the UK to ransom. It has comprehensively failed to do so.

"All parties should now respect the ruling that the court has given.

"Yet typically, Nicola Sturgeon has decided to ignore it by stating – even before the verdict was in – that she would still seek a separate vote at Holyrood.

"The Scottish Conservatives will have no truck with yet more SNP stunts on Brexit.

"Whatever side people were on last year, Scotland wants to get on with the negotiations so we can start to leave the uncertainty of the last few years behind us.

"We have all had enough of the nationalists using every diversionary tactic they can to try to use Brexit to manufacture a case for separation.

"The SNP needs to decide: does it want Britain's renegotiation to succeed or fail?

"If it is the former, it needs to end the attempts to sow division and add to the uncertainty we face, and instead get behind the UK attempt to get the right deal for the whole UK."

[SNP urged to 'come out of hiding' on independence economy plans](#)

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23 Jan 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have called on the SNP to “come out of hiding” over its plans for the economy of an independent Scotland.

The nationalists’ Growth Commission, launched last year, presented a report to the party at the end of 2016 but it is yet to be published.

It comes as senior SNP figures have called on the party to ditch its support for the pound amid growing evidence it is divided over its flawed 2014 prospectus for independence.

The Scottish Conservatives will oppose any attempt by the SNP to bring forward a second independence referendum – and are calling on the SNP to rule it out.

And today, the UK Government outlined its plans for a modern industrial strategy, aimed at boosting business and creating more high-skilled jobs.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Today the UK Government is setting out a clear way forward to prepare the UK for our future outside the EU.

“The SNP, by contrast, has once again spent the weekend threatening a second referendum on independence, which would pile even more uncertainty on to Scotland.

“Nicola Sturgeon last year set up a growth commission, but has conspicuously refused to reveal any of its proposals.

“If the SNP is really confident about its case for separation, it should let us know what its plans are.

“Anything short of that will simply confirm the fact that the nationalists are all bluster and no plan.

“It is time for the SNP to come out of hiding.”

The SNP pledged to publish findings from its growth commission before the end of 2016:

http://www.snp.org/snp_growth_commission

The UK Government published its industrial action plan today:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-38713327>