



Rich dividend for Scotland because it's part of the UK

If ever there was a case well made for Scotland's place in the United Kingdom it was Rishi Sunak's summer budget announcement. Despite the extraordinary circumstances imposed by Covid19, the Chancellor put the UK Government's money where its mouth is, unveiling an unprecedented raft of measures which will benefit Scotland to the tune of £800 million.

That money is additional to the billions which have already arrived through Barnett Consequentials, and as well as the hundreds of thousands of Scottish jobs supported through the furlough scheme.

The measures included a reduction in VAT for tourism and hospitality businesses to 5%, a £1000 payment to companies for every worker they bring back from furlough, and a kick-start scheme for young people's jobs. Right across Scotland, businesses have been adapting as quickly as possible and working their fingers to the bone to survive to ensure services can continue. For many, these measures from the Chancellor are undoubtedly the difference between the ability to stay open and certain closure.

And the £800 million uplift came on the same day that the SNP demanded borrowing powers for a fraction of that amount!



Much needed reform announced for tertiary education

It is now two decades since the then Labour Government decreed that 50% of young people should go into higher education – a policy which also found favour with the subsequent Conservative Government.

If you measure things purely by numbers, the policy was a success. By 2018 50% of young people were indeed entering higher education and the number of undergraduate degrees had increased from 265,000 in 1999 to 414,000 in 2018. But, by other measurements, this policy has been highly questionable. This is because it can easily be argued that the other 50% of young people have, in so many areas, had a raw deal.

This is because not nearly enough attention has been focused on improving non-degree vocational and technical education and addressing the long-held public perception that those who do not go to university have less “value” than

those who go to university. It is a deeply damaging perception which has been at the root of many ills in education policy.

So it is good to see a shift in focus from the UK Government. Now is the time, especially when the post-Covid recovery will require many in the workforce to retrain for new forms of employment, to invest in a more holistic approach to learning. As Chris Skidmore MP put it *“we need a system that allows for personalised education not one that seeks to divide between two systems. Only by ending this perception of 50% studying for degrees pitted against 50% who are not, can we properly begin to have a grown-up conversation about how to achieve a unity of purpose, uniting further education and higher education to skill and reskill an entire nation.”*

Scotland needs to do exactly the same. Indeed, this issue must be a major part of the Scottish Conservative manifesto for 2021. It is the right choice for education and it is the right choice for voters.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government ends free tuition for EU students.

At long last – albeit 13 years too late - the SNP has been forced to acknowledge that its higher education funding policy is not working. On 9th June, announcing that it would no longer pay the fees of EU students, it signalled yet another u-turn from John Swinney who pledged in 2016 that the Scottish Government would continue to pay the fees of EU students for the long term . As we have come to expect from the SNP, this policy change was blamed on the UK Government’s approach to Brexit.

The truth however is very different. The SNP’s higher education current funding policy is deeply flawed. Not only does it discriminate between students according to where they come from, but it has created long term financial instability in the sector. Plus, the “cap” on the number of domiciled Scottish places has prevented many of our best young people winning a university place.

Since academic year 2014-15, the SNP has cut higher education funding by 11.6% in real terms. £127.6million less is invested each year into Scottish universities which means that every Scottish student at university now has £700 less invested in their education every year. So, when the SNP moans about funding, it should look closer to home. This underfunding is their fault and noone else's.

The savings made from EU student fees should help to ease the cap and allow more Scottish domiciled students to study in Scotland. But this is not going to solve the long term problem. If our sector is to be put back onto a sustainable footing once again after successive years of deep cuts, it will need a whole lot more money from somewhere else. That is the challenge for all political parties ahead of 2021.

Confusion finally cleared up over tax relief in the property market

The SNP announced ten days ago that most buyers in Scotland will no longer pay a "moving tax". The threshold at which land and buildings transaction tax (the duty paid when you move house) will be raised from £145,000 to £250,000 but there was absolutely no clarity from the SNP about when this would happen. In England, the threshold for the equivalent tax (stamp duty) was raised from £125,000 to £500,000.

The delay in providing a timescale was a matter of serious concern since it would mean buyers would hold off until they knew when the legislation would come into force. Thanks to pressure from the Scottish Conservatives however, the Scottish Government has announced this legislation will now be fast-tracked so that the much needed boost for the property market and the construction industry can happen as quickly as possible.



Message from Gavin McWhinnie and our younger members

Over the summer, we have been creating a Mid Scotland and Fife young Conservatives' campaign group, in preparation for the 2021 Scottish Parliament Election. The group consists of members under the age of 26 who are passionate about young people's roles within the Scottish Conservatives. We are a diverse group of those in jobs, further education, and schools, with the common goal of increasing our campaign capabilities.

During lockdown, we have remained extremely active by participating in Zoom calls with Liz and our other elected Mid Scotland and Fife MSPs. These calls have given our group opportunities to meet, discuss and question the candidates we will be trying to elect in 2021. Further meetings will be arranged soon which will allow our young members to propose specific policy ideas, directly to our representatives, which will help to enhance our party's strong relationship with our young members. Bringing young people together has also allowed us to better understand the challenges facing our young members and addressing their concerns.

Once campaigning can safely resume, the group is ready to lead the fight against the SNP and get our candidates elected. Liz has been heavily committed to the success of our group and has voiced her support for young people's opinions to be heard within the party. If you are, or are aware of,

anyone under the age of 26, who would be interested in joining the group, then please contact me on: g.mcwhinnie01@gmail.com.



Yet more SNP delays to child care provision

The Scottish Government has shelved its flagship policy of funding 1140 hours of childcare for at least another year. The announcement came ten days ago in a letter from Minister for Children and Young People, Maree Todd, to Directors of Education, early learning and childcare (ELC) local authority leads. The letter states that an “*initial assessment of readiness will be undertaken by the Joint Delivery Board by December 2020*”, but the letter goes on to say, “it will not be feasible to reinstate a universal 1140 duty in the academic year 20/21.”

My colleague Jamie Greene MSP said;

“Parents are going to be furious that the funded expansion of childcare has been shelved for a year and another almighty backlash awaits the SNP. The SNP government isn’t even going to assess the situation until December this year – nine months after the policy was put on hold in March. This staggering delay proves beyond doubt that the SNP was never ready or able to deliver this policy on time”.

Judging by my mailbag, this is a huge issue for parents across Mid Scotland and Fife, many of whom are desperate to get back to work as quickly as possible but can't do so if there isn't available childcare.



Fly-tipping Continues

The Conservative run council in Perth and Kinross has done a huge amount, in co-operation with Zero Waste Scotland, the police and the Scottish Partnership Against Rural Crime, to clear up the mountains of dumped rubbish but, sadly, there is still a lot to do, I recently found what could only be described as an outdoor lounge dumped on the roadside between Methven and Moneydie. It is a tiny minority of people who are involved in this irresponsible behaviour but it comes at a significant cost to the taxpayer and to the time spent clearing up the mess when officers have so many other challenges. Remember, fly-tipping is a crime so please report it when you see it. The police number is 101 and the SPARC details are contained in this website:

www.neighbourhoodwatchscotland.co.uk

The Height of Success

And finally, news of an extraordinary feat achieved by 11 year old Jules Molyneaux from Ardvreck School in Crieff who, on 10th July, along with his father, became the youngest person ever to scale the Matterhorn. Many congratulations to Jules, his family and all the staff at Ardvreck School!



[Click Here: BBC Crieff boy, 11, youngest to climb the Matterhorn](#)

The next edition of this newsletter will be published on Monday 10th August as full-time business at Holyrood resumes.

Perth & Kinross Conservative Website

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