

Teachers tell SNP to end combined classes

7 Jun 2019



Teachers inundated the SNP government with concerns over combined classes, new documents have shown.

On the day after education secretary John Swinney described concerns over multi-level teaching as a “moan-fest”, more than 30 letters to his SNP government have been revealed.

They show the extent of the problem of combined classes – where children studying different qualifications are taught by the same teacher at the same time.

They were submitted to the Scottish Parliament’s Education Committee, before which Mr Swinney appeared last week to say he’d heard no concerns about the matter.

One wrote: “There is much more of a strain on teaching my own subject as due to the now lower numbers mentioned above I have three, sometimes four or five, different levels in one class (N3, N4, N5, Higher, Advanced Higher) which means I cannot meet the needs of the majority of young people in my class.”

Another said: “Options have remained broad at our school by combining levels in many subjects and this has had an impact on the weaker students as they have effectively less taught time. It is not unusual to have classes of N4, N5 and Higher levels combined.”

Others said the practice was now “too common” and that there was “little or no chance of raising attainment or closing attainment gap” as a result.

One teacher even implied combined classes were a ploy to make the SNP government look better, stating: “Increasing pressure to have multi-course teaching at same time to fill a classroom. Again. Pupils getting the short end to make statistics look better.”

At First Minister’s Questions yesterday, Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson revealed more than 100 schools in Scotland have examples where three or more qualifications are taught as part of the same class.

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Liz Smith said:

“John Swinney arrogantly dismissed concerns about combined classes as a ‘moan-fest’.

“If that’s what he thinks of experts and opposition politicians, is this what he thinks of teachers too?”

“These letters show there is widespread concern about the number of combined classes across Scotland.

“The problem disadvantages children, harms their education and stretches teachers in too many directions.

“It’s simply not good for the SNP government to ignore these points and plough on regardless.”

[Revealed: Scores of schools forced into running combined classes](#)

6 Jun 2019



More than 100 schools in Scotland are being forced to run combined classes where at least three different qualifications are being taught by the same teacher at the same time.

Research by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed the extent of multi-level teaching across the country, with some schools even squeezing four separate qualifications into one lesson.

However, when confronted with the problem at First Minister’s Questions today, education secretary John Swinney dismissed the issue as a “moan fest”.

This is despite a range of experts, including unions and senior teachers, saying combined classes were “intolerable”, a “disgrace” and “definitely disadvantaged” children.

The Freedom of Information requests show, out of the 238 schools who responded, 112 had combined classes for three levels, with a further 11 squeezing in four topics.

Included in the examples set out were Inverclyde Academy, where one class is being taught four different levels of maths at the same time, and Bridge of Don Academy in Aberdeen, which has 40 combined classes.

Perth High is teaching three levels in combined classes relating to chemistry, physics and biology.

And Ayr Academy are being forced to teach four different levels of English in one – National 3, National 4, National 5 and Higher.

Despite the scale of analysis revealed, Mr Swinney – who was standing in for Nicola Sturgeon – told Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson that combined classes had always been a feature of Scottish education, and stood by his previous remarks that no-one had told him it was a problem.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

“Across Scotland, thousands of pupils are being thrown together in combined classes, because the school doesn’t have the resources to teach qualifications separately.

“It’s unfair on the children who have to compete for the teacher’s attention, and unfair on teachers who have to conduct up to four different lessons all at the same time.

“Experts across the board have told the SNP government about the damage and strain this causes, and our data shows the scale of the issue across every part of the country.

“To have John Swinney dismiss legitimate concerns over combined classes as a ‘moan-fest’ is both insulting and offensive.

“And to claim he was better informed than members of the teaching profession who have spoken out, because he attended an award ceremony, is both desperate and laughable.

“I fear Mr Swinney will come to regret such statements which will only infuriate teachers and parents who are having to endure the failures of this government.

“We’ve supplied the evidence and the data, and now the Scottish Government needs to act.

“But it seems after 12 years in government, we have SNP ministers more interested in defending their failed record than actually improving the education of our young people.”

Mackay’s Brexit blame game exposed

31 May 2019



The SNP’s tactic of blaming Brexit for the billion pound black hole in Scotland’s finances has been exposed by the Fraser of Allander Institute’s Stuart McIntyre.

