

Melting Pot 2022

About Reform Scotland

Reform Scotland, a charity registered in Scotland, is a public policy institute which works to promote increased economic prosperity, opportunity for all, and more effective public services. Reform Scotland is independent of political parties and any other organisations. It is funded by donations from private individuals, charitable trusts and corporate organisations. Its Director is Chris Deerin and Alison Payne is the Research Director. Both work closely with the Trustee Board, chaired by Jack McConnell, which meets regularly to review the research and policy programme.

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Foreword

What a challenging year 2022 has been. Three Prime Ministers and four chancellors. War in Europe. The kind of inflation we haven't seen since the 1970s, and the looming threat of stagflation. The perils of Brexit starting to show their fangs. The winter cold biting more bitterly than ever as we all try to manage our soaring heating bills.

Each of these crises has been as relevant to Scotland as it has to any other part of the UK. But we've had our own problems too, of course. This has been a tough 12 months for our NHS as it attempts to catch up with the backlog caused by Covid, despite staff shortages and major budget tensions. Our schools have also been playing catch-up – two years' absence from the classroom has left an unhappy legacy among our young people that will take time to address. There have been angry debates about controversial reforms to gender law, planning for a National Care Service, and the prospect of another independence referendum.

At Reform Scotland, we've sought both to address some of these immediate issues and keep our usual eye on the longer term. We've published influential research on reordering [school governance for the 21st century](#), and on how to make the [Scottish tax system](#) fresher and fairer. We've looked at the need for a more sensible [funding arrangement for our universities](#), and at what more should be done to [decarbonise Scottish energy](#). You can see this year's research [here](#).

Our events schedule has been as enjoyable and educational as ever – guests in 2022 included Britain's foremost security strategy expert [Sir Lawrence Freedman](#), on the war in Ukraine; [Peter Mandelson](#) discussing Labour's returning popularity; [Ruth Davidson](#), [David Gauke](#), [Jesse Norman](#) and [Donald Cameron](#) on the future of the Conservative Party; [Andrew Marr](#) giving his take on this weird political year. We also held events on the [future of the Civil Service](#), reform of the [Scottish tax system](#), and the government's planned [reforms to the education system](#). All of our events can be viewed [here](#).

It's been another strong year on our blog, where we host expert and stimulating new thinking on the big issues of the day. We've had Scottish ministers and SNP frontbenchers setting out the thinking behind government policy, and some bold challenges to the consensus on education and the NHS. We are delighted to share all of this year's articles with you in our annual compendium.

As we head into the Christmas period, the team at Reform Scotland would like to thank everyone who has supported us this year, in whatever form it took. At times it strikes me that it's still harder than it should be to keep a think tank running in Scotland, even though I would argue we're needed more today than ever. But I'm always inspired and enthused by the conversations I have with the incredible people we engage with on a day to day basis – there is so much desire out there for our nation to be better than it is, and such untapped excellence and expertise in every sector and corner. We will continue our mission full-heartedly in 2023, and look forward to you joining us. See you next year.

Chris Deerin
Director,
Reform Scotland

Red Deer And The Monadhliath Mountains

– Drew McFarlane-Slack

Originally posted 20 January 2022

Last year, Ben Goldsmith's wrote an article in Reform Scotland titled '[Time to Rewild the Highlands?](#)' It has prompted me to reflect on my last seven years as the independent Chair of the Monadhliath Deer Management Group (MDMG). Rewilding is not a term I use to describe our work in the Monadhliaths, but Ben's comments prompted a rethink. I will describe who we are and what we are doing and argue that our direction of travel is in line with the principles of Rewilding.

The Monadhliath mountains are, for many visitors to the Highlands of Scotland, a rather remote and untravelled land. They contain, however, the largest and arguably most successful modern Deer Management project in the whole of the UK.

The MDMG was formed in the 1960s. It comprises of over 40 private Estates including one owned by the Scottish Government. Its boundaries stretch from Spean Bridge in Lochaber to Tomatin near Inverness and from Fort Augustus in the West to Kincaig, near Aviemore in the East. It includes around 175,000 hectares of land. Some of the owners have long histories of continuing stewardship going back to the 1800s, some are relatively new to the rights and responsibilities that come with estate ownership and management.

The group's initial aim was to increase the Red Deer population in the Monadhliaths. At that time most estates wanted to grow the number of stags available for sport as this was, and still is, an important element of their business. An increase in shooting of marauding stags on low lying farmland crops was the problem, so the owners decided to take action to secure their stag numbers for the future.

Their immediate decision was to erect a deer fence separating the high ground from the vulnerable farmland, hence protecting both the farming and shooting interests. It was no mean feat, stretching along a 175-mile perimeter and over the years it has proved difficult to maintain.

By the late 1990s the Red Deer population within the fence had grown beyond what was required. Several of the larger estates began to increase their culls. The motivations were different. Some wanted to improve grouse populations for sport, while others were keen to restore habitats by natural regeneration of woodlands. This diversity created tensions within the DMG.

In addition, the EU Natura 2000 Directive had led to discussions with Scottish Natural Heritage, (now NatureScot) about measures, including land management plans and incentives which could be put in place to encourage owners to operate their estates in sympathy with nature conservation objectives and in a more collaborative manner between private and public interests.

Scottish Natural Heritage also had powers to impose sanctions to reduce Deer numbers with the purpose of improving degraded peatland to a 'favourable condition'. The members of the DMG and NatureScot argued, peacefully, about how to proceed and after much discussion, it was agreed to resolve the matter by producing a 10-year Strategic Deer Management Plan (SDMP).

With the support of an external team of specialists (StrathCaulidh Ltd), the details of the SDMP were agreed over a two-year period, which included face to face discussions with each estate member. In 2015 at its Annual General Meeting, the majority of MDMG members approved its implementation.

Its principal objective was to halve the number of Red Deer inside the fence within the first three years by increasing the hind cull and thereafter implement maintenance culls. This strategy was based on research into Red Deer which began on the Island of Rum in the early 1950s and continues today. It allowed relatively more stags to be available to estates for their sporting businesses during the cull as the overall herd size reduced and fecundity increased.

We are now in year seven of that plan and about to begin the process of mapping our next 10 years. I took over the Chairmanship of the project in 2015 from Jamie Williamson of Alvie and Dalraddy Estates, who remains part of the Executive Group. Jamie had helped drive the change despite his well-founded scepticism about government intervention in private land management. A generation earlier, his father had been encouraged to drain the same peatland he is now rewetting and restoring.

Our aims and objectives translated into the following actions.

- **Providing sufficient stags for estates' sporting requirements while maintaining the herd at a sustainable level.** This helps existing businesses operate with some expectation of success while ensuring they play their part in meeting Scotland's climate and biodiversity targets. Importantly we believe that our SDMP is aligned with the thrust of the Scottish Government's Deer Working Group (DWG) final report in 2020.
- **Encourage a rapid increase in new woodland planting, both native and commercial, and improve the condition of existing native woodlands.** This objective recognises the role of both open range and woodland deer management as we move forward, and the equally important role strategic fencing will play in the management of deer to meet public policy objectives, while providing economic activity and employment in fragile rural areas. Currently our members' existing new woodland plans exceed our expected target.
- **Restore to good condition degraded and drained peatland within the Monadhliaths.** In the last 5 years with the support of NatureScot's Peatland Action team, 14 estates in the MDMG have collaborated to restore peatland. We identified local contractors able to carry out this complicated work and encouraged them to invest in staff training and new equipment. At this point in early January 2022 our project, managed by Strath Caulidh Ltd., has successfully

completed 5,000ha of restoration works, the largest and most successful private sector peatland restoration to date in Scotland.

These achievements are due to the foresight of our membership, forward-thinking private estate owners who collectively as members of MDMG supported our SDMP, which gave us the authority to carry out the actions outlined. After this reflection, I am content that our members got it right in 2015. Through active management the MDMG is delivering, in spades, the ambitions of rewilding outlined by Ben Goldsmith creating meaningful landscape-scale change while retaining the glory of the majestic Monadhliath Mountains and Deer in their natural balance with that landscape.

Drew McFarlane-Slack MBE is Chairman of the Monadhliath Deer Management Group

Reclaiming My Voice

– Alison Payne

Originally posted 23 February 2022

Somehow I've been working in politics for 20 years. I can't quite believe so much time has passed, but as my eldest starts his teenage years, I am seeing more of that time reflected back at me. Twenty years in politics – though that is 20 years very much in the background, in amongst the facts and statistics.

For the last 14 years I have worked as the Research Director for Reform Scotland, though I began my career working for the Scottish Conservatives at Holyrood from 2000 (initially as an intern during my last year of university) to 2006.

Those were the early days of devolution and it was a fascinating learning experience. I had friends in different parties and met my late husband, who was a public servant, then too. The debates, and arguments, taught me so much. I didn't always agree with the policies pursued by those who I worked for, but those discussions helped me shape my own views. I tried to listen and to learn and was lucky enough to meet people from across the political divide who inspired me.

I don't hide the fact that I worked for the Scottish Conservatives. It is on my bio on the Reform Scotland website. I also stood as a council candidate for the party twice (in 2003 and 2007). I lost both times. I believe strongly in localism and, regardless of the fact that these council elections were long before the independence referendum, the big issues in those elections were rightly local ones. That was especially the case in 2007, when the issue of a new high school was a fierce local debate. As a former pupil of the local high school I was a strong advocate in favour of a new school being built, a position I shared with candidates in some of the other parties.

Of course, when you are tied to a party you have to advocate publicly for some policies you may not always agree with – the same is true for all politicians.

However, my links to the Conservative Party largely ended in 2007. A huge amount has happened both nationally and personally since then and a quick glance at my Twitter feed will illustrate that my views and those of the Conservative party frequently diverge. Indeed, I think I have since voted SNP, Labour and Lib Dem at different elections.

In the 14 years I've worked for Reform Scotland I have researched, written and advocated publicly and personally for a wide range of policies, from a Basic Income to Road Pricing; greater fiscal devolution to banning short prison sentences; graduates contributing to the cost of higher education to improving the business environment.

Our different policy proposals have been both welcomed and criticised by different parties. Reform Scotland is not aligned to any political party, works with them all, and wants to push the public policy debate. Although it has argued for far greater fiscal devolution, it has not taken a stance on the constitution.

Over the years I have regularly spoken on the TV or radio about our work, always billed as Research Director at Reform Scotland. I do so knowing many people will disagree with whatever policy I am discussing, but I want to engage in that debate.

Speaking publicly is something I have always been nervous of – I am very much more a back room person – but debate is important and I have tried to grow and adapt into that side of the role. But now the nerves have turned to dread.

The BBC journalist Sarah Smith recently talked of the abuse she has received as a result of reporting on Scottish politics. It has put the debate about the abuse – suffered disproportionately by women, and targeted at those across the political spectrum – back in the spotlight. Despite, or perhaps because, Scotland has produced a number of inspiring female politicians in recent years, including Nicola Sturgeon, Ruth Davidson and Kezia Dugdale who have all led their parties, as well as leading political commentators like Smith, there seems to be more trolling and online abuse and it always seems to be more aimed at women than men.

I am no-one. I have held no elected office and it has been 15 years since I last attempted to. And yet, a Twitter account with over 26,000 followers, including many leading politicians, has had a tweet about me as its pinned tweet for nearly two years.

In June 2020 I spoke to the BBC about proposals to return kids to school following the initial lockdown. I had voiced concerns that while some councils were proposing pupils return for half the week, in Edinburgh the proposals were for only one day per week. My main concern was the actions of councils, not Holyrood, and the potential postcode lottery of education provision that was being proposed. I was speaking on behalf of Reform Scotland, I was billed as such, but the BBC also mentioned I had two school age children, as my family was directly impacted as I live in Edinburgh.

I have no idea why, at that point, the trolls came out. Not one person questioned my central point about the unfairness of some kids potentially getting twice as much in-person schooling as others, but they all questioned my right to ask.

Led by the Twitter user I mentioned, a constant barrage of tweets and social media interactions came my way. I am well aware that it was a microcosm of what too many people receive, but for me it was all-encompassing. It didn't stay on Twitter either. Although my Facebook is private, people were finding the odd post I had made public and taking the opportunity to have a go at me. I was receiving messages from friends who were linked to political groups on Facebook to let me know that more and more posts about me were popping up (and I am hugely grateful to those individuals who challenged what was being said). Politicians, including MSPs and councillors who had never met me, retweeted conspiracy nonsense about my links to the Conservative Party. Again not a single one of these individuals appeared to disagree with my central point and defended the idea that it was ok that some kids would get half as much in-person schooling as others. But they all thought they had the right to shut down my right to an opinion due to what I may have done 13 years previously. It was as if everything I had done in the intervening years counted for nothing.

I was not, as was suggested by the trolls, speaking as simply a “worried parent”. I was not billed as a random person off the street, rather I was clearly labelled as being from Reform Scotland. People took issue that my previous links to the Conservative Party were not mentioned. But it was not relevant because I was speaking on behalf of Reform Scotland. The photo on the pinned tweet even has “Reform Scotland” under my name.

Most people of course don’t actually look at what is written or said, they just re-tweet and join the pile on. I was subsequently accused of arguing that all pupils should return no matter what – when I said nothing of the sort. I was accused of saying a whole range of things, despite the easy proof that this was untrue. I tried to engage with those who shared the lies and occasionally someone would apologise and delete. But for the most part they did not. They just didn’t seem to care. I wasn’t a person, rather another bandwagon they could jump on.

As it happens, another media outlet had also asked to interview me about the issue. I turned them down as they were wanting to speak to me as a parent, not as someone representing Reform Scotland. I said that I thought that would be difficult given my role and what we had been saying as an organisation.

I have only once spoken out on a policy matter from a purely personal standpoint. It was in 2016/17 when I was involved in a campaign against changes being made to what was then Widowed Parents’ Allowance. I was part of a group of widowed parents, who would not be affected by the changes, campaigning against the UK Government’s proposals to dramatically cut support to new claimants. I spoke out against the changes in the press and media. At no point did anyone question my right to do so.

I most recently went on the radio to promote Reform Scotland’s work a few days after Christmas. We had published a report calling for a 1p increase in income tax in Scotland to help pay for social care and enable the implementation of the Feeley Review. It so happened that the report criticised UK Conservative Party policies. On Radio Scotland, I advocated a tax rise and explained the work Reform Scotland had published. The trolls came for me again. I had quoted Douglas Ross at one point, not favourably, but to make the point that there was pressure to spend the Health and Social Care Levy on the NHS, and that if it is spent on that it can’t then be also spent on social care. Regardless of the fact that I was talking about a report that was critical of the UK Government and advocating for an income tax rise in Scotland, a policy that the Scottish Conservatives certainly don’t support, I was dismissed as a Tory. Little engagement on the policy once again, just an attempt to shut down my ability to talk at all.

In 14 years at Reform Scotland I have written and publicly spoken in favour of many controversial policies. My comments in June 2020 were not controversial – it was a fair question. Indeed the policy was changed in the end. But those pinned tweets and the conspiracy nonsense remain.

This is not about SNP/Independence bashing. Although the trolls perceived me as being “anti-SNP”, despite plenty of evidence to the contrary, the abuse happens on all sides.

The problem of how we treat those who disagree with us on social media is a matter for everyone – left/right; unionist/nationalist; leave/remain. As the First Minister said last week, the issue shouldn’t be used to bash the other side. Rather, all politicians should be collectively doing what they can to stamp it out. It shouldn’t be something that we just have to put up with.

This makes me so very angry. I am opinionated. I am not always right. I like to debate, to discuss, to learn. Circumstances change, policies develop. We all need to listen to each other more. Unfortunately, social media seems to be making listening and informed discussion much, much harder. All sides are sticking to their echo chambers. All sides engage in pile-ons and re-tweet things they shouldn’t. All sides need to do better.

Alison Payne is the Research Director at Reform Scotland

The Scottish Government's economic strategy isn't Scottish enough

– Gordon Hector

Originally posted 3 March 2022

Last year I spoke to an Irish government official who summarised its economic strategy in a single word: 'just internationalise'.

A bit of a simplification, obviously. But it does capture the sense of focus in Ireland's enterprise policy: get investment in, get exports out.

Yesterday the Scottish Government published its new [economic strategy](#).

It has some good things. It is clearer than past strategies, and thinking about how to implement existing ideas is refreshing.

But does it have this kind of clarity? Do we have our equivalent of 'just internationalise'?

All too often, public sector strategies are really lists of activities – just a long collection of things that should happen without any sense of how they fit together.

Even worse are the 'plans of plans', where the list of actions is simply a collection of other documents.

Neither is actually a strategy. Strategies have some little nugget of insight about the things that will really make the difference. For national economic strategies this is often a really clear sense of underlying strengths and how to make the most of them, or a rationale for backing a particular sector, or identifying the supply-side reform with biggest impact. The crucial thing is to have prioritised, and done so with an intelligent read of the environment and at least some sense of why an action will lead to change. Which is how Ireland ends up with 'just internationalise'.

The themes in the Scottish Government strategy are broadly sensible. But there is still too much listing of Things That Could Be Done.

The best bit is in the entrepreneurship section. It's well-recognised Scotland lags behind in new companies and scale-ups. It's also recognised that specifically scale-ups lead to wage growth. I think it's accepted, if not always talked about, that Scottish culture sometimes doesn't like people getting too big for their boots. So creating a culture that supports more entrepreneurs and high-growth companies is a good thing, rooted in evidence on why it matters. It is hardly new, but it is sensible.

But the other themes are far less focussed. The second chapter is on 'new market opportunities'. This *could*, with a bit of tweaking, become a strategic approach: building around identified sectors and focussing policy around cluster-building. But it's too

scattergun: touch of hydrogen here, bit of renewables here, new funds and investment committees over there.

Scotland's institutional landscape on this front is increasingly complicated with city deals, new enterprise agencies, and the new Scottish National Investment Bank all in play. The SNIB in particular catches the fashion for [Mazzucato-ism](#) – defining big 'missions' to refocus capitalism – and it's really not at all clear how that approach fits in to this plan. It would make sense for a strategy to be mission-based and all the institutions fit that. Or vice-versa, making the national plan reflect institution-level strategy. This does neither.

Then there are chapters on regional growth, skills and fair growth, which veer towards the dreaded plans-of-plans, as they are things that broadly were going to happen anyway. Particularly on the role of regions, massive questions are ducked: you could see regional-level institutions as *the* great focus for investment from now on, making much more sense than national- or local-level approaches. But it is barely touched upon.

So where the whole thing ends up is this sentence:

As a consequence of the 6 programmes, 18 projects and 77 actions set out in this strategy, we will have achieved our vision of building a wellbeing economy.

This has the slight feel of willing it to be true.

Compare yesterday's plan with, say, Rishi Sunak's [Mais lecture](#) last week which identified three priorities. The second (skills) was very blah blah blah but the other two (capital and ideas) were serious, thought-out arguments about what the economy needs. What really stands out is that it was all wrapped in a statement of strategy – an argument about why free markets work, and where they don't, and how Sunak sees the world. It is not like he said anything original, and you can disagree with what he thinks. But it is at least a working theory to underpin everything else.

What's odd is that Kate Forbes has a reputation for being on the centre-right. She is, obviously, in favour of independence. And the best economic argument for independence is a bracingly free market one, which is that a small, open economy like Scotland's would have no option but to face reality, and relentlessly focus on whatever it is keeps us in the game.

Odd then, to feel that what the economic plan lacks is this sense of crispness, of being lean, nimble, adaptive, and above all else focussed.

It's a lot better than previous plans but needs to go further. It needs to streamline more. It needs to list fewer actions but with greater conviction. It needs a stronger sense of why certain things should be done and why others should not, based on a vision of the role of government.

Ironically, for a Finance Minister coming from the right and in favour of independence – it needs a much stronger sense of what it really means to be a small country.

Gordon Hector is a policy consultant and former Director of Policy and Strategy for the Scottish Conservatives

Transforming Dispute Resolution in Scotland

– John Sturrock

Originally posted 9 March 2022

Introduction

“I wish we’d had this conversation a year ago.” This remark, or language expressing similar sentiments, is probably the one I hear most in my professional role.

For the past twenty years, my primary occupation has been to act as a mediator, assisting and indeed empowering parties who are involved in complex commercial, business, professional, personal or policy disputes to reach a mutually acceptable outcome among themselves. Often this is achieved in one day, even in long-standing disputes.

The remark above is usually offered in frustration, often with regret, sometimes in anger. *“If only...we’d sat down and talked about this at an earlier stage, we could have...”*

- *understood your side of the story better and what really matters to you and us*
- *assessed the risks on all sides more objectively*
- *got this sorted quickly, found a solution and been able to deliver/move on/make changes*
- *maintained what had been a good business and/or personal relationship*
- *saved so much in time, hassle and resources which could have been used in a much more productive way*
- *avoided the legal and other costs which have been greater than the real value of the dispute.”*

Fortunately, many of these outcomes are still regularly achieved in mediation, especially if it is utilised as early as possible when disagreements arise. Nipping things in the bud makes such a difference.

The Problem?

Abraham Lincoln famously advised: *“Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbours to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often a real loser – in fees, expenses, and waste of time.”* Wise words indeed.

And yet, in Scotland, mediation remains a rather marginal activity. We still see many commercial and civil disputes heading down the path of litigation (or other tribunal proceedings) with often disproportionate costs in time, money and damage to relationships – and deployment of polarising win/lose, right/wrong strategies, where those involved are obliged to take and support opposing positions. Sometimes one wonders if putting people through the court process, and regularly exposing them to past events which have caused them pain while revisiting adverse situations, is a form of trauma.

In any event, while millions of pounds and people-hours are devoted to the civil justice system, only a very small percentage of court cases (perhaps no more than 5%) are actually decided by judges. The remainder are eventually settled before a final judicial determination is made but there is a cost to being caught up in unresolved adversarial proceedings, with their limited binary and uncertain outcomes. The effects can be damaging (directly and indirectly) to the business, the organisation, the community and the people involved and ultimately to the economy. Except in a few important cases where an authoritative decision by a third party is necessary, going through the adversarial process can be an unproductive use of the assets of those involved and of the public money invested in the system. And, being essentially backward-looking, it often doesn't address what really matters, the real underlying issues.

Of course, many people cannot afford to use the court system at all. When they do, some of the costs incurred in reported cases are mouth-watering. Just think of some of the recent cases seeking a judicial review of Scottish Government actions. As a mediator, I have lost count of the number of situations where the settlement amount agreed in mediation is less than the total legal costs incurred to date and where costs have become the major sticking point.

What Can We Do?

Einstein observed that doing the same thing over and over and hoping for different results is a form of madness. So, what needs to change? Default to a court, arbitrator or adjudicator should only be a last resort. The goal should be to take out of the formal justice system as early as possible (or remove altogether) as many as possible of those disputes which consume time, resource and money and yet are ultimately settled by agreement, very often after considerable expense has been incurred, not only by the public purse but by litigants, businesses, funders, insurers and others.

Even in the really tough cases, we need to help people to look forward and find mutually acceptable outcomes. I suggest that we need an approach to dealing with difficult disputes and disagreements (i.e. those which are not resolved fairly readily by straightforward communication) in which we encourage early and constructive discussion and resolution by negotiation. Even before going to court is considered, we should do what we can to avoid disagreements and differences from escalating unhelpfully.

For a recent example, I note that, in its report into the construction and procurement of the CalMac ferries, the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee of the Scottish Parliament pointed to the weakness of the dispute resolution mechanisms, including the provision for appointing a mediator, hampering the prospect of trying to find an early solution and arguably leading to so much additional cost. We need to manage a whole range of issues like these better in future, especially in the public sector.

Logically, by placing much greater emphasis on trying to find an agreed outcome to any dispute, we will help those involved to address what really matters. Such an approach also promotes better communication and taking responsibility (rather than deferring to an outside party to decide), while restoring autonomy and maintaining control over the

outcome, all of which are at the heart of good decision-making. It gives the parties, the people affected, involvement and choice. Sometimes, though, this is not so easy. Those parties (and perhaps their legal advisers) can get stuck for all sorts of understandable reasons. One way to extend and enhance the negotiation process is to seek assistance in the form of mediation.

Mediation as Added Value

Mediation's added value is the involvement of a skilled independent facilitator in the ongoing discussions, someone who can help people meet and talk, get under the surface, understand and overcome the cognitive biases, psychological barriers and other causes of impasse, identify and assess the options for achieving realistic and useful outcomes, benchmark against the consequences of not reaching agreement, and focus on what precisely is needed to achieve practical delivery of whatever is agreed.

In a recent dispute arising in a construction project, for example, the claim in question was resolved in mediation by agreeing a series of potential future contracts which would generate value for an employer in excess of losses in the immediate claim and secure a flow of work for a supplier which had been blacklisted. Then there was the farming family, whose business was facing a difficult future, which resolved a serious inter-generational problem about succession when the younger members of the family used the mediation day to demonstrate to the older folks that the time had come for responsibility to be handed over. And the Scottish flagship business trying to introduce new production processes and wishing to take the trades unions with it, where a day of mediated conversations began the vital process of rebuilding trust, with clear communication, acknowledgements of past mistakes, reassurances about future job prospects and agreement to work jointly on new plans.

Mediation is well established in many parts of the world, not least south of the border where senior judges have recently re-emphasised its importance as an integral part of the dispute resolution process, observing that the focus needs to be on *resolution* rather than *dispute*. There is talk of a mandatory good faith obligation to try to resolve or narrow a dispute.

The UK Ministry of Justice has said that it wants to *"support people to get the most effective resolution without devoting more resources than necessary – financial, intellectual and emotional – to resolve their dispute."* They add a call to *"mainstream non-adversarial dispute resolution mechanisms, so that resolving disagreements proactively and constructively becomes the norm"*. The UK Government's recent consultation on 'Reforming Competition and Consumer Policy' includes proposals to increase the uptake of processes such as mediation as a way to support consumers. NHS Resolution in England and Wales emphasises the use of mediation to address medical claims. There is now an international mechanism (the "Singapore Convention") for enforcement of mediation agreements.

Mediation and Dispute Resolution in Scotland

However, after a bit of a flourish a couple of years ago with publication of a report optimistically entitled '[Bringing Mediation into the Mainstream in Civil Justice in Scotland](#)' which made numerous proposals, some of us worry that Scotland is falling behind. This is important for many reasons, including that those who have disputes to resolve may go where the system appears more flexible and progressive. Others may end up with sub-optimal outcomes. Businesses, communities and the economy may end up worse off at a time when we need to be maximising our use of resources. Past research indicates that the price of unresolved conflict is high – it has been estimated that it costs UK business over £30bn a year, takes up 20% of leadership time and results in the loss of 370 million working days. By comparison, recent estimates in England and Wales suggest a £4.6 billion annual saving from quicker and more effective resolution of commercial disputes through mediation.

In Scotland's Programme for Government, it is said that: *"The Scottish Government will work with stakeholders to expand the availability of mediation and arbitration services within the civil justice system. The Scottish Government is working with stakeholders, and will consult on future changes as appropriate, to give people access to flexible, affordable and less stressful means of settling disputes, benefitting them and saving time in courts."* These words are just what we need to hear but actions speak louder. A form of consultation process has actually been going on for several years. There are some specific examples of welcome changes occurring in Scotland but overall the pace of change remains slow. Of course, change will come not just from Government and the courts but also from business, the professions and better education.

Thinking about the court system, one question, perhaps for Audit Scotland, is how should limited public money and resources be deployed to help achieve efficient dispute resolution? Should parties to a dispute be required to try mediation before engaging the costly civil justice system? In England and Wales, as elsewhere, that proposition is now accepted. Experience and research show that successful outcomes are achieved in the large majority of mediated matters, so this makes sense especially when, as noted above, the costs of litigating are often disproportionate to the sums in dispute in a case.

This is not to suggest that parties can be compelled to come to an agreement in mediation, only that they may be required to try it. Parties at all times retain the choice to refuse to reach agreement and to return to a court if they wish to do so. As one observer commented, making mediation mandatory *"does not guarantee that cases settle, but you do create more opportunities for the rational assessment of litigation risk and to agree on remedies that the courts cannot provide."*

However, this is not just about compulsory mediation. Overall, it would make financial sense to devote more resources to prevention at an early stage of unnecessary litigation, and indeed unnecessarily prolonged disputes in general, in order to reduce the disproportionate expenditure incurred at the later expensive stages. Investment in early-stage resolution, including encouraging more skilled approaches to negotiation and mediation, could save millions of pounds in Scotland and in turn generate greater

productivity and value. In many countries and in many states in the US for example, the civil justice system leads the way in innovative measures to reduce the use of courts. This also frees up courts to handle quickly and effectively those matters which can only be decided by judges. We could do the same in Scotland.

Looking Ahead

This is fundamentally about our culture and how we ensure that difficult disputes and disagreements can be resolved quickly, cost effectively and constructively, especially post-pandemic. The pandemic has placed huge demands on the civil justice system. With its speed, relatively low cost and easy delivery using online platforms, mediation offers a way through a backlog of unresolved cases, with much less use of resources. However, it is important to emphasise that the benefits of mediation are far wider than merely saving public expenditure and that mediation is not just a way of reducing the cost of courts in Scotland.

Mediation also offers a route more generally to meaningful engagement, better relationships and creative outcomes in all sorts of difficult situations. It provides access to dispute resolution for many of those who cannot afford to pursue matters in a court. And dealing with disagreements and disputes quickly and efficiently is also an environmentally friendly choice. It fits with building a greener economy and with aspirations to meet sustainable development goals.

An encouraging recent development has been the incorporation of mediation, as part of a wider commitment to promoting collaboration and the avoidance of disagreements, into the latest proposals for handling inter-governmental relations in the UK. That mediation is recognised as offering a valuable means to reduce political tension is a useful step forward.

In the context of criminal justice, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice recently wrote about strengthening and modernising the justice system and delivering justice services which meet our needs in a modern society. This surely applies equally to civil justice. In 2021, Iain Smith wrote a [piece for Reform Scotland](#) in which, based on his experiences of the failure of – and trauma related to – conventional approaches to crime, he called for a smarter criminal justice system with long term solutions which were not simply characterised as “soft” or “hard”. Again, surely such an enlightened approach pertains just as much to civil justice.

In summary,

- promoting earlier, more effective and more efficient resolution of disputes and disagreements in Scotland will be good for the economy, civil society and communities, not least in aligning with health and wellbeing objectives and the National Performance Framework.
- better education in negotiation skills and embracing the use of mediation for matters of importance to business, the public sector and the workforce will bring useful social and economic benefits, better financial

returns and increased productivity. This could be vital to the delivery of any national strategy for economic transformation.

- active encouragement of mediation by the courts in Scotland to promote earlier settlement of cases and incorporating the use of mediation in appropriate Scottish Parliament legislation will add to the impetus.
- commitment by the Scottish Government, local government and other public sector bodies to endeavour to resolve disputes in which they are involved by using skilled mediation wherever possible could make a real difference. That might include some of the most challenging and sensitive policy issues which attract so much attention these days and which tend to dwell on polarised positions. Constructive dialogue is needed – and possible.

And Finally

“I wish we’d had this conversation a year ago.” Disputes and disagreements will always be with us. Fundamentally this is about how we in Scotland choose to deal with them. We really need to act now. If we do, we’ll perhaps have those difficult conversations at the time when they will be most useful. And with those conversations will come better outcomes.

As one senior participant commented during a mediation: *“I’ve never experienced anything as tough as this dispute in my professional career. But I am glad we met today. They completely changed my perception of people like this. They obviously want this finished. I think we can get something sorted. It will be a relief to put this behind us. It was good to actually meet and talk.”*

John Sturrock QC is Founder and Senior Mediator at Core Solutions

Why new forms of investment are needed in higher education if we are to solve the climate challenge – the case for patient capital

– Richard A Williams

Originally posted 15 March 2022

Why does addressing the climate change challenges feel such an unsurmountable peak for so many? As an engineer and working in higher education that has a history of driving technological and societal change, I am much more confident that with a targeted and ambitious mindset there is no reason that a net-zero outcome cannot be reached. Indeed my own wish, and a leadership driver for my own University community, is that we should be *globally fossil-free* within a generation. The key here is that the solution and pathways must be global and ethical – as the rightmindedness of any one nation will not accomplish the task.

One of the main reasons for the gap between where the hearts and minds of citizens lie, and the position of national governments, is that the political process mitigates against achieving very ambitious ('moon-shot') goals. Why? First, I cannot see any process, and sometimes I sense a lack of political determination, to set out a long-term plan that fixing net-zero will demand. A plan of at least twenty years is needed, with a high degree of political consensus. Secondly, there is little public favour to be gained by suggesting tough changes (if this is part of the recipe). Third, and connected to the previous point, the challenging pathway will involve initiatives, not all of which will work – and the political landscape defers to timidity rather than risk the typical mud-throwing adverse reaction to failure. Fourthly, the key features and functioning of a vibrant green economy has not been articulated or gamified. The net result of this is that no clear pathways have been offered by governments and communicated to citizens that explain how to achieve the outcomes. This is the cause of angst and will continue to be so. Of course, Scotland has sought to get ahead of the game in acknowledging the need to address its integrated approach to the outcomes aligned to the UN sustainability goals through its helpful National Performance Framework [1]. However, we need future pathways for local, national and global actions to be elucidated.

Scotland has a truly stellar history of scholarship, invention and impact. Remember that innovation (a word that is loosely bandied around) is about the successful application of an idea (invention) to the benefit of society. Having the idea is comparatively easy, drawing it out to benefit society is the big win. The answers do not just lie in technology: they lie predominantly in the human factors of society. Here again Scotland has been a primary place of enlightenment in the eighteenth century. The world's father of economics, Adam Smith, would have argued that the heart of change would arise by keeping enlightened self-interest at the forefront of our minds. The magnum opus of *The Wealth of Nations* is so well known, but let me shine a light on his other rather splendid book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [2]. Apart from being a more concise read, it speaks of acting as if someone was observing all your actions and, of course, it speaks at length on the importance of a generic societal happiness. What excellent points. Last year, the research centre located in the renovated home of Adam Smith just off the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, Panmure House, developed ten clear priorities and actions for the mitigation climate effects [3] that presents a whole society view. Ambition and intent was a key priority, as were reforms in finance and the economy.

So let me focus on the possible role of universities, which have for centuries been lighthouses for the future. Universities are curators, convenors and creators through their ideas and inventions that have led to innovation. Scotland is blessed with one of the best possible assets, its universities, for its future, the ability to research and shape the future, and the ability to develop people with the talent to make the future happen. But change is needed in the innovation process. I must admit to feeling slightly aggravated by reference to 'why are we not like Silicon Valley' – where someone has an idea and then hey-presto in four years everybody has made a great deal of money and a new business has been developed and sold on. Is this a trick we are missing? Of course, our economy does need 'high growth new companies' but we want them to stick in Scotland. There are other important interventions in play too, such as the emerging programme for the so-called *Tech Scalers*. But to solve issues around climate challenge, we need a whole different additional investment structure, once based on long-term investment. Let me explain.

As a person involved with radical innovation, it's clear that in most cases the business models and markets for radical technologies, processes, and new ways of doing things often do not exist. Indeed, my definition of radical 'invention' (note my choice of word here) is that it may be simple, unbelievable, and difficult to gain adoption. Community adoption can be slow even if consumer surveys show they might wish to adopt. This means that conventional economic drivers cannot be used to assess the fiscal business proposition. An example I worked on in the past was the implementation of a radical way of washing without (or using extraordinarily little) water and no need for washing powder. The technology was first-rate and the environmental benefits (energy consumption, water usage, wastewater clean-up, avoidance of drying) were stupendous. However, the ability for such a disruptive product to enter the market and displace existing washing machines, detergent suppliers etc was viewed as unbackable. Furthermore, consumers, whilst liking the green credentials, could not bring their wallets round to purchasing the machines in their homes due to the human factor. They thought that waterless washing could not work in their home, despite readily taking clothes to the environmentally damaging organic chemical 'dry cleaning' counter-services. Ten years later, the technology is well adopted in the hotel sector in California where supply chain issues have been remapped, driven by the obvious benefits [4]. The process of radical invention to innovation takes time.

All this took patience, and hence the missing link is *Patient Capital* – propositions where the value of the investment is not based on fast return but on longer term financial and societal returns. If we are to address the climate challenge in our universities, we need access to investors and research funders who value societal impact above short term gain. This is a quite different arena for several reasons. It requires the executors of the research to be committed to the whole innovation cycles of invention and deployment, of which the latter is challenging and requires evidence of appropriate partners. The innovation team needs to have a broad-base so that it has the capacity and resilience to be enduring in its purpose. It carries risk since a good proportion of the 'great ideas' may fail anywhere along the innovation pathway – and, for the reasons I mentioned above, failure polarises communities. We must get over this. The whole innovation team must have an utterly clear conviction and purpose to achieve the outcome. Such endeavours are suited to a so-called 'challenge' approach to research – in which an end-to-end team emerges to address a specific challenge.

There is a growing interest in long-term capital and organisations have been developed to foster, promote, audit and demonstrate its value to savers and communities [5]. Critically,

the long-term investment chain is supported by institutions (pension funds, sovereign wealth funds, insurers, and asset managers) who share a common objective in long-term security. There is a specific focus on climate challenges and approaches, such as in this toolkit [6]. In such funds, the measure of success should be best expressed in terms of the yield of tCO_2 reductions achieved per £ of research investment placed. Humungous global financial losses that are predicted if climate mitigants are not delivered, which provides a chilling backdrop to calibrate against and justify the scale of innovation investment that may be required.

It is through such pathways that Scotland should draw on the undisputable track record of innovation in its institutions of Higher Education, to lead the way in deployment of long-term capital to solve some of the most wicked problems that we face in transition. Focussing capital on long-term gain needs to be an increasingly visible part of a better-connected whole-systems Scottish approach that starts with developing entrepreneurial mindsets equipped with confidence and ambition to solve critical issues.

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Urgent need for action in Scottish schools

– Carole Ford

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There has been a continuing concern about the Scottish education system for some years now, thrown into sharp relief by declining results from the international Pisa studies, the recent depressing OECD report and the effects of the pandemic. Currently, attention is focused on the SQA assessment regime, particularly the place of examinations, and on the configuration of Education Scotland. These are key strategic cogs in the machine of the education system, but it appears to me that we are ignoring two much more important factors which have a major influence on both individual and collective educational outcomes. The first is the underlying ethos of our schools and what they are trying to achieve, and the second is the behaviour of pupils and the extent to which it appears to hinder performance.

From my own observations and discussions with teachers, current standards of achievement have fallen sharply. For pupils following an examination syllabus, they have large gaps in their knowledge and will not be well prepared for the next stage in their education, regardless of the grades they achieve this summer. Yet, there is no national strategy to retrieve this situation. Where are the extra classes, the changes in the curriculum, the tutor programmes? Why is there no outcry for something to be done? Individual teachers and individual schools are implementing catch up strategies if they can, but the collective response, particularly from the educational establishment, appears to be that it doesn't really matter. Contrast this approach with what has been happening in England since June 2020: a school led, locally sourced but nationally funded tutor programme. Exactly what has Education Scotland been doing for the last two years?

My concern about the standard of pupil performance in Scottish schools goes wider than the post-pandemic scenario. The lack of urgency over the current situation is the culmination of an anti-intellectual, anti-academic ethos which has pervaded Scottish schools for many years, exacerbated by the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence, a misnomer if ever there was one. By anti-intellectual I am referring to a persistent belittling of the importance of knowledge and conceptual understanding, and a dismissive attitude to the notions of mastery of skills or academic excellence, which have combined to undermine the performance of Scottish pupils. Concerned parents mitigate this themselves, correcting spelling and punctuation, practising arithmetic skills, inculcating knowledge and understanding their children might not otherwise acquire. Make no mistake, this educational ethos is the antithesis of that which contributed to Scotland's previous world class reputation for education. The OECD report clearly identified the low priority given to acquiring knowledge in our schools.

What is the evidence for my concern? Aside from the incontrovertible Pisa data which shows a distinct decline in standards, there has been a steady drop in the numbers of pupils studying STEM subjects and subjects which may be described as more difficult. In this context, the definition of more difficult is the statistical evidence of

the grades awarded by the SQA. Defined in this way, Physics is harder than Biology, German is harder than Spanish, Geography is harder than Modern Studies. Schools know this and pupils know this. What is depressing is that so many pupils deliberately choose the easier options, and there is little incentive for schools to encourage them otherwise. At a time when technology could not be more important, Scotland has fewer pupils studying Maths, Physics and Computing. In an increasingly global world, Scotland's young people are avoiding foreign languages.

A snapshot of the anti-intellectual ethos: at Higher level, excellence is positively discouraged by the current inspection regime. Four Highers at grade A are worth less than five at grade C in the eyes of HMIE and school league tables. But to the individual pupil, four As will gain entry to a wider range of courses, including high tariff courses, than five Cs ever will. Crucially, a candidate with four As has gained a much surer foundation for future study. In short, the system favours mediocrity over excellence, collective data over individual pupil performance. Almost uniquely among developed countries, Scotland's schools have limited scope to deliver the most academically challenging courses. There is seriously restricted availability of Advanced Higher classes in most schools; in more deprived areas and in smaller schools, provision may be as low as one or two subjects. What price social equity in this context?

Our curriculum relies on experiences, exposure to facts and skills, rather than an explicit expectation that pupils will learn the facts or master the skills. The paucity of assessment throughout the broad general phase of education, from age 5 to 15, clearly illustrates the relaxed attitude to retention of knowledge. Scottish school children study the Vikings, the Victorians, the Egyptians, the Romans. Ask them to point to the relevant countries on a map, or whether the Roman empire pre- or post-dates the Viking incursions, and you may be seriously disappointed in the answers. Worse still, display a map of Scotland and see how many could point to the location of their hometown, or Edinburgh, or the Outer Hebrides. Subjects which require prior knowledge and the retention of further knowledge, are suffering the most under this philosophy. Algebra is very difficult if you cannot remember how to divide two fractions; foreign languages are very difficult if you are not comfortable with the concept of nouns, verbs and adjectives. Knowledge and understanding are built on previous knowledge and understanding, yet pupils place little importance on acquiring either in an experiential curriculum. They do not understand that learning is a conscious act, only rarely accomplished by osmosis.

Since the acquisition of knowledge plays such a small role in the current curriculum, teaching methods prioritise process and activity over outcome. Innovative teaching strategies abound, with no independent evaluation worthy of the name, no analysis of their efficacy. Many teachers try to avoid exposition, wrongly described as passive learning. There is nothing passive about any form of learning; it requires active *cognitive* effort. The mistaken notion of active versus passive learning presupposes that typing your credit card number into your laptop is an effective way to learn it. I think many of us know that is not true. Sit down for five minutes and make the cognitive effort to learn it, and you will. To avoid direct teaching, teachers attempt to draw ideas from pupils or invent activities to lead them to the desired outcome. There are occasions when these techniques are fruitful, but they are rarely

effective with new facts or difficult concepts, particularly abstract concepts. I have observed teachers tying themselves in knots trying to 'draw out' a mathematical concept from a class of very bewildered pupils. If it was easy to spot Pythagoras' Theorem for yourself, Pythagoras would not be famous for having done so. The consequence of these ineffective methods is that understanding is insecure for many pupils, and it is much slower for all of them.

The debate over SQA qualifications is a clear illustration of the prevailing ethos. The debate is all about whether the exams should go ahead or not; there is little debate about how much learning has actually taken place in the last two years, how future study will be affected by large gaps in pupil understanding, the standard at which the exams should be set or the actual quality of the examinations themselves. The fears over teaching to the test would be largely eliminated by better designed examinations.

The second issue which is receiving even less attention than performance standards is classroom behaviour. Most teachers are aware of a steady decline in pupil behaviour over a number of years. This is attributable to many factors but you will search CfE in vain for references to productive learning behaviours such as listening quietly, following teacher instruction, working hard, completing homework, or persevering when encountering difficulty, the behaviours which successful learners almost uniformly display. We acknowledge that pupil outcomes are adversely affected by family difficulties, specific cognitive or mental health issues and poverty, the last being the most significant of all. But the educational establishment does not acknowledge that pupil outcomes are very seriously affected by both individual behaviour and the behaviour of classmates. Teachers are fully aware of this. They attribute much of the decline in standards to poor behaviour and they attribute their own high stress levels to the same. It is the elephant in the room of Scottish education, that difficult behaviour not only affects how children learn, it affects what teachers attempt to teach.

Adolescents and children may misbehave simply because it is more fun than working. Young people are not throwing chairs around: they talk constantly, when the teacher is talking or others are trying to work; they do not listen to or follow teacher instruction; they fail to bring necessary equipment, not even a pencil in some cases; they rarely complete homework; their work rate is close to zero as they chat to friends; they play with their phones which, strangely enough, they never forget to bring, unlike the afore mentioned pencil. Teachers report a distinct drop in motivation caused by the cancellation of exams, a diminution in work ethic following the periods of lockdown and a management reluctance to use any form of discipline to improve the situation. The possible impact on mental health is the major deterrent to effective deployment of discipline measures. The concern is well founded but the laissez faire strategy is not. Educational standards are suffering, no individual pupil benefits from achieving less, the majority of pupils in a class may be held back by the behaviour of a minority. The actual content of lessons may be dictated by behavioural rather than pedagogical concerns.

Sound mental health is developing as the single largest influence on the education system. This may be no bad thing but why is working hard to achieve discernible,

worthwhile progress no longer regarded as an effective counter to mental health issues? Why is so little consideration given to the failure to achieve positive educational outcomes as a source of anxiety? Of course, the ethos and environment of the school should be designed to have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff, but its purpose must centre on educational outcomes. Tolerating poor behaviour, to the detriment of both individual and collective outcomes, to the detriment of staff morale and wellbeing, is no solution. As most teachers are fully aware, there is a correlation between poorer behaviour and economic and social disadvantage, for the reasons noted above. Relaxing behavioural standards is a backdoor elitism which disproportionately impacts on the very pupils who can least afford it. We routinely acknowledge that achieving five Highers in a disadvantaged school takes more individual grit and determination than in the leafy suburbs yet we take no steps to improve this situation. This low expectation of behaviour has a direct inhibiting impact on achievement. Teaching strategies are designed to appease and accommodate the less motivated, very often to the detriment of educational outcomes, particularly for those who are motivated to learn. Individual teachers cannot instil a standard of behaviour that senior management will not support. There is not a lot of headroom for the lad o' pairs if he is sitting in a classroom surrounded by children who never stop talking.

These two issues, an anti-intellectual ethos and poor classroom behaviour, feed off each other. Pupils are unwilling to complete homework; some teachers now claim that homework is unnecessary and elitist, despite the evidence of its positive impact on learning. The logic appears to be that if some choose not to complete it, we should stop everyone from doing so. It is certainly the most effective way to close the attainment gap, lowering achievement from above, but not a positive educational strategy in anyone's interests.

The anti-intellectual ethos is also influencing the longer term debate about the future assessment and qualifications system in Scotland. There is vocal support among some teachers and elements of the educational establishment for the abolition of examinations entirely, despite their clear advantages in terms of fairness and maintaining universal standards. Fairness and standards are the reasons for the ubiquitous nature of exams, across every aspect of learning, and across the globe. From the driving test and music grades to accountancy and medicine. From progressive education systems in Sweden and Finland, to the rigours of Singapore. There is no doubt that teachers have varying internalised standards, and varying levels of conscious or unconscious bias. The very many ways in which teachers, parents, or tutors can impact on school based assessments is a whole other problem. Basing a high stakes assessment system on teacher grades alone will be unfair and it will be the usual suspects who suffer if the objectivity of examinations is removed or diminished – girls, ethnic minorities, the economically or socially disadvantaged. Universal standards across schools will be difficult to maintain with the obnoxious possibility of qualifications from one school being considered more valuable than from another. Universities are ample evidence of how this could develop. The principal basis for the removal of exams appears to be the idea that expected standards of performance are not necessary; we should not judge pupil performance against an objective measure; challenging young people to achieve a

particular standard may be stressful; personal development, not the acquisition of specific knowledge and understanding, is the key objective. But striving for achievable goals is the prime motivator for most human endeavour, as teachers are now more keenly aware than ever. And those very specific standards are the key to successful future study. Personally, I want my bridges built by engineers who understand forces and my appendix removed by a surgeon who remembers where it is.

All pupils deserve an education which delivers knowledge and understanding, which teaches them how to learn and acquire skills, in a classroom environment which fosters rather than hinders their progress. Scotland's future productivity and economic development will be adversely affected by an education system which does not actively strive to deliver excellence and high standards at every stage, or to promote the behaviours which will facilitate that. Individuals will not achieve their potential, particularly those with the greatest obstacles to overcome. While our pupils are being introduced to calculus through the medium of interpretive dance, youngsters in Estonia will be forging ahead, solving differential equations in their sleep.

Carole Ford is a member of the Commission for School Reform. She is the former Head Teacher of Kilmarnock Academy, chair of the Scottish Secondary Mathematics Group and co-author of a number of maths textbooks. She works as an associate tutor in teacher education.

A Scottish National Security Strategy – Stewart McDonald MP

Originally posted 29 April 2022

The illegal and unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine has shattered the post-Cold War European order. As interstate conflict returns to our North Atlantic neighbourhood, governments and citizens must now reckon with the reality of living with a neighbour who, just hours away, is hell-bent on redrawing the map of Europe in blood. Scotland, tucked up in our quiet corner of the world, is no exception: as a European nation, we must now grapple with the return of war to our continent.

The war in Ukraine has forced Europeans of all political traditions to reflect on many of our long-held beliefs about peace and security. Within days of the invasion of Ukraine, Germany – where anti-militarism is woven into the DNA of most mainstream political parties – announced a €100bn increase in defence spending, while Annalena Baerbock, German Minister of Foreign Affairs and former leader of the German Green Party, has been among her country's most vocal advocates for providing military aid to Ukraine.

This is a story repeated across Europe, as progressive and centre-left parties adjust to the new reality created by Vladimir Putin's attempt to prosecute an imperialist war of conquest on the European continent.

In Finland, where just months ago only 28 per cent of the population supported NATO membership, there is now a clear public and parliamentary majority in favour of joining the alliance. The country's Green League – part of Finland's coalition government who have been historically opposed to NATO membership – exemplify this remarkable volte face better than many: the party's Deputy Chair, MP Iiris Suomela, said the invasion of Ukraine shows that her country "needs new types of security guarantees, and it has become clear that we get the strongest guarantees through NATO membership", while the Chair of the Green parliamentary group in the Finnish Parliament recently published a statement arguing that Finland's "most natural and safe place" is to be found in the shelter of the NATO alliance.

In Sweden too, unprovoked Russian aggression has thawed decades-long opposition to NATO. Months after the governing Swedish Social Democratic Party reaffirmed its opposition to NATO membership, the Prime Minister – noting that "Sweden's security position changed fundamentally" when Russia invaded Ukraine – has opened the door to NATO membership, with a review on joining the alliance to be completed before summer.

Many in Scotland have long admired much of Nordic social policy, but we have often neglected the reality that a sound defence posture is what ultimately underpins a nation's ability to have a robust social contract with its people. As the Finnish Director-General for Defence Janne Kuusel observed, without a serious and credible defence

policy, “We don’t have business, we don’t have welfare, we don’t have growth ... It’s well understood”.

The debate in both Sweden and Finland recognises the reality that the world fundamentally changed with Putin’s assault on Ukraine in February. As the Swedish Prime Minister put it at a press conference in Helsinki with her Finnish counterpart, ‘there is a world before February 24th and a world after February 24th’.

And yet as our northern-European neighbours set about shaping the new Euro-Atlantic security order, the UK Government’s position is that its own defining defence and security posture – the 2020 Integrated Review – doesn’t need to change. This is hubris we can ill afford.

Just as I have called on the UK Government to revisit its now defunct Integrated Review, we in the SNP must show that we are adapting too. The world we want Scotland to enter as a member state has changed, and we must change with it.

Our aspiration for Scotland to be non-nuclear member of NATO has undoubtedly solidified. No other security proposition could possibly afford Scotland the comprehensive security arrangements that our country would need.

Not only do I believe this to be in Scotland’s national interest, but in the interest of NATO too. That being said, we must resist the temptation to rely solely on Scotland’s geo-strategic position to secure membership, important though it is. NATO is a burden-sharing alliance and Scotland, like all member states, will be expected to share in that burden. That means a new level of ambition on defence, similar to that being shown by our neighbours, compared to what we put forward in the 2014 independence referendum.

We must assert a new level of confidence in defence and security cooperation for an independent Scotland, including with the rest of the UK. As our nearest neighbour, with whom we share an island, it makes sense for a comprehensive defence and security treaty between Edinburgh and London to be an early priority. Such a treaty would be in the interests of both states and would be a confidence-building measure for allies.

I have also argued that Scotland should seek to be an early member of the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force. Ben Wallace has previously referred to members of the JEF as ‘the doers’ – those who actively partner, train, and exercise in pursuit of common security – and that is what Scotland should be known as. This would also be an important confidence-building measure.

We will also want to ensure that we are able to offer allies a unique military capability that matters. Just as Denmark is renowned for its special forces capability and Estonia for its cyber, I have argued that an independent Scotland should build an adaptable and deployable capability in military medicine that we can readily offer partners in time of need.

A Scottish national security strategy should adopt the same whole-of-society approach to defence, security, and national resilience that we see in our Nordic neighbours. Such an approach would allow us to protect our interests at home, but also contribute to the common security of our allies. That means putting non-kinetic threats such as pandemics, extreme weather and hostile disinformation on a level playing field with military threats. Finland learned this many years ago and today enjoys an international reputation as a “producer” of regional security.

The reordering of this Euro-Atlantic security order is a totemic moment. NATO and the EU, as the twin pillars of that order, have shown a remarkable ability to remain focused and to adapt. These burden-sharing alliances, based on mutual co-operation, provide the environment that states, and in particular small states, need to flourish. Without this security – the ability to make decisions unconstrained by hostile actors – nothing else is possible.

My aspiration is for Scotland to be a member of the international community and we cannot afford to sit still as the world changes around us. We must be actively engaged in the Euro-Atlantic security debate and ensure that we put forward a credible prospectus at the next referendum so that, like our neighbours across the North Sea, an independent Scotland will produce security just like we will produce green energy – both in our national interest and for the benefit of our North Atlantic neighbourhood.

Stewart McDonald MP is SNP Spokesperson for Defence and a member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee

Improving our tax communications and engagement

– Tom Arthur MSP

Originally posted 7 June 2022

In October 2021 I wrote a [blog](#) for Reform Scotland about the Scottish Government's consultation on the Framework for Tax. I'm pleased to say that we received a wealth of valuable and detailed input from a wide variety of stakeholders. The final version of the Framework was published in December 2021 shortly after the Scottish Budget.

Engagement has always been a key component of our approach to taxation in Scotland. It has now been enshrined as a principle of good tax policy making in our Framework for Tax, which reaffirms that commitment.

It is through these principles that we will ensure that the decisions we make on tax policy in Scotland delivers a fairer, greener and more prosperous country for everyone. The Framework also demonstrates our commitment to good guardianship in relation to our tax powers and our eagerness to continue to improve. This is why we published an evaluation of the changes made to Income Tax in 2018-19 alongside the Framework.

It is also why we will continue to engage proactively with our stakeholders and continue to be open and transparent.

That is all fine if you have a good grasp of the tax system in Scotland. But what if you don't?

Understanding of the Scottish tax system is low among people in Scotland – as it is across the rest of the UK. The Scottish Government conducts research into public understanding of tax and in 2021 found that only 39% of those living in Scotland understood the Scottish tax system.

That leaves 61% of people in Scotland not knowing much, or anything at all, about the tax system in Scotland. That needs to change.

This is an area of concern as it not only makes it more difficult for these people to understand the tax system, it makes them less likely to engage and contribute to discussions that ultimately impact them.

I want to help them understand it, even just a little bit more. I know you do too. A lot of work is being undertaken by the Scottish Government to try and improve public understanding of tax across a variety of platforms.

One of the key products relating to this is the animated video, 'Raised in Scotland. Spent in Scotland.' (watch below) This was co-designed with five external stakeholders who worked with the Scottish Government to ensure that the messages were easily understood, but also relevant to individuals in Scotland.

Without wanting to write too much about the video, it conveys a multitude of information quickly and simply, linking all forms of tax to our spending commitments.

I am aware that tax is not a topic that people are instinctively drawn towards. Even though tax is not something everyone finds exciting I believe that everyone should at least understand a bit more about it.

The decisions we make on tax are decisions that impact everybody's lives and, in the case of young people especially, will impact their futures. I want the citizens of the country to be able to contribute to discussions happening on tax.

Your view matters to the Scottish Government. More specifically, they matter to me. The video is just one of many steps that the Scottish Government is taking to try to help tackle the issue of public understanding of tax.

The Citizens' Assembly of Scotland published a set of recommendations on tax, which the [Scottish Government has responded to](#), with many of those themed around making the information more accessible.

An example of this is our [tax pages on gov.scot](#) which have been restructured to meet some of the recommendations. Simple to understand information, such as a definition of the taxes, have now been included at the top of the page. Nothing has been taken away either, and I feel that is equally as important.

We now have a website that meets the needs of all audiences looking for information – be that top level or in-depth background content on how the policy will function.

I ask my officials to be innovative and creative in the ways in which we communicate about tax. I feel that we are getting there and a lot is being done. Content is being produced for a variety of platforms, reaching an expansive group of people. I know that this is an area where there has been a lot of growth, but there is still a good way to go to achieve our aims.

This is now the part where I throw out an ask to you, the reader, to think a bit more about tax and your part in the national conversation.

Whether you are an interested individual or a representative of an organisation, your voice matters. I am very keen to help improve the public debate on tax and for it to be more of a discussion. This is a view shared with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, Kate Forbes MSP, and we are committed to doing this.

Talk to your family, friends, and colleagues, create your own social media content or share ours, create your own resources, or try to stimulate debate and help to improve understanding of tax in Scotland.

You have read this far down, so you are clearly interested and want to help improve the public's understanding of tax.

That leads me to my final question for you – what can you do to help?

Tom Arthur MSP is Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth

The Scottish Government 2022 Resource Spending Review: Yes. But How?

– Alan Mitchell

Originally posted 20 June 2022

The Scottish Government's latest resource spending review [Investing in Scotland's Future](#) is admirable in many ways. But it is also worrying.

Ministers clearly have their hearts in the right place. They clearly want Scotland and its citizens to thrive. They also understand all too well that they are stuck between a very hard rock (of intensifying demands on many fronts such as the cost of living, shocking levels of poverty and climate change) and the very hard place of reduced resources to tackle these problems.

Clearly they need to prioritise, and Ministers' chosen priorities – addressing the cost of living crisis, tackling child poverty, addressing the climate and nature crises, building a stronger, fairer, greener economy, and developing effective public services – seem as good as any.

But what's missing is any real sense as to exactly how, given shrinking financial resources, these still-hugely ambitious goals are to be achieved. Magic wands aside, exactly how much Ministers will be able to deliver will depend on one thing: how efficiently they can use what resources they've got. So it's no surprise that the Spending Review paper mentions the word 'efficiency' over 30 times.

Unfortunately, the Review has very little to say on how these much-needed efficiencies will be achieved. It talks vaguely about "the reform and redesign of services" but says nothing of what these reforms may look like. The dedicated section 'Levers to Drive Greater Efficiency' largely skirts the issue. Three of the four 'new approaches' – improving procurement processes, better management of grants and better Scotland's public sector estate (such as increased co-location of services) – can only have a marginal impact on overall efficiencies at best.

The fourth, Shared Services – "a more collaborative approach to service delivery ... work[ing] across boundaries and find[ing] connections across organisations" – is vague to say the least (even if it is a good idea). None of them get to the heart of the matter.

The heart of the matter

So what is the heart of the matter? Over 60% of all Scotland's public spending is accounted for by five core buckets of social protection, health, education, housing and community amenities, and transport. If real efficiencies of say, 5 or 10%, can be found in these areas the impact would be transformational.

What is bizarre about this Spending Review is that the Scottish Government has a way of achieving such efficiencies (real, genuine efficiencies that eliminate waste and actually deliver *better* outcomes). Indeed, it has *already committed* to doing what it

takes to deliver these efficiencies ... and is now apparently ignoring and neglecting the opportunity.

The initiative in question is the Scottish Attribute Provider Service (SAPS). In a nutshell, SAPS opens the door to far-reaching efficiencies in the delivery of public services by enabling one service to safely, easily and reliably re-use data about citizens that has already been collected, generated, checked and used by other public services.

Data about citizens is needed for every step of every element of every citizen-facing public service. It's needed to identify who they are, to assess whether they are eligible for particular services, to triage and configure different peoples' particular service requirements, to plan and organise service delivery, to actually deliver the services in question, and to undertake all associated record-keeping, administration and customer service. These processes apply to every citizen in the country, across dozens – hundreds – of different services.

Yet the way citizen data is currently collected and used means that every department, agency and service is forced to reinvent the data processing wheel every day, for service, endlessly duplicating data collection and checking that some other part of the public sector and Scottish Government has already done. It is a system built around large-scale and unnecessary waste – creating friction, effort, risk and cost for *both* services and citizens.

SAPS eliminates this duplication by enabling pre-checked citizen data ('verified attributes') to be shared between public services as and when needed. It is an example of a 'shared service' that the Review identifies as key to improved efficiencies.

It does so in a way that operationalises and implements Christie Commission principles. It empowers individuals and communities because the data is deposited in citizens' personal data (or attribute) stores where data sharing is under the citizen's direct control. It integrates service provision because the same citizen-centred data sharing enables the integration and 'joining up' of different services. It prevents negative outcomes from arising by building privacy protection into how it operates. And it delivers order-of-magnitude efficiency improvements by reducing duplication and enabling the sharing of services.

It also, by the way, greatly improves citizens' experience of using public services. That's because with SAPS, these services are providing citizens with the information they need when applying for and using other services they are entitled to access. It helps eliminate form filling, for a start. It thus fits perfectly the Spending Review's decision to focus on

"achieving genuinely person-centred services, so people can more easily access the support they need, reducing and removing unnecessary barriers and reducing inequalities of outcome ... [helping to] ... address two key issues facing government, delivering the kind of transformation our communities and services need to be fit for the future, whilst ensuring public services are sustainable."

It also fits the Government's Covid Recovery Strategy, which lays the groundwork for inclusive person centred services, promoting wellbeing and tackling inequalities.

Yet, even though the Government committed to developing SAPS [two years ago](#), from all appearances the project now seems to be languishing.

The Scottish Government *already* has a way to deliver far-reaching efficiencies across most of the biggest spending areas of public services. But if the Spending Review is to be taken at face value, Ministers seem apparently unaware of the opportunity. Or, for some obscure and unfathomable reason they have decided to neglect it.

Why is this? This is a question that now needs answering. Because an accelerated [implementation of SAPS](#) would go a long way to achieving the public sector efficiencies, “reforming “the way we experience public services”, promoting the “structural change and collaboration”, and the improved outcomes Government Ministers are looking for.

Alan Mitchell is Chairman of Mydex CIC, which advised the Scottish Government on the [vision](#) and [operation](#) of the Scottish Attribute Provider strategy

The Case For An Annual Ground Rent – Duncan Pickard

Originally posted 13 July 2022

The governments of most countries have budget deficits and increasing national debts. The taxes they currently collect are unable to meet the costs of health and welfare provision of their older people and for the care and education of their young ones. The majority of tax revenues are imposed on earned incomes and trade (Income Taxes and VAT). Trying to obtain more revenue by increasing the rates of these taxes is futile because they have severe negative impacts (deadweight losses) on employment and trade. Income taxes cost the national economy about £2 for every £1 collected and VAT costs about £3. When the percentage of these taxes reach about 40% of earned incomes the amount of revenue received begins to decline and would reach zero if a government tried to collect 100% of earnings. Cutting public services and increasing the rates of taxes on earnings can never achieve recovery from recessions. It is perverse to tax employment and trade. We need more of both so that more Wealth can be created. Adam Smith described Wealth as that which is produced by Labour and Capital using Land (Natural Resources). He said that Wealth is distributed as Wages to Labour, Interest to Capital and Rent to Land. Rent is the Wealth which remains after Labour and Capital have received their just returns for their contributions to its creation. Our current tax system favours those who own landed property and take an unfair proportion of the Wealth which others have created. Most of what is described as *economics* in universities is advanced mathematics and only those who are talented in mathematics are deemed suitable to be called economists. The complicated algorithms used are worse than useless in understanding how the economy should function. Economic history is barely mentioned and Political Economy, which is the study of the creation and distribution of Wealth, gets no mention.

Those who promote Natural Capital as a new concept in economics are only adding more confusion. Natural Capitalists are like Neo-Classical Economists in believing that Land is just another form of capital and therefore Rent is irrelevant. Every student should read *Progress and Poverty*, written by Henry George in 1879. He and other Classical Economists such as Smith, Ogilvie, Ricardo and Mill described their theories without mathematical equations or meaningless jargon. They all agreed that the main source of government revenue should be the unearned Annual Ground Rent (AGR), not taxes on employment and trade. I challenge anyone seeking a new system for providing the funds for the necessary functions of government to produce one which is worse than the one we have now.

The four tenets which a new system should have are :-

1. It should not hinder employment and trade and so reduce the total fund from which the tax or charge should be paid.
2. For fairness the amount of tax or charge levied should be related to the ability to pay and for justice, earned incomes should not be taxed whilst unearned rental incomes are left untaxed.

3. A tax or charge should be cheaply and easily collected so that the costs of administration are as low as possible.
4. There should be no opportunity for avoidance or evasion.

The collection of Annual Ground Rent is the only fiscal charge which complies with these four tenets. An important feature of AGR is the encouragement of employment and trade by removing their burden of taxation and reducing the costs of creating Wealth.

The history of taxation clearly records that the laws pertaining to taxation were made by landowners. Once they gained control of government from the monarchy, they began to shed their responsibility for providing the funds for government from the land they owned and shifted the burden of taxation onto the earnings of working people. The "Law of the Land" that we have should be called the "Law of the Landowners".

Some critics of our present tax system propose the retention of most of the existing taxes but at lower rates of charge, with the introduction of a tax on *wealth* to make up for the reduction of revenue. The problem with this idea is that the deadweight losses of existing taxes and their high costs of administration both for the tax collectors and those who have to pay, will still remain. A *broad based tax system* is supposed to be more acceptable to tax payers but most tax payers do not fully understand the present system.

Most people believe that Income Taxes are progressive but in reality they are not. The rich have many ways of avoiding Income Tax such as investment in provision for pensions and the very rich often use the option of registering their riches offshore. The ability to avoid Inheritance Tax on the landed property they own means that this tax has become a voluntary tax for the rich. VAT is the worst of all the harmful taxes. It is the largest of the indirect taxes and affects poor people much more than the rich. The poorest fifth pay 31% of their take-home pay in indirect tax, the richest fifth pay 13%.

When speaking about tax reform and the benefits to the economy of taxing *wealth* instead of earnings, a definition of *wealth* is rarely given, but it is implied that landed property should be the target for taxation. Using the classical definition of wealth, it is wrong to tax wealth because the creation of Wealth should be encouraged, not discouraged by tax. Many have increased their riches more from the increase in the price of their houses than from working but most of the increase in the market price of houses is the increase in the price of the land they are built on, not the price of the house itself. *Land is not Wealth*. Wealth is created by Labour and Capital, using Land (which includes all natural resources). This leads to the conclusion that the main source of government revenue *should not be Wealth* but the Annual Rental Value of Land and Natural Resources, most of which is obtained, unearned, by those of us who own landed property.

The need for tax reform is greater in Scotland than in the rest of the UK because its population is, on average, older and the proportion of those of working age is becoming smaller. The Scottish government has had sufficient powers for several years to reform the tax system but has never made significant use of them. It could have replaced

Council Tax and Business Rates with AGR, which would have dramatically improved the funding of local government, which has been recommended by its own Commission on Justice and Fairness. Since 2016 it has had the power to abolish Income Tax but refuses to listen to those of us who have made the case for replacing it with AGR. Any government's economic policy which is based on continuous borrowing to make up for its budget deficits will devalue the currency through inflation and widen the gap in inequality. A radically reformed system for obtaining government revenue will obviate the need for government borrowing.

One major obstacle to radical tax reform is the vested interest of the rich who benefit from the present system. They wish to become even richer and have little regard for those who become poorer. There is no chance of reform without the subject of *Taxation* becoming part of the curriculum in all schools, colleges and universities. The scourges of financial and health inequality will not be removed without radical tax reform.

Dr Duncan Pickard is a member of the Scottish Land Revenue Group and is a landowning farmer

A Glimpse Of The NHS' Future

– Gordon Hector

Originally posted 26 July 2022

Everyone can see the NHS is in trouble. But what do we *do*? Answers seem in short supply.

Last week the Scottish Government put out a press release, announcing a new urology hub near Falkirk. It was a bit of summer fluff and it's a relatively small facility. But it's more interesting that it first looks. It has three ideas which give us a glimpse of the NHS' possible escape from its crisis.

First, this hub creates new kinds of job.

There are Surgical Care Practitioners. This role is about repeatable, relatively simple and safe surgery, much of which was previously performed by surgeons. They do that in a room in a clinic, not an operating theatre. At the same time, new Advanced Nurse Practitioners are deployed. These are nurses with extra training, particularly in diagnostic technology.

We need to be clear what this is – it's removing doctors from some procedures. But it makes total sense. Swapping a consultant for another clinician, and a theatre for a clinic room, saves a lot of money. It focuses the doctors' time and overnight beds on the patients who really need it. More procedures can be done, reducing waiting lists and speeding up diagnosis. And these new roles create new avenues for progression for nurses and allied health professionals, which supports staff retention.

Second, the hub puts urology diagnostics and treatment into one place, in a newly-built facility. This is easier for patients to navigate and means the NHS can offer exactly the kind of facilities they need – in this case, changing rooms are pretty important for a urology patient. But again it's more efficient. On average, a service which is consolidated into a single place is going to spend proportionately less on clinical staff, admin staff, porters, energy, IT and buildings than one distributed across lots of different places.

The bigger impact of this consolidation is longer-term. With all due respect to Larbert, it is not one of the world's great medical research centres. But concentrating services creates a critical mass of clinicians and patients. That usually makes for a greater sense of a team, usually means higher-quality care and makes it much easier to start doing proper research and innovation work. Healthcare is a global staff market and most of the NHS' staff could work anywhere: so offering camaraderie, quality, and an outlet for research ambitions is a good way of keeping them here.

The final part of the equation is cash. It's difficult to understand the sums for this kind of thing: the press release says the wider programme in which it sits costs £70m – but obviously services would have to be paid for anyway. So it's not clear if there is actually

a saving. Still, the concept is to spend a bit of money rearranging the service in a way which, over the long term, represents good value compared to the previous model. These are three hints on where the NHS is heading: standardising as much care as possible into higher-volume, higher-tech, less-consultant led formats; concentrating specialties in a single place; and spending a bit to save a bit. It's sensible stuff and done enough times, represents a decent response to the challenges of staff shortages, increased demand, and covid catch-up.

There are just three niggles.

First, all of this takes time to implement. Meanwhile the system is in meltdown. The NHS needs to execute this kind of new project while also putting out shorter-term fires. That's quite an ask.

Second, this is all about freeing up patient flow in medical care. There are many bits of the system where that's impossible without also fixing social care. It's not like Ministers won't be busy on social care, but the approach taken there is far from the kind of practice improvement the urology hub represents: instead they are focused on national structures and changing the law, with the National Care Service Bill. The clear risk is that we get a nice shiny law while the on-the-ground practice has deteriorated. If I were sitting in St Andrews' House advising ministers, I'd want to be confident that the bill is worth the opportunity cost in time, political capital, and headspace to do other things.

And finally, above all else – what do patients make of this? Better outcomes in a cheaper system is a good deal for patients, on average. But people are not averages. Most places in the Forth valley are pretty close, so I'd be surprised if there is a concern about this model centralising services. That will feel different in other parts of Scotland, where this model could be much more controversial. This kind of project needs clarity of thought to make sure it genuinely speaks to local needs, as opposed to just serving the needs of the system.

These are pretty big niggles. Still, this is a snapshot of the kind of change that we can expect from the NHS in the years ahead. The questions facing the NHS remain massive: but this little hub near Falkirk might show at least part of the answer.

Gordon Hector is a policy consultant and former Director of Policy and Strategy for the Scottish Conservatives

Is It Time For Some Jeffersonian Thinking?

– Alastair Stewart

Originally posted 28 July 2022

Whatever you think about Scottish independence, the chatter of a referendum has become a fact of life.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) may hold the key to resolving Scotland's constitutional quagmire. A forgotten belief of the founding father and third president is that he did not consider the U.S. Constitution as permanent or sacrosanct as it is today.

In an insightful letter to Virginia lawyer Samuel Kercheval, Jefferson presents an eloquent argument against fossilising the constitution. On July 12, 1816, he wrote, "some men look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence and deem them like the ark of the covenant, too sacred to be touched."

"Scotland's Future", the white paper 2013 on independence, said a referendum was a "once in a generation opportunity". This has suffered from Chinese whispers by critics and is taken as a literal commitment not to hold another referendum for an indefinite time.

Cut through the grandstanding, and both Yes supporters and Unionists are asking the same thing: will there ever be a final settlement on the constitution that concludes today's arguments once and for all?

In all the mudslinging, no side stops to appreciate that our constitutional debate is a good thing. No nation should ever accept its structures as immutably writ for time immemorial. It is precisely what should continue if Scotland voted for independence.

In a letter written to compatriot James Madison from Paris just after the French Revolution had broken out, Jefferson asks whether or not "one generation of men has a right to bind another," either in the form of financial debt or a political obligation to obey a constitution of laws not contracted by that individual.

He supposes that "every constitution, then, and every law, naturally expires at the end of 19 years" if it is not to become "an act of force and not of right".

Jefferson believed "the earth belongs to the living and not to the dead." Previous generations could not bind the current generation to pay their debts or accept the laws and constitution drawn up by their ancestors.

In his mind, "no society can make a perpetual constitution or even a perpetual law". The only "umpire" between the generations was the law of nature – "one generation is to another as one independent nation to another."

In this, both Unionists and Yes supporters share common ground. Yes, there was a recent vote only eight years ago. But no, that decision cannot be binding for eternity.

A new decision-making agreement, ratified by the Scottish Parliament and Westminster, must be reached by convention or law, whereby a generation's length is realistically agreed upon.

The mechanism for a Jeffersonian review of the status quo would afford two things. Firstly, a legitimate passage of time will give a reasonable answer to whether ongoing participation in the Union is beneficial to Scotland.

Secondly, suppose that the passage of time is a generation. In that case, a significantly younger portion of the electorate will have the lived experience to demand, campaign and vote on the impact of that arrangement on them.

Those key performance indicators would be agreed upon in advance. Every aspect of civil society should provide data and conclusions, including independent expert groups, think tanks, community groups, government agencies and businesses, to ensure a consensus.

Winning elections is treated as a mandate for a referendum or the status quo. A formal agreement on what constitutes a successful or failed generation ensures an entire record in office must be examined to inform a public referendum. Sample polling is fodder for newspapers and creates false flags for all sides.

The benefit of the 2014 referendum is the process is known and not some 'what if' exercise. It has been done before and can be replicated. The issue is agreeing on when and under what conditions.

A formal agreement mechanism on the particulars would build on the lessons of the 2012 Edinburgh Agreement. The benefit of such a framework, even if it was a Memorandum of Understanding, is the business of politics could go back to that other excellent American process: the separation of powers.

Holyrood and Westminster seem to do more when they are vying for control. Tipping the constitutional scales has proven a reasonably successful pursuit in the last ten years by all parties. The Scotland Acts of 2012 and 2016 followed recommendations in the 2009 Calman and 2014 Smith Commissions. The 2007 National Conversation was an early prelude to the 2012 Edinburgh Agreement.

In many ways, that generational cycle Jefferson describes is already in motion. Consider the establishment of the Secretary for Scotland in 1885 and the Scottish Office; the upgrading of the post to Secretary of State appointment in 1926; repeated attempts to introduce a Government of Scotland Bill from 1913; the Scottish Covenant Association and the Scottish Covenant petition in the 1940s and 1950s; the 1979 devolution referendum, the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the Claim of Right in 1989, the devolution referendum in 1997 and changes to the Scotland Act since 1998.

“Laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind,” Jefferson wrote to Kercheval in 1816. “We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy, as civilised society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”

In the words of the Federalist Papers, the American Revolution created a new government by “reflection and choice.”

Scotland must do the same, with studied conscientiousness, patience, imagination, and a commitment to the next generation.

Alastair Stewart is a weekly columnist for The Scotsman and a public affairs consultant. You can read more from Alastair at www.agjstewart.com

Literacy In Scottish Schools

– Carole Ford

Originally posted 03 August 2022

There are many opinions on the purposes of school education but there can be little doubt that acquiring the ability to read is at the top of the list. There is no need to rehearse the arguments on either an individual or a societal basis. It is therefore very surprising that the declining literacy standards in Scottish schools have excited so little genuine concern, any form of concerted action to identify the reasons for this, or the strategies to address it.

Indeed, on a personal level, I have for many years been astonished at the educational establishment's acceptance that large numbers of school children leave primary school with a functional literacy level which pretty much precludes success in secondary education or beyond, deprives so many individuals of the lifelong social, creative and cultural benefits of full literacy, and inhibits full participation in the economic life of the country. At the extreme end, the prison population is disproportionately handicapped by extremely low literacy levels.

What are we talking about here? Very few people are illiterate. The vast majority can deal with the literary transactional requirements of everyday life. But many read in such a halting manner that extracting meaning from text is very difficult, hence the educational difficulties, and there is no pleasure in the process. Just one of the reasons some children are uninterested in reading is that it is a chore for them. Even for fluent readers, a flawed approach to the initial teaching of reading may undermine any desire to read for pleasure. Early difficulty influences attitudes for life.

As an analogy, in theory many of us could read a book in a foreign language but the effort involved, doubling back when sentences are convoluted or looking up unknown vocabulary, sends us looking for the translation. I have listened to so many young people reading aloud in a stop/start manner, stumbling over fairly commonplace words, stopping at the end of every line rather than reading the punctuation. All meaning is lost in such a process and it is certainly not pleasurable.

I am not talking specifically about the least able pupils, or dyslexic children, or those with learning difficulties; I am talking about pupils across all ranges of ability. They technically know how to read, but they are slow, ill practiced and often use guesswork rather than decoding. For example, every word which begins 'th' may be misread: they will guess them or they or this or these. Reading the first couple of letters and then guessing the rest, known as 'Look and say' in the current pedagogy of reading, is a disastrous, quick fix technique with lasting consequences for high level literacy skills. Those who finally achieve fluency may be forever weary of the process of achieving it. By the way, if you think that looking and saying is why you can read so quickly, think again. What you are doing is decoding the words so quickly, from long practice, that you are unaware you are doing it.

Why is Scotland falling behind other countries? I contend it is because we are ignoring both the science behind learning to read and the long term, international evidence of what works.

Educational research is fraught with difficulties. It is not possible to conduct double blind trials, as in medicine. There are so many factors which affect outcomes; you cannot learn something one way and then relearn it another, and compare. The reason that so many successful pilot programmes fail when they are rolled out to all schools is that the conditions of the pilot programme, regardless of the subject of the study, have as much, or more, influence on the outcomes than the actual method under review. Everyone involved feels a bit special to be chosen to try something new. Everyone knows the results will be carefully scrutinised. Every necessary resource will be provided with researchers on hand to smooth the path. And this is before you even think about the differing nature of pupils and quality of teacher. Pilot conditions are never replicated in schools; rarely are the outcomes.

However, learning to read is much more amenable to research as, by definition, all the subjects of the research are starting from the same position: they cannot read. It is possible to isolate the different processes involved in reading and ascertain which prior skills result in better, or worse, reading outcomes. Many, many studies have been conducted across the globe and a consensus on what constitutes reading, and what skills are prerequisites for learning to read successfully is emerging.

Essentially, reading is decoding – recognising a particular sound, learning the symbol which represents it and decoding a set of such symbols to form the sound of a word. What research has shown is that children must recognise the sound *before* they can be taught to associate it with a symbol. If a young child cannot identify the odd one out in this list of words – cat, bat, fat, mat, pan, sat – then they are not recognising the distinct sound of a ‘t’ at the end of a word. If they do not ‘hear’ that ban, bat, bin, bar, bad has an odd member in ‘bin’, they are not distinguishing the sound ‘i’ from ‘a’. Research has shown that children who know many nursery rhymes learn to read more successively than children who do not. There is of course a confounding factor in this, associated with economic disadvantage, but the repetitive nature of nursery rhymes helps to build sound recognition. Without sound recognition, symbols remain a bit of a mystery, and decoding words becomes a guessing game. With practice people get better at decoding; not so much with guessing. As an aside, sound recognition is the basis of phonic approaches to reading.

The analogy with learning a foreign language is illustrative. When you hear a language of which you have no knowledge, you cannot distinguish individual words. It is simply a continuous sound. If you know something of a language, you start to distinguish individual words. Once you are fluent, you hear all language as a series of words, not a sound stream. If young children are being taught to read before they can distinguish individual sounds then we are condemning many of them to relative failure.

The international evidence supports the science. Most countries start formal schooling a year later than in Scotland, some two years later. The intervening time is spent on activities which improve pupil skills which will make formal learning much easier. But crucially, children simply have more time to develop the stronger sound recognition

which is critical to success. The greater difficulty that boys experience with reading is probably strongly associated with their relatively slower development in early childhood. They are less likely to have developed the same level of sound recognition as girls.

If Scottish schools waited until more children could discern sounds more clearly, many fewer would struggle to learn to read. Learning to associate a symbol with a sound would make more sense to them. Our early years teachers need to understand the science behind reading and spend at least the first year of school simply building the necessary skills. Every child deserves the opportunity to get off to a strong start in education; waiting until they are ready is the very least we could do.

But the question still remains, why have Scottish standards dropped relative to other countries? It is not the early start to formal education, damaging though it is to many children, because we have always had that. The difference is the change in methodology in teaching reading, the dreaded 'Look and say', and in pedagogy generally. Active learning, yet to be properly defined, is the mantra of Curriculum for Excellence. While teachers and schools have used a variety of approaches to implement something they consider to be active learning, one thing common to all has been a reduction in the use of printed materials. In all stages of school education, there is far less exposure to text than previously. Where text is used, it is often surrounded by pictures, bright colours, arrows and clouds, anything other than simply paragraphs of words. Pupils in school simply read far less than previous generations. Like every skill, from playing the piano to knitting, high level skill requires lots of practice. The comparative lack of reading practice affects fluency, spelling skill, vocabulary and sentence construction, and the acquisition of knowledge. If we want children to be more literate, they need to read more, and we need to make it easier for them to do so; start later and improve our teaching methods.

Finally, one of the barriers to delaying the formal teaching of reading is the strange but pervasive myth that learning something earlier is both beneficial to a child and an indicator of ability. Not so. Education is not a race and the early bird is no more likely to catch the worm than the tortoise who is laying a very sure foundation for future learning. The Finns start reading at age seven; they are outperforming Scottish children by the age of nine.

Carole Ford is a member of the Commission for School Reform. She is the former Head Teacher of Kilmarnock Academy, chair of the Scottish Secondary Mathematics Group and co-author of a number of maths textbooks. She works as an associate tutor in teacher education.

Cultural resources and school attainment

– Lindsay Paterson

Originally posted 17 August 2022

The importance of children's homes in their educational progression is widely recognised – and was made very apparent during the home-schooling caused by Covid. But do all the potentially relevant aspects of home life matter equally? There are two kinds of home resource. There is the technology of learning, ranging from the most basic – having a quiet room in which to study – to the most advanced, such as having access to laptops and wifi. On the other hand, there are the cultural resources of the home, what the U.S. writer E. D. Hirsch has called [cultural literacy](#). For each of these two, there is also the questions of how they relate to more economically fundamental aspects of a child's home environment, and of how schools might compensate for poverty. Although laptops might not be affordable by families with few economic resources, cultural literacy costs less. So a key question is whether rich cultural resources overcome the educational effects of economically deprived living conditions.

Scotland and England provide a quasi-experiment on this question in the past decade because of their different paths of curricular reform. On the one hand, the dominant strand of English reform was shaped by Michael Gove when he became Secretary of State for education in 2010, and taken further by Nick Gibb as schools minister until he was dropped by Boris Johnson in autumn 2021. Inspired by Hirsch and others, [these reforms](#) tried to ensure that schools would provide the same kind of cultural literacy for all students. The changes shifted the attention of the curriculum to a core of knowledge, away from skills and from any direct concern with pastoral matters such as emotional well-being. The principle was that well-being and skills would develop best from a sound understanding of a powerful intellectual inheritance. In some respects, Mr Gove and Mr Gibb were merely intensifying a shift in policy that had already started in England during David Blunkett's tenure at Education in the first years of the Blair government.

Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence has moved in a quite different direction, eschewing what the Scottish debate tends to disparagingly refer to as academic knowledge, and towards not only a greater variety of skills – such as those that might be required in the workplace – but also towards well-being as a deliberate aim. This policy, too, has commanded cross-party support, even though that has implicitly brought the Britain-wide parties to a different position in Scotland from that taken by their counterparts in England.

Both the English and the Scottish policies have claimed to be able to overcome social inequalities of learning. In England, this is on the basis that cultural literacy can be provided by schools to compensate for its lack at home. Scottish policy is founded on the principle that students' self-confidence, aspirations and belief in their own capacities is an effective way of overcoming the depressing effects of poverty.

PISA data on educational resources at home

Is there any evidence that might allow a comparison of the effects of these two broad approaches to the curriculum? Unfortunately, the best kind of comparison is not available because of the loss in Scotland of good-quality series of statistics (as Reform Scotland's Commission on School Reform has frequently [pointed out](#)). There is nothing in Scotland that would allow a comparison with the publicly accessible data from England's National Pupil Database. However, the three-yearly data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (the PISA studies) do give some limited opportunity to compare. In each survey since 2006, the samples have been large enough to give reliable evidence – on average about 2,800 in Scotland and 4,700 in England. The assessments in the PISA surveys are of reading, mathematics and natural science. Because they are done in the same way in every country, using them to compare Scotland and England is more valid than other kinds of comparison (such as trying to compare Highers and A-levels).

Home cultural resources

In the most recent survey (in 2018), the students were asked whether they had any of five key indicators of cultural resources at home:

- works of classic literature (in the British surveys giving the example of Shakespeare);
- books of poetry;
- works of art;
- books on art, music, or design;
- musical instruments (for example guitar or piano).

These are used here to construct a scale of cultural possessions, with summary values 'one or none', 'two', 'three' and 'four or five'. (The distribution is shown in Table 1 below.)

This scale is not ideal for our purposes. In particular, it would clearly be desirable to have some information about scientific resources at home. Nevertheless, in the absence of anything better, the intended interpretation of this scale is not so much for its overt content as for its suggestion of a general ethos. A home with all these resources is likely to be one which is educationally stimulating in all respects, not only in the explicit ways referred to in these measures.

Home educational equipment

A scale of educational resources at home was similarly constructed from questions about whether, at home, the student had:

- a desk to study at;
- a quiet place to study;
- a computer available for school work;
- educational software;

- books to help with school work;
- technical reference books;
- a dictionary.

The summary values here are 'four or fewer', 'five', 'six' and 'seven' (with distribution in Table 2 below). Again, this scale is not ideal, though it is probably a better indicator of a range of educational resources than is the cultural scale for culture.

Home economic circumstances

The PISA survey does not collect financial data about students' homes, but it does include a measure of the occupational class of parents. This [socio-economic index](#) has been developed over many decades by researchers mainly in the Netherlands specifically for the purpose of making international comparisons. Here, we use the higher of the father's and mother's value of the index (or of a sole parent where information on only one was available), and divide the resulting scale into four quarters. Typical occupations in each quarter are:

- class 1: sales staff, waiter, hairdresser, personal carer, cleaner, construction worker, vehicle repairer, lorry driver;
- class 2: retail manager, technician, secretary, nursing associate, construction manager, ambulance worker, unpromoted police officer;
- class 3: nurse, primary school teacher, social worker, software developer, marketing manager;
- class 4: scientist, engineer, architect, accountant, doctor, secondary teacher, university teacher, lawyer.

The main question is whether and how the measure of home cultural resources relates to students' attainment. The results summarised here were similar for male and female students, and so they have been presented without any differentiation by sex.

Cultural resources and attainment

England has a higher proportion of students in the highest category of cultural resources than Scotland, a difference that is seen in each of the occupational classes. This is shown in Table 1. Overall, 39% of students in England are in the highest category of cultural possessions, whereas in Scotland the proportion is 26%. In the highest-status occupational class, these proportions are 53% and 39%.