The Finance Secretary, Derek Mackay explicitly blamed Brexit for the poor

Scottish economic performance which has led to a reduction in Scotland's income.

Stuart McIntyre of the Fraser of Allander Institute later corrected this in a twitter post; "The problem with this response is that both Brexit and austerity are UK wide factors affecting economic growth, and the reconciliations today arise because income tax receipts per head in Scotland are growing more slowly than elsewhere in the UK..."

The Scottish Fiscal Commission has revised Scotland's growth rate downwards to 0.8 percent in 2019, 0.9 percent in 2020 and 1.1 percent in 2021.

As a result Scotland's income tax receipts are lower than anticipated, creating the £1bn gap in Scotland's income.

This is substantially lower than the rest of the UK and, therefore is the fault of the SNP's inability to grow the Scottish economy, not Brexit.

Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary said;

"Derek Mackay is trying to play Brexit blame game.

"It won't wash – if it was all down to Brexit, tax receipts in the rest of the UK would be equally affected, but they're not.

"The blame for the £1bn black hole facing Scotland lies at the door of SNP HQ.

"This is down to Nicola Sturgeon and Derek Mackay and their total failure to grow the Scottish economy.

"They need to act urgently and send out a clear signal – no more tax rises, a clear plan to deliver sustainable growth, and an end to gimmicks and government waste."

[More people than ever hospitalised after using cannabis](#)

31 May 2019



More than one in eight drug-related hospital admissions in Scotland are now caused by cannabis, scotching theories that the substance is harmless.

New statistics revealed there were 1689 people taken to hospital in 2017/18 after using the drug, either from overdosing or suffering psychological

effects.

That's the equivalent of 32 people a week, and signals a seven-fold rise since figures were first recorded in the mid-1990s.

The number of cannabis-users admitted was not only the highest ever but, at 13.5 per cent of all drug-related admissions, also the largest proportion ever.

It compares to just 6.5 per cent when the records began in the mid-1990s, and is nearly the double the rate from when the SNP came to power, when the drug accounted for just 7.5 per cent of drug-related admissions.

Earlier this week, ISD Scotland figures showed the overall number of people rushed to hospital after using drugs was at a record high.

Across the country, there were 10,509 admissions, a four-fold increase from two decades ago.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

"This exposes claims that cannabis is a harmless drug as a nonsense.

"There is now evidence of dozens of hospital admissions every week as a direct result of people taking cannabis.

"These are individuals whose lives are being destroyed by a drug that too many people want to see normalised.

"Instead, we need to be getting tough on dealers and providing proper support to those who have developed problems with addiction.

"The SNP seem to want to make it easier for people in Scotland to take drugs, when most addicts themselves just want to stop altogether.

"Cannabis may not have quite the ruinous effect of Class A drugs like heroin, but there are now thousands of examples where Scots have been hospitalised after taking it.

"That tells me a new approach is required."

[SNP's 'devastating' £1bn black hole revealed](#)

30 May 2019



A black hole exceeding £1 billion has been revealed at the heart of Scotland's budget as a result of slow economic growth under the SNP.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission revealed today that budgets were being adjusted to account for Scotland now collecting its own income tax.

That means the Scottish Government budget is more dependent on the country's own economic performance.

As a result, £229 million has been wiped off next year's budget, a further £608 million from the 2021-22 accounts, and £188 million from the following year.

The report also revealed wage growth for Scots would be worse over coming years.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said the poor economic performance under the SNP would mean more tax rises, increased borrowing or the slashing of public services.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"This is a devastating blow for Scotland's finances totalling more than £1 billion.

"For years the SNP has been warned about the poor economic performance for which it is responsible, and now we see the consequences of that.

"This is disastrous news for public services as well as hardworking Scots who may be in line for even more of their payslip being seized by the SNP government.

"We already knew Scotland's growth and productivity was worse than the rest of the UK, and that people north of the border receive comparatively lower pay.

"Now we learn that's all set to continue for the years ahead.

"The SNP has the control to turn this around, but has instead obsessed about constitutional matters, bringing uncertainty and division to our economy.

"The hardworking people of Scotland are now reaping what the nationalists sowed."