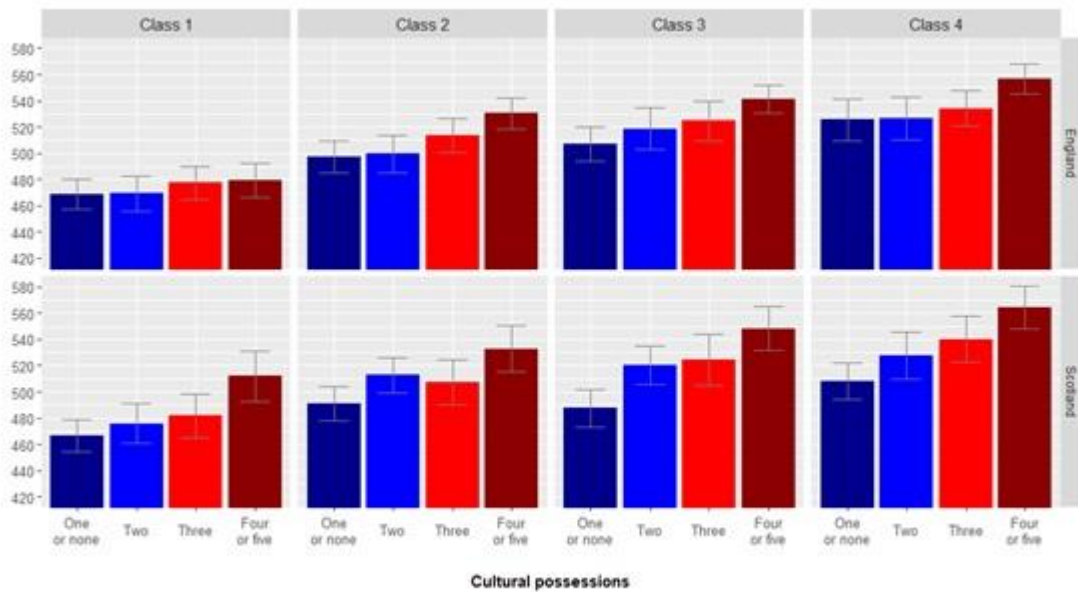
Table 1 Distribution of cultural possessions in the home, by occupational class of parents, England and Scotland, 2018				
Percentage in rows	Cultural possessions at home			
	One or none	Two	Three	Four or five
England				
Class 1	34	20	16	30
Class 2	28	21	18	33
Class 3	20	15	19	46
Class 4	15	14	18	53
All	25	18	19	39
Scotland				
Class 1	46	21	17	16
Class 2	40	21	17	22
Class 3	26	21	21	32
Class 4	24	19	18	39
All	35	21	18	26

Source: PISA 2018

Figure 1 shows the average performance in the reading tests in Scotland and England classified on two dimensions: by the index of occupational class, and by the index of cultural possessions. (In each year, in each subject, the scale of attainment is defined to have an average of about 500 across all the economically developed countries.)

For example, in the left-most graphs, there are students from families in the lowest-status classes. Within each of these graphs, the left-hand bar is for students in these classes whose households have the fewest cultural possessions. So these students are disadvantaged both economically (through the occupations of their parents) and culturally. At the other end of Figure 1 are students who are highly advantaged in both respects. The narrow grey lines at the top of each bar give some assessment of random-sampling variability – indicating, for each category of class and culture, the range in which the true value probably lies (with 95% probability).

Figure 1
Reading attainment, by social class and number of cultural possessions,
England and Scotland, 2018



Source: PISA 2018

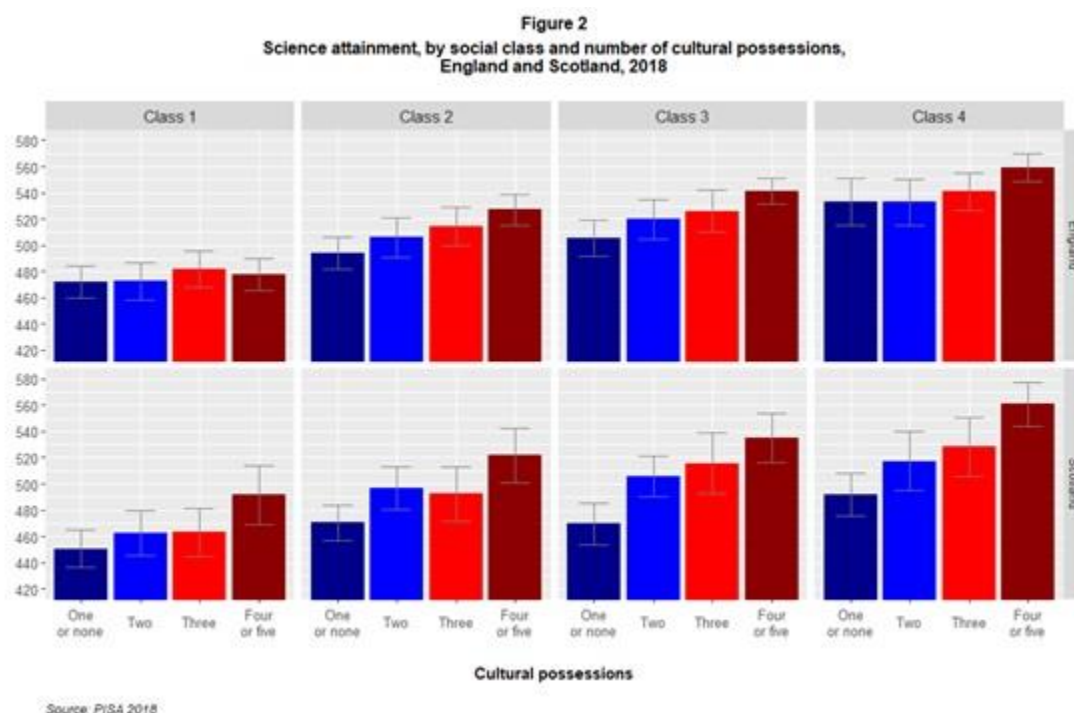
There are very large differences associated with class: the blocks of bars rise from left to right across the panels of the Figure, similarly in England and Scotland. There are also large differences associated with culture: the bars also tend to rise from left to right within each panel. But there is a difference in this cultural respect between Scotland and England. In Scotland, there is a gradient across cultural categories in each class block. In England, that cultural gradient is clear only in relation to the highest cultural category. In the lowest-status class (at the left) there is hardly any cultural gradient in England, in contrast to Scotland.

The most pronounced difference between specific bars in the two countries is for students in the higher-status classes, but who have few cultural possessions at home: these are the dark-blue bars of the panels labelled Class 3 and Class 4. The bars for England there are higher than the Scottish bars. Indeed, a student from the highest class in England who has low cultural resources from home does at least as well as all but the highest-culture Scottish students: that is, the dark-blue and bright-blue bars for the highest class in England are at least as high as all but the brown bars in the other classes in Scotland.

The only case where the Scottish bar is higher than the corresponding English one is for people in the lowest-status class who have many cultural possessions at home (the brown bars in the left-hand panels). In fact, these Scottish students have attainment almost as high as students with less culture in all but the highest-status class: the brown bar in the left-most Scottish panel is as high as all but the brown bars in the middle two panels for either country.

In short, home culture in England has less of an effect on reading attainment than it does in Scotland. Scottish students in the lowest-status class who have rich cultural possessions overcome the general educational effect of being in that class; but (from Table 1) only 16% of Scottish students in that class have that advantage.

The patterns for mathematics and science were, if anything, even stronger. The mathematics graphs looked very like the reading ones, but with no combination of class and culture in which students in Scotland performed better than corresponding students in England. Figure 2 shows science. Here, attainment at the lowest level of home culture (the dark-blue bars) is higher in England than in Scotland at all levels of class. As with mathematics, there is no reliable evidence that any category of Scottish students had higher average attainment than the corresponding English students. This relationship of the cultural scale to science attainment (despite there being no explicit reference to science in the components of the scale) tends to vindicate our interpretation of the scale as reflecting something about the general ethos of the home.



Educational resources and attainment

Next we replace home culture with the measure of home educational resources. The distribution of these resources is shown in Table 2. They are more common than the cultural possessions (Table 1): over one third in Scotland – and one half in England – have all seven. The difference between Scotland and England is less than for cultural possessions, especially in the highest-status class.

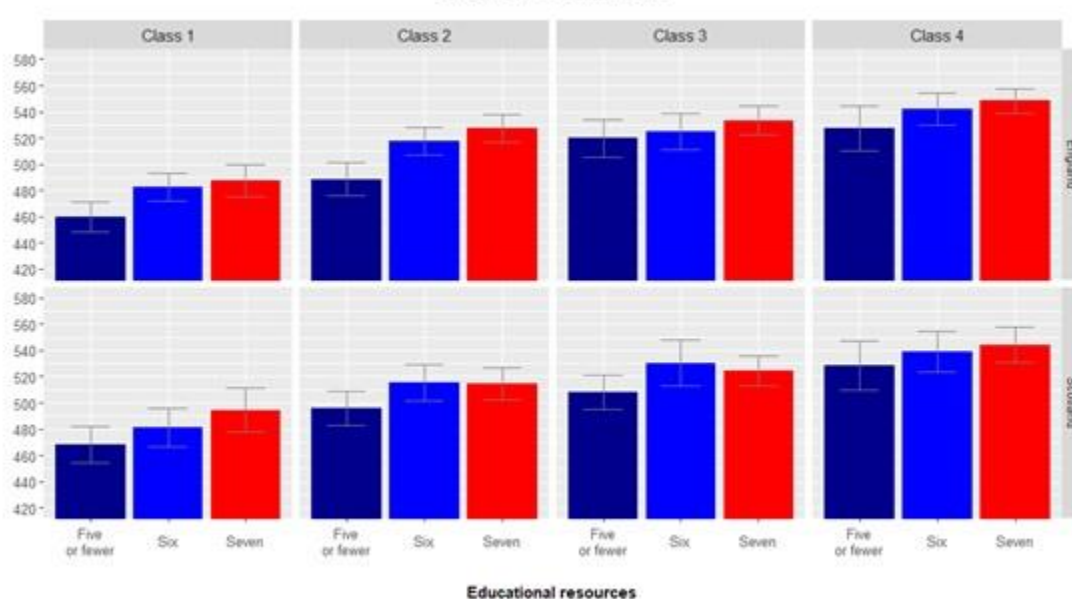
Table 2
Distribution of educational resources, by occupational class of parents,
England and Scotland, 2018

Percentage in rows	Educational resources		
	Five or fewer	Six	Seven
England			
Class 1	43	27	30
Class 2	33	28	38
Class 3	23	30	47
Class 4	18	30	52
All	30	28	42
Scotland			
Class 1	54	25	21
Class 2	41	34	25
Class 3	33	28	39
Class 4	22	28	50
All	38	29	33

Source: PISA 2018

When average attainment is calculated in relation to these educational resources, there is certainly a gradient at each level of occupational class, but there is no difference between Scotland and England, unlike the cultural scale: see Figure 3 for reading. The same was found for mathematics and science.

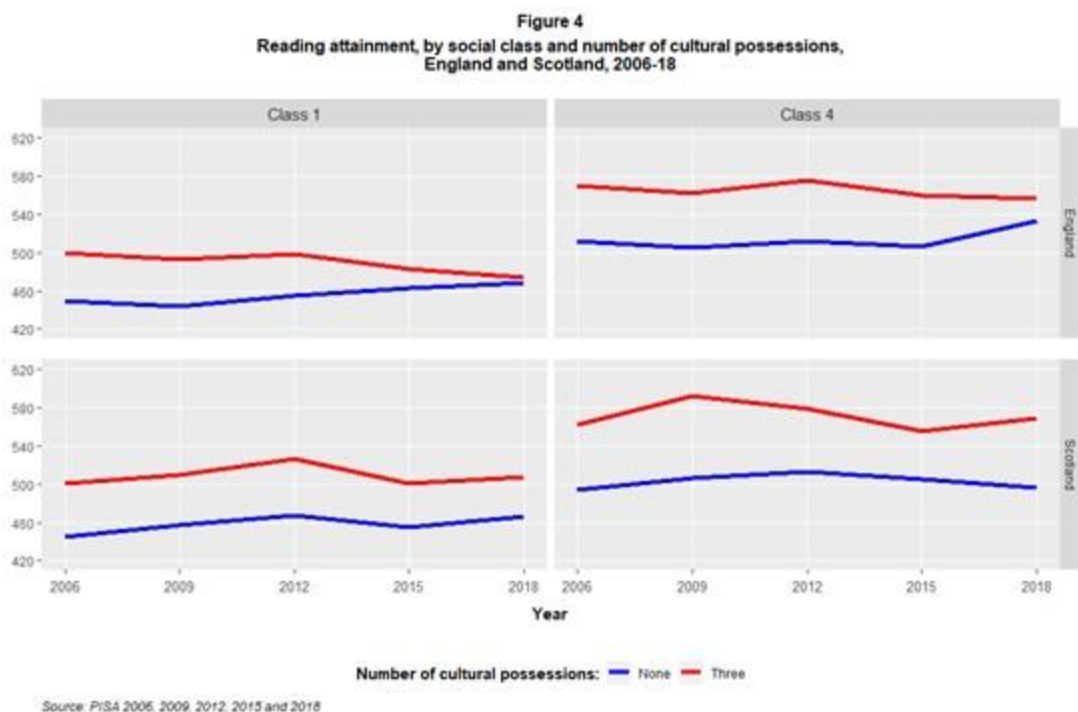
Figure 3
Reading attainment, by social class and number of educational resources,
England and Scotland, 2018



Source: PISA 2018

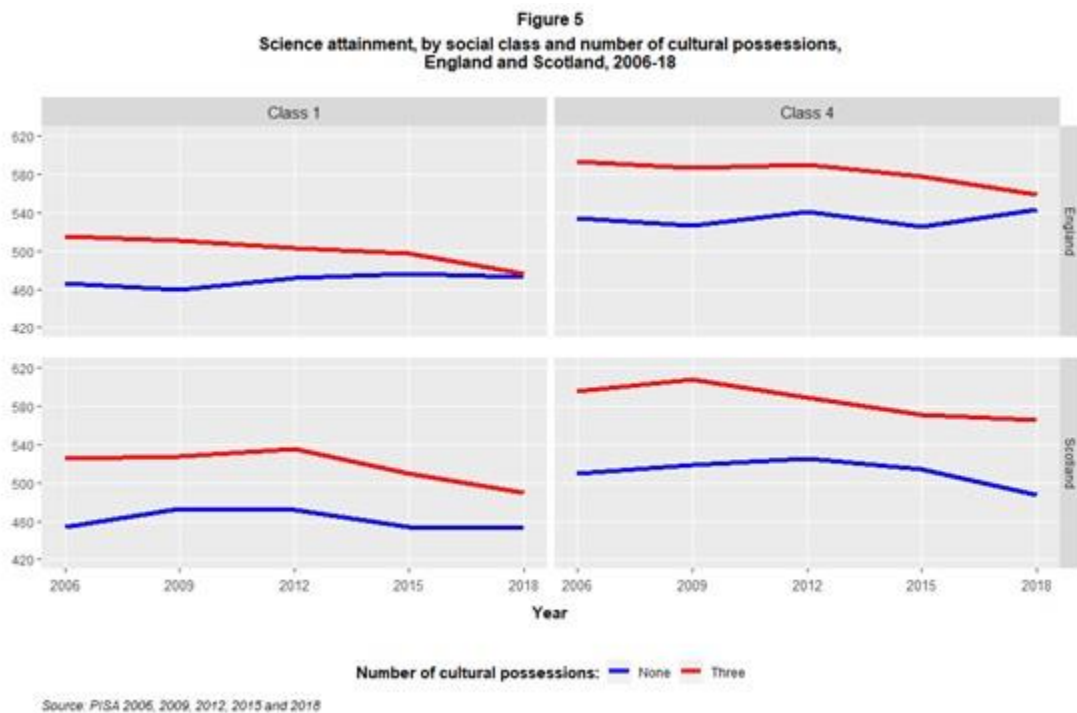
Cultural resources and attainment over time

Some further insight into this may be had by tracking these differences over time, including now also the PISA data from 2006, 2009, 2012 and 2015. The definition of family class was broadly the same in each survey, but the survey questions about cultural possessions at home were fewer up to 2012 than subsequently, asking only about the first three topics noted for 2018 above (classic literature, books of poetry, and works of art). So for consistency in this time series, the 2018 and 2015 definition of cultural possessions has been revised to include only that information. Figure 4 shows the trends for reading. To make the patterns clearer, the graphs are restricted to the highest-status and lowest-status classes (the two columns of the array in Figure 4), and to the highest and lowest categories of cultural possessions (the red and blue lines). The patterns for the other classes and cultural categories were intermediate between those shown.



The main theme to emerge from Figure 4 is that the cultural difference is fairly constant in Scotland but diminishes in England. That reduction in England is, in both of the classes, in part because of a rise in the group with the weakest home culture (the blue lines), but in the lowest-status class it is also because of a weakening performance in the group with the strongest home culture (the red line in the top-left graph). The Scottish group that out-performed the corresponding English group in 2018 – the low-status, high-culture students (who are the red line in the bottom-left panel of Figure 4) – did not improve their position over time, and so we can now see that they are ahead of that group in England in 2018 only because of the English decline.

The patterns for mathematics and science were similar to this, as illustrated for science in Figure 5. Again, there was no change in Scotland in the association of attainment with home culture. The association weakened in England. And the attainment of the highest-culture group in England slowly declined. In both mathematics and science, the highest-culture group also declined in Scotland.



The importance of home culture

What conclusions might we draw from this? One is the importance of home culture of the kind that is recorded in the survey questions which we have used here. It seems to mean something different from educational resources as conventionally measured, such as textbooks and laptops. These certainly matter, but they matter in the same way in both Scotland and England. There is a national difference in the way in which cultural resources relate to attainment, in all three domains.

The second conclusion is about policy in England. The Gove-Gibb reforms may be a plausible explanation of the apparently weakening importance of home culture. It is noticeable that the change over time in Figures 4 and 5 became clear in the 2012 or 2015 surveys, which is what we would expect if the reforms were the explanation, because these would have started to have an effect in secondary schools around the middle of the last decade. But the evidence from PISA is that the most striking impact was not on children from the lowest-status social classes but rather on those in affluent families who had few cultural possessions at home. There was also a positive effect on children from low-status classes who had weak home culture. The group that did not move ahead were the high-culture, low-status category, where the downward-sloping red lines in the top-left graphs of Figures 4 and 5 might cause Mr Gove and Mr Gibb some disappointment.

The third conclusion is about Scotland. Even these partial improvements in England were completely absent. There was a cultural gradient in each class, and it did not change over time. This would be consistent with a weaker effect of school culture in Scotland than of home culture.

Overall then we might say that the policy attention to high culture in schools in England in the past decade or more seems to have had some impact in compensating for an absence of that culture at home, even though not as straightforwardly as Mr Gove and Mr Gibb might have hoped. Not building on the cultural resources of those working-class families which value high culture seems a particular failure. But Scottish policy cannot even claim that partial success. If there is any indication of Scottish success here it is by parents, not schools. Those parents in the lowest-status class who value cultural richness have enabled their children to counteract quite a lot of the general educational effects of economic disadvantage. But the consequence, when looked at over time, is that home cultural resources remain as strongly influential on students' attainment as ever. For the children of all social classes who are fortunate enough to have parents who value culture of this kind, the home provides some educational insurance. For others, Scottish schools are failing to compensate for the cultural disadvantage.

Lindsay Paterson is Professor of Education Policy, School of Social and Political Science, Edinburgh University.

Living in electric dreams?

– Stuart Paton

Originally posted 25 August 2022

Energy is not just electricity. This may seem like a trite, somewhat geeky comment, but it is key to thinking about net zero targets and how energy is talked about by politicians, in the press and online. Almost every day, statements are made about the percentage of electricity from renewable sources, or energy generated by wind, and comparing different countries (generally Scotland and England), electricity costs, green levies etc etc.

The most important figure to remember is that electricity provided only 21.7% of Scotland's total energy consumption in 2020. So, whenever commentators quote the very high proportion of electricity produced from renewable sources, 21.7% is the key figure to remember. Energy is clearly not just electricity.

The balance of total energy consumed is in heat (41% of the total with only 6.2% from renewable sources as the vast majority of households use either gas or oil for heating) and transport (21% of the total with only 5.9% from biofuels). Taking all energy uses, only 20.7% was from renewable sources.

Of course, for electricity the renewable impact is much, much greater but even here commentators obfuscate the numbers depending on their argument. Scotland generated 51.9TWh (terra watt hours) of electricity in 2020. Of this, 61.8% (32TWhr) was from renewables (wind accounting for 44.5% of total electricity generation with the balance from hydro, solar and waste) and a further 25.7% was from low carbon generation (nuclear). [88.1% of total electricity generated was from low carbon sources](#) but this does include nuclear where Torness, the remaining power station, is due to close in 2028. It is also worth noting, this figure represents a huge change in the last decade increasing substantially from 19.0% in 2010.

To add another layer of complexity, Scotland generates significantly more electricity than it requires. From total generation of 51.9TWh in 2021, Scotland exported 17.7TWh of electricity through transmission links to England and the Moyle interconnector to Northern Ireland. We did import 1TWh of electricity resulting in net exports of 16.7TWh with an estimated wholesale value of £2.4 billion (which would of course be substantially higher this year).

And to add yet another layer of complexity, not all generated electricity actually ends up at a plug socket due to consumption by generators and losses. Last year Scotland actually used 28TWh of electricity.

So taking all this into account, Scotland generated somewhere between 13% of total energy consumption from renewable sources and 114% of its electricity consumption from renewable sources (being total electricity demand divided by total renewable electricity generated). So, which answer did you want?

Oh, and of course we can add in the further complication of when the electricity is actually generated. One might expect given the overcapacity in electricity generation that we would always generate sufficient electricity. However, as we all know, the sun doesn't always shine and the wind doesn't always blow. Indeed, we sometime have extended periods under high pressure systems where the whole country and surrounding seasons have little wind. This situation arose in Spring and Summer 2021 with estimated wind generation reduced by about 30%. Over the whole year, Scotland met its own demand from low carbon (renewables and nuclear) 67.2% of the time in 2021 compared with 83.6% of the time in 2020. This issue is of course well advertised particularly by those opposed to renewables and remaining vocal 'climate sceptic' lobby. However, it is remarkable that Scotland did meet its own demand 83.6% of the time in 2020 as, firstly, this was an increase from 9.1% a decade earlier, and secondly shows that with minimal improvements to long term storage, demand management and replacement of the nuclear power (a sizeable elephant in the room), the country could easily satisfy its own demand 100% of the time from low carbon.

What are the key conclusions of all these numbers to consider the next time someone throws out some numbers?

Firstly, low carbon generation is now very significant in terms of electricity usage and, with additional capacity and storage, could generate all the electricity we need for current demands. However, the next step towards Net Zero is to electrify as much as possible of the other energy usages, principally heat and transport. This sounds like a tall order. However, with heat pumps a proven technology (more of that in separate blog), electric cars and light vehicles, green hydrogen for heavier transport and a combination of electrification, batteries and green hydrogen for trains, it should, in principle be able to completely decarbonise heat and transport through electrification. In addition, we can add in the use of carbon capture and storage (CCS) for gas fired power stations and nuclear power to provide base load capacity and, at a smaller scale, local generation, be that solar panels on roofs or hydro schemes. Making some very big assumptions, the complete electrification of heat and transport would require additional installed capacity of 100GW (compared with 13GW already installed). The recent Scotwind award of licences for 25GW of offshore wind generation shows the scale of the challenge and the level of investment required but that this should be achievable if very challenging by 2045. This will also require huge investments in improving uptime on generation, balancing the grid, improved infrastructure as well as the softer issues every household will need to handle- how will a heat pump work compared to my existing gas boiler, how do I charge my car overnight, the costs of making the changes etc etc.

Another key issue, particularly with the current focus on cost of living, is the cost of generating renewable electricity. The last six months have shown how expensive electricity can be and, notwithstanding the price caps, how quickly prices can rise. However, despite the anti-Net Zero lobby's claims, the price increases are almost entirely due to increases in the cost of gas. Wholesale prices make up about 35% of the cost of domestic electricity and the various environmental and social levies between 9-13%. As an aside, the levies cover a wide range of schemes including feed in tariffs and emissions trading but also the Warm Home discount and funding for

insulation. Day ahead gas prices have increased from 20p/therm in June 2020, to 90p/therm in June 2021 and 150p/therm in June 2022. Over the same period, monthly average wholesale electricity prices have increased from £55/MWhr to £171/MWhr with £93/MWhr (of £112/MWhr) of this increase due to the increase in gas price. And although Scotland requires a relatively small proportion of electricity generated from gas (about 17%), it is the cost of the marginal therm of electricity (that is the last therm sold) that sets the price. And despite what some people may argue, as shown above, Scotland currently still requires the marginal therm to be generated from gas.

The cheapest forms of electricity generation globally are solar (probably likely to remain a relatively small component of Scottish generation) and onshore wind even when the gas price was at the level of two years ago. With the huge growth in offshore wind developments, the cost of electricity from these sources has also dramatically decreased with recent awards having contracts for difference at as low as £37.35/MWhr which is similar to gas fired generation at 'standard' gas prices and substantially less than at the current high prices. North Sea and West of Shetland gas can play a part in improving our security of supply and to some extent mitigating the effects of international gas prices and the carbon footprint of imported gas. However, as the North Sea is a very mature oil and gas province, with recent discoveries such as Jackdaw complex and challenging, this impact is marginal. There are of course costs associated with intermittency of generation and new infrastructure directly related to renewable electricity. However, the huge uncertainty in future gas prices and the carbon emissions associated with the use of gas, means that the case for increased renewable and low carbon electricity generation is absolutely compelling.

In summary, Scotland has done extremely well in almost entirely moving to low carbon electricity generation. However, the next stage of decarbonising heat and transport will require a mammoth investment in new generation capacity, new base load capacity to underpin renewable sources, storage, infrastructure and grid balancing amongst a range of other issues. The answer to the trilemma of cost, security of supply and zero carbon cannot be more hydrocarbons for electricity generation but low carbon generation.

Delivery of this decarbonisation also requires a huge change in the mindset of everyone in the country as to how we heat our homes, drive our cars and go about our daily lives. And to deliver this change requires leadership from government being clear on the costs and the prize.

Stuart Paton is an associate of Reform Scotland and the former CEO of Dana Petroleum plc

Colleges delivered Scotland's Early Learning & Childcare revolution and can do the same for the Green revolution – Anne Campbell

Originally posted 29 September 2022

When the Scottish Government announced in 2014 that it planned to more than double the Early Learning and Childcare provision for every three and four-year-old child, it was almost universally welcomed.

Parents were delighted with a flagship policy which would save them around £4900 for each child accessing the scheme for 1140 hours every year. Around 120,000 youngsters would benefit from the extra learning opportunities. Even opposition MSPs found it difficult to criticise such a popular proposal.

But there was a massive obstacle in the way. How was it possible to train thousands of new staff, in little more than five years, to more than double the hours of provision for youngsters? Instigating, developing and delivering a dedicated skills programme on this scale and in such a short timeframe had never been attempted since devolution.

Local authorities needed around 8,000 new early learning and childcare staff, while thousands more were also needed in the private sector. In all, the Scottish Government estimated 11,000 new workers were required. And all of them needed the skills to ensure that children received the best learning and childcare experiences, delivered with kindness and recognition that each child is an individual.

As the country's main skills providers, Scotland's colleges were tasked with finding the way to make it all happen by the policy implementation deadline of August 2020. As it happened, Covid intervened to push back the deadline by a year but that did nothing to reduce the challenge.

Across the country, college management teams immediately assessed local needs by working in partnership with private providers, local authorities and agencies, such as Skills Development Scotland, and put together action plans to ensure that the relevant courses were available to provide the skills needed to meet the staffing requirements within their communities.

It was far from just a matter of overnight deciding to offer on a few extra courses. Not only had the right programmes for students to be put together – which in itself was a huge challenge as it had to provide locally-relevant, targeted learning and training for roles ranging from carers to managers. In addition, additional class space had to be found to house the many new students and, equally importantly, lecturers had to be sourced to increase the capacity to deliver the learning needed.

College Development Network's (CDN) Care Strategy Steering group ensured that regional leads, responsible for the delivery of care courses in Scotland's colleges, were regularly brought together to discuss and share plans and to facilitate best practice sessions for lecturers.

However, there were no one-size-fits all solutions. The needs of nurseries in a rural communities could often be very different from those in urban settings. Smaller populations might have very specific shortfalls as opposed to those in more populous areas. Larger colleges might have to create entirely new courses, with accompanying recruitment or internal training challenges, while their smaller counterparts could sometimes simply expand existing ones.

The key was to share experiences while still introducing bespoke, local solutions which were uniquely appropriate for the communities in which the colleges were based.

Colleges are incredibly agile organisations, geared towards adapting to meet ever-changing workplace demands. And, while the sheer scale of delivering the early learning and childcare targets was something new, it was something they were confident they could deliver.

Back in 2016-17 there were 9,576 full-time equivalent local authority ELC staff in post. There are now around 17,700 – an increase of more than 80% in little more than five years.

In 2014, when the expansion plans were first announced, Scotland's colleges enrolled 1,789 students onto the HNC Childhood Practice course. By 2017-18, there were 2,327 students enrolled. The following year it was 2,803, then 2,798 and last year it was around 2,500. That's an average of 2,607 students enrolling or more than 818 additional students every year since the plans were unveiled.

And that's just one HNC course. Many, many other students signed up for other courses which provided them with pathways into jobs at every level.

What colleges achieved by ensuring thousands of additional students received world-class training in little more than a five-year window was unprecedented. And, the demand for these skills will continue for years to come as the new sector evolves into one of the country's biggest employers.

But it doesn't stop there. Colleges, like students, absorb knowledge from their experiences. Now, the lessons learned during the ELC delivery programme are being used to meet evolving large-scale workplace requirements. Emerging technologies such as artificial technology and machine learning along with the green revolution have created a massive thirst for new skills.

New offshore windfarms plans have already led to a similarly enormous trials for Scotland's colleges. Many thousands of skilled staff are going to be needed in the coming decade to deliver these giant, green energy providers which, once again are at the heart of a flagship government policy – this time that of tackling the climate emergency by sourcing clean, renewable energy. And Scotland's colleges are the workhorses which will provide the skills needed to make it happen. In just over a year, they have expanded from three colleges providing training in operations and maintenance to ten, with more likely to follow in areas like fabrication.

The number of 'green' jobs being created are enormous, running into the tens of thousands. So not only do the Government's environmental plans depend on colleges somehow, training, re-training and upskilling tomorrow's workforce to fulfil the ambition of this green revolution, so does the economy. By providing local people with the right skills, the earnings of this well-paid employee army is fed directly back into the national economy.

However, colleges are now at a financial crossroads. Colleges Scotland, which represents the sector, has said that for them to continue to provide the skills needed within a transformed Scotland there needs to be realistic, long-term funding in place.

The experiences gained from the delivery of skills needed for the Early Learning and Childcare blueprint are invaluable. However, they'll be squandered if realistic funding for colleges isn't there to ensure their estate is fit-for-purpose and they have the necessary resources to ensure the workforces of tomorrow are equipped with the relevant skills they need.

Already this year's settlement will mean that colleges face the prospect of contraction of teaching at a time when the need for the expansion of skills provision has never been greater. A £51.9m real-terms cut does not support Ministers' insisted mantra around a 'skills-led recovery'.

With colleges having consistently received significantly lower funding per head than schools and universities for decades, there is a need for a financial reset in government. Colleges as organisations hold within them the talent, experience, agility and ability to deliver the vision of a skills-led recovery and green revolution. But that will only happen if the public ambition of government is matched by actual investment in the colleges who alone can make it happen.

Anne Campbell, vice-principal (curriculum) Ayrshire College

Is there a light that never goes out?

– Stuart Paton

Originally posted 13 October 2022

The surprising thing about energy is that it is so cheap. This may seem a strange thing to say given the recent high profile cost increases but look at this in context. Oil is currently about \$90/barrel (the strange unit of volume used for oil), which is actually down about 20% in the last 3 months. This is equal to 55p/litre (yes, 55p per litre). Petrol at the pumps increased dramatically but has now reduced somewhat to about £1.60/litre (with about 55p of that being UK fuel duty). If you compare this against about £1/litre for milk, Coca Cola (other brands of fizzy drinks are available), or £20.00 (or much more) for whisky, it is remarkable you can drive 15 miles for this amount of money. And remember, this product has involved multi-billion pound investments, over many years in some of the most inhospitable places on the planet. And the exploitation of the resources has involved huge geopolitical ramifications from Iran to Saudi Arabia to Aberdeen. But the economic development of the last 100 years would not have happened without this cheap power (or indeed expensive fizzy drinks and quite a lot of whisky).

The issue we are now struggling with is that energy is not as cheap as we have been used to, and at a price required to maintain our standard of living. The wholesale electricity price has increased by about 50% in the last year. The UK day ahead wholesale gas price has more than tripled in the last year and is 10-times the average price in 2020. On this measure, gas is now selling for \$260/barrel of oil equivalent compared to an oil price of about \$90/barrel. For reasons ranging from economic growth post COVID in 2021 when the gas and oil price had already increased significantly, to the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and in particular the leverage the Russians have over western European gas supply, we are now having to deal with a very large price shock. And large energy price shocks, be it the oil shock of the early 70's or the low oil price of the late 80s, have significant political impact. However, we live in a very different world where, at least for developed economies, there is much less of a link between energy price and GDP growth and where the cheapest form of electricity is not now coal or gas.

What does this mean for the proposed UK government support through the 'Energy Price Guarantee'. Putting aside the fact that the government really seem to have no idea how much this may cost ('the biggest single fiscal intervention in my lifetime' according to Paul Johnson of the IFS) and that it is essentially a regressive policy as the largest houses use the most energy, what is the basis of the cap?

Firstly, the Energy Price Guarantee initially applied to domestic electricity and gas users for two years but has now been extended, in a somewhat different structure, to businesses for 6 months. However, although the mechanism is reasonably clear for households using gas and electricity (including clarity on pre-payment meters), there is still a lot of uncertainty for businesses and for households who use other sources of energy including oil on the detail. Announcements to date suggest that off grid consumers £100 for off grid support. 14.4% of Scottish households, about 361,000

homes, are not connected to the gas grid and are classed as “off grid”. This figure includes all of Shetland and Orkney, the vast majority of the Western Isles, as well as 58% of households in the Highlands and 49% of those in Argyll & Bute. These homes will already have seen very dramatic increases in oil (although prices have somewhat reduced in the last few months) or LPG and other sources of ‘off grid’ gas. To date, the government is only offering all these homes £100 of support which is likely to be substantially less than the actual increases and much less support than that given to ‘on grid’ households. This issue is presumably much bigger in Scotland than England and should be a focus of the Scottish Government in the coming months.

Secondly, the cap actually applies to units of gas (10.3p/kWhr from 1st October up from 7p/kWhr) and units of electricity (34p/kWhr up from 28p). The figure usually quoted of £2,500 is for an average household although this is often conflated, even by the Prime Minister, to the maximum amount a household will pay. Surprisingly, OFGEM and the government don’t provide a variety of scenarios, as for example the papers provide at a (normal!) budget (if you are a married smoker with 2 children living in a 3-bedroom house with a dog the impact of the budget will be £15/week). I therefore have sympathy with the pensioner interviewed on Radio 4 a couple of weeks ago who was expecting half her pension going on heating bill. For this individual, this was highly unlikely to be the case but as the figure of £5,000 per household (prior to the Energy Price Guarantee) was the only figure being mentioned what are people meant to think?

Thirdly, this is a cap on the energy price, and unlike the claims of most commentary, this should have an impact on usage as the price is a lot higher than last year. The cap could have been set higher which presumably would have a larger impact on usage but then would have required additional targeted support. However, as the price cap is double what it was one year ago at which time many people presumably had contracts below the price cap, this will still be a huge increase in the cost of domestic energy. Therefore, the government should be clearer that while it is introducing the price cap to ease the fiscal burden, we still need to individually reduce our consumption where possible to save money and as, reducing demand is also necessary if we are to meet our NetZero commitments.

This is of course a difficult message going into winter, which is why it also needs to be linked into help and advice around insulation and ways to improve energy efficiency. However, a recent poll for the Economist by Ipsos suggest a large proportion of people (approx. 60%) would support measures that would require households to reduce their energy consumption this year, provided there are exceptions for the most vulnerable, compared with one fifth opposing the rules. Of course, whether people would actually support these measures in practice is a different matter but it does show at least notional support.

To support this finding, a recent study by the think tank Breuegel, which compared a whole range of measures across Europe, clearly showed that countries that implemented more price support had less impact on natural gas demand and vice versa. Despite all these comments, in the short term, the UK government really had no other option than to provide support to households and businesses. However, to leave the

household support in place for 2 years seems a huge misjudgement and a potential huge liability.

The other key statement made by the new prime minister in relation to energy was regarding security and self-reliance. The mechanisms presented were greater exploration licencing and fast-tracking developments in the North Sea and encouraging onshore hydraulic fracturing of gas reservoirs ('fracking'). Both of these solutions seem wrong-headed.

UK oil and gas production has been declining for much of the last 20 years (although there has been an uptick in oil production this year probably due to post COVID effects). Average total production of oil and gas in 2021 was about 1.3 million barrels of oil equivalent. The key reason that companies are not increasing production from the North Sea is that this is a very mature basin with very few large discoveries still to be made rather than a lack of exploration activity.

Even the high-profile discoveries such as Jackdaw (75 Million barrels) and Cambo (170 Million barrels) are tiny on a global scale when you consider oil production and consumption is about 90 million barrels PER DAY. In comparison, ExxonMobil has discovered 11 billion barrels- 11 thousand million barrels- in Guyana since 2015- and will imminently be producing 1.2 million barrels per day. Recent UK discoveries are small even in a long term UK context- the last very large discovery in the UK was Buzzard- 1.5 billion barrels discovered in 2001, onstream 2007, currently producing 60,000 barrels/day. Recent UK discoveries are challenging- Jackdaw is very high pressure and high temperature, Cambo is in the relatively remote West of Shetland. Glengorm discovered in 2019 was originally thought to contain approximately 250 million barrels but following further drilling the current estimate is 60 million barrels.

Each of these discoveries could be an important part of the energy mix but it is overly optimistic to think they will have a major impact on the amount of gas or oil we need to import. This is not to say we can or should shut down the UK oil and gas industry overnight- far from it. However, we need to be realistic about the impact North Sea production will have on our energy supplies and also have a debate on the impact on our progress to net zero if we keep bringing new fields on stream.

The impact that developing gas fields using hydraulic fracturing ('fracking') will have on the UK gas market is likewise hugely overoptimistic. As a previous advocate of fracking, I now think the world has moved on in the last few years largely due to the increasing urgency, underpinned by legislation, to achieve net zero and the large reductions in cost of renewable electricity generation. The US (and to a lesser extent Australia) is the only place that has really made fracking work. The US has a wide range of geology to explore and test ideas, a huge onshore oil and gas industry with each stage of the supply chain honed and hugely innovative and wide-open spaces with mineral ownership rights which incentivise production. The UK has none of these. Further, is the government really going to go head-to-head with local objectors to fracking- many from key Conservative seats? At best, this will be a small, incremental benefit.

Instead of pursuing the fruitless goal of energy security from the North Sea and fracking, the government should instead focus on developing the cheapest forms of

energy- wind and solar- supported by nuclear for base load, storage of all forms and massive improvements to the electricity infrastructure. They should be ensuring companies are progressing with offshore wind development and that the UK supply chain is capable of taking a major part in this development. In parallel, with more renewable capacity, the government should be supporting companies delivering storage, green hydrogen and grid balancing, all vital for maximising the increased renewable capacity. Apart from their desire to start a publicly owned Green Energy Company, these aims are much more aligned with those of the Labour Party than the Conservative government. As an aside, it is interesting to see the UK Labour party enthusiastically advocating nuclear power which is at odds with some within the Scottish party and the SNP.

Secondly, the government with OFGEM must redesign the electricity market so that the price is decoupled from the gas price. As stated above, the electricity price is currently set by the 'marginal therm'- the last therm generated. Until a few years ago, this made sense as the cost of renewables was driving the price of electricity too low to incentivise anyone to generate electricity on the windless, cloudy winter days. The logic is, therefore, to pay the highest cost producer to ensure they can deliver when required. However, this means consumers are not seeing the benefit of lower cost generation- from renewables and, at the current gas price, nuclear. The benefits of this flow to the lower cost generators, specifically those who sell short term, and to upstream gas producers who are directly benefiting from the high gas price. The regulators, in Britain and across Europe, now need to modify the system to allow consumers to benefit from the lower cost renewable electricity but allow mechanisms for some type of option when we need gas generation or to pay for storage. The solution is complex but should be tractable in a timely manner as it does not require building lots of new power stations but focussing on running the system.

Thirdly, developing a support scheme for the most needy households and businesses rather than blanket support for everyone which cannot be sustainable. The government's approach to supporting households and businesses in the coming months is necessary and likely the least worst choice. However, the government needs to quickly decide on a sustainable method of support for the most vulnerable. The government should also be clear that, even with this support, energy prices have doubled in the last year and people will need to consider how they mitigate this impact likely looking at reducing consumption, improving insulation and installing solar panels.

Stuart Paton is an energy industry advisor and former Chief Executive of Dana Petroleum. He is also an associate of Reform Scotland

Promoting the Personal Development of Young People: Why Personal Agency is important in Families and Education

– Euan Mackie

Originally posted 17 October 2022

Having a revitalised appreciation of education, in its fullest sense, is essential for the promotion of young people's personal development. This should include the nurturing of personal agency.

The review of the role of Scotland's national educational institutions is important in clarifying the direction of education for Scotland's young people and those who support it. As the OECD has recognised, we have an assessment overload. This percolates the whole system. We are so used to assessment criteria in everything, we believe it is synonymous with our notion of 'education', as the outcomes of 'didactic schooling'. However those outside our system in non-formal education see it as a systemic neurosis. Rather than seeing the Four Capacities¹ and the UN Rights of the Child² as being the vision which should dictate how we support young people, everyone is bogged down in meeting protocols and guidance in all manner of things. This is hierarchical control and the antithesis of promoting personal agency.

We need to think carefully, as parents, teachers, educators, and those in the health sectors how we respond to the challenge of strengthening young people's well-being and, of course, of our own development! Through extensive personal experience, and using psychological research, I suggest there are natural approaches for promoting better personal development for young people, in families and in institutions. The outcomes are about nurturing a growth in 'personal agency' as the OECD define: **an ability and will to positively influence our own lives and those around us**³.

Young people all need to have a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives and to feel supported in their development. I suggest the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly given us a reality check on the need for safe and nurturing educational and family life. It has drawn attention to structural and systemic failures in the pastoral care of young people, the impact of social isolation and an exacerbation of mental health issues.

Our new understanding of the human condition provides us with strong concepts regarding the growth of all individuals. Our neurological conditions are flexible, have plasticity and respond to nurturing environments. We now understand that humans have strong genetic dispositions for learning new skills and for social collaboration. These elements can combine towards the growth of personal agency and hence well-being and intelligence⁴. Family life and educational institutions can limit and hinder these two main dispositions or enhance them. I suggest a modern psychological understanding of well-being and mental health can influence families and educational institutions with approaches designed to promote personal agency in young people's development.

In the first place we know that young people need positive social wrapping in families and in educational institutions for making the best of opportunities for their development. Social wrapping includes aspects of: Feeling safe and secure; Having rich interactions and dialogues with carers and teachers; Having choices for exploration through ordered freedom; Providing grace in young people's oversight. Institutions need to build positive rich relationship models which provide these essential conditions.

Given social wrapping, there are ten key approaches for improving the personal development of young people through nurturing personal agency. The two main approaches are enhancing the **skills development** of all young people and also providing them with inclusive **positive social experiences**.

The acquisition of skills has a direct neurological impact on self-identity. Mastery goes towards becoming more independent and an aptitude for self-agency and efficacy – the ultimate of education. Too many young people languish in our institutions with low levels of skills, from the onset of education, and are carried throughout the system and managed as low ability groups. The labelling of these pupils in the early stages of primary school, even at the age of 5, becomes an influencing and determinant factor for academic success. Their personal agency is systemically undermined from the outset by being compared with their peers. This needs to change to engage those young people to become more motivated and engaged in their skills development.

Pastoral care was signposted in Scotland as a development priority as early as the '10-14 programme'⁵ in the nineteen eighties. It has become a matter of protocols rather than enriching education consistently with positive social experiences. Young people meet many adults in school, and further education, but often don't have someone who knows them really well. Many don't receive inclusive social experiences, even though the evidence is that participating in positive inclusive pastoral groups is instrumental to individual well-being and to personality development⁶. These positive social experiences are ones without formal success criteria, but are ones related to personal choice, creative and expressive activities, service and volunteering and are linked with well-being outcomes.

From pre-school childcare, through primary and secondary schools, into higher and tertiary lifelong education, there should be a clearer emphasis on **skills progression** and richer inclusive social and creative **pastoral experiences** for all young people.

There are other approaches which support these two main aspects of development of personal agency. These include a higher public service importance for developing and collaborating with **family efficacy** (How families aspire to be involved with their children's broader education). The **quality of institutional environments within their communities** needs dramatically enhancing away from institutional industrial uniformity towards socially amenable places for communities to learn and interact. The **pedagogical structures of institutions** need to be shifted towards the individual and personal skills and pastoral needs of young people. The role of teachers moves towards **being educators** and having teaching, coaching and facilitating roles. There is

more emphasis on **networking, collaboration and dialogue** for improving the **quality of the system based on the growth of personal agency of all participants**.

These approaches offer a change from current historical structures of institutional education and point towards a socially collaborative way based on dialogue, mentoring and coaching. As society has woken up to cases of historical use of power in education, even for abuse and discrimination in public schools, then we can see how much power remains within the system to deny many young people, and even of their families, of their natural disposition for agency. A stronger sense of personal agency in life, and of citizenship, is this fundamental vision for education.

Euan Mackie is an educational Leadership coach and independent researcher into Social Educational Psychology.

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It is possible to farm without subsidies

– Duncan Pickard

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Almost all discussions on farming have emphasised the importance of subsidy income support. A typical example was from the chief strategy officer of the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) who said that subsidy income accounted for 80% of farm income in Scotland. This estimate must have been based on the officially produced, average Net Farm Income (NFI) or the average Farm Business Income (FBI) which are not the same as the real average income of farmers. Those who use average NFI or FBI should find out how they are calculated. When I questioned the civil servant responsible for the publication of NFI for Scotland he said that it should be “viewed as an economic measure rather than a wage and, as such, could be used to observe trends over years and between countries”. When I calculate the NFI for our farm it is considerably lower than our taxable profit. We do not depend on subsidy income support. Many more farmers in Scotland are in the same position as we are. When producing a forward strategy for farming, policy makers should not use artificial ‘economic measures’ of farm incomes instead of real incomes. Some of those who have become dependent on subsidies did so because they chose to. Why work seven days a week when you can live comfortably on subsidy income and only work four or five days?

There is a large difference between farm businesses in their productivity and profitability. The top 25% are consistently profitable and more productive than the rest; if the others could match the top 25%, many more could manage without subsidies. Too many have no incentive to do better because they have the subsidy comfort cushion to rely on. Much more food could be produced in the UK but will not be while subsidies allow farmers to be paid when using their land below its optimum capacity. Some need their subsidy income to pay for additional land bought at excessively high prices. Subsidies have allowed farmers to become inefficient and others to try to achieve economies of scale which do not exist. Subsidies should be seen for what they mostly are: non-means tested income support for wealthy land owners. The average net worth of farm businesses in Scotland is about £1m. It is unfair to give them income support. The latest figures from the Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate show that, of the total subsidy money disbursed, 69% went to 20% of those who submitted claims.

Subsidies are responsible for some of the rise in land prices which have made it almost impossible for young people to make a start in farming. The report from the Royal Bank of Scotland “Harvesting the Future for Young Farmers” identified high land prices as the main barrier to entry, but it did not attempt to explain why land prices are so high. The Government’s perverse tax policy, which favours land ownership with tax breaks and penalises work and trade with high rates of tax, is a major factor.

When comparisons are made with New Zealand’s farmers, who do not receive subsidy income support, many reasons for their success are given but the most relevant is that they have lower costs of production and that is where farmers should be looking

instead of seeking ever increasing produce prices to cover our high costs. We will have to adapt to reduced subsidies but so will farmers in the rest of Europe; the present level of spending on subsidies is not affordable. Brexit gives us the chance to get rid of a lot of costly unnecessary regulations and record keeping put in place when we had to comply with the Common Agricultural Policy, (CAP) but little progress has been made so far. I am not alone in believing that the CAP has never been appropriate for the UK. Jonnie Hall, the director of policy of the National Farmers Union of Scotland said, "We have lived for 46 years under the CAP and how many favours has it done for Scottish agriculture? CAP has stifled development and innovation, blocked new entrants and inflated land prices. There is so much scope for improvement if we are given the right tools".

We could also radically reform our outdated, complicated and disincentive tax system. Earned incomes should be relieved from taxes and the necessary revenue collected instead from the unearned increases in the rental value of land, both urban and rural. This is known as Land Value Tax (LVT) or Annual Ground Rent, (AGR). Abolition of VAT, the EU's most favoured tax, and Income Taxes would promote employment and trade so that consumers could afford to buy what we produce.

I am often asked why, as a landowning farmer, I am in favour of replacing existing taxes with an annual charge on the rental value of our land? The charge on land (AGR/ LVT) will be based on its productive capacity which means that those who farm in more remote and less fertile areas will pay less per acre. About ninety percent of the land area is rural but its rental value is only about ten percent of the total, conversely, ten percent of the land is urban but its rental value is ninety percent of the total. This means that the owners of urban land will pay most of the AGR. The market price of the land we farm will fall when speculative investors are unable to profit from simply owning land. Its current high price is of no advantage to us because we do not want to sell. I cannot say how much AGR/LVT we would pay but it would be closely linked to our ability to pay. Under the present tax system we have to pay wages related to our employees' skills irrespective of the farm's profitability. Compare that with rent: when we negotiate rent with a land owner, the amount we bid is based on the profitability of the animals and crops we plan to produce. Following the introduction of AGR/LVT the owners of large areas of rural land will also benefit from the removal of employment taxes they pay for their staff. Those farming more productive land will, instead of trying to maximise the area of land they farm, try to optimise the output per unit area to maximise their profits. Land which is remote from farm steadings is usually less profitable because of the increased costs in time and transport needed to care for animals or cultivate crops. Some will find that they are more profitable by reducing the area they farm and this will increase the availability of land for newcomers to start farming or provide suitable habitats for wildlife.

The removal of Income Taxes and VAT will allow more young people to be gainfully employed on farms, even in remote areas and this will reverse the trend towards rural depopulation. Community buyouts of land in the highlands and islands of Scotland have improved the standard of living but young people are still unable to remain there. Employment taxes and VAT are often the difference between a business being financially viable or failing and it is wrong that the same rates of tax are charged in

these places as in more advantageous ones. The total amount of AGR potentially available for collection is sufficient to fund all the necessary functions of government and could provide for improvements in education, healthcare and welfare because it has no inhibitory effects on employment and trade: it stimulates them by optimising the use of land to increase the production of wealth.

Dr Duncan Pickard is a member of the Scottish Land Revenue Group and is a landowning farmer

The Scottish government's review of school assessment: why is the debate not fully public?

– Lindsay Paterson

Originally posted 26 October 2022

The Scottish government is currently holding a review of what it calls 'the Future of Qualifications and Assessment', in other words school exams. The review is led by Professor Louise Hayward of Glasgow University. It issued a [consultation paper](#) at the end of last week. Comments on the questions which it raises have to be submitted by 16 December, and Professor Hayward will make her final recommendations in March next year. The purpose of this blog is not to debate the substantive issues. That is done in detail in papers from Reform Scotland's Commission on School Reform (in [June](#) 2021 and [March](#) 2021). My focus is on the process.

On the face of it, this seems an innocuously open approach to a matter of great importance. But it isn't. Despite the undoubted good intentions of everyone involved, the consultation is, in truth, a conversation of the governing elites with each other. Only those who are invited set the criteria by which the outcomes are chosen. Only insiders have a real chance to influence the options offered in public for change. Only they get to set the agenda of debate.

Before I explain how the process is being constructed, let me consider an example of one of the questions that the consultation raises to show how an ostensibly open approach actually hides the real ways in which decisions are taken. Question 4 asks for views on 'what a "better balanced" assessment system would look like'. It means by this mainly the relative importance of examinations on the one hand against coursework on the other.

Whatever your views on this matter, imagine being invited into a room to join a discussion of it and how differently you would prepare under two contrasting scenarios:

1. where those already in the room quite like the current balance of exams and coursework – which at Higher, for example, means that most subjects assign between a fifth and a third of marks to coursework and the rest to exams of the familiar kind;
2. where the presumption in the room is against exams altogether as unfair and as unable to test candidates' knowledge and skills.

The problem with the consultation on this question is that it is impossible to know the review's starting point – the beliefs of the people in the room. It might be reasonable to assume that it is scenario (1), because that is, after all, the currently existing state of affairs, in which coursework has gradually expanded its share over the past four decades. On the other hand, the consultation paper cites as authoritative a [review](#) of Scottish assessment by an academic from Oxford University that is quite resolutely hostile to any kind of exam, and also embarrassingly ill-informed about several

important details of how Scottish exams have evolved over the past century and a half. If you entered the room assuming scenario (1), and assuming a fair degree of support for exams, you would be rather taken aback to find yourself having to defend their very existence.

That is the essence of the problem here. This review is shrouded in secrecy while pretending not to be. It has a rather byzantine structure. At the head is Professor Hayward, who is served by a secretariat that is provided by the Scottish government. She is advised by what is called the [Independent Review Group](#), whose 22 members are drawn from the usual range of civic organisations that constitute such review groups in education – students, teachers, parents, employers, academic researchers, and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Each individual doubtless has a great deal to offer, and the organisations they represent ought indeed to be among those which should be consulted. But how the specific organisations or the individuals were chosen is not explained. More importantly, what they are talking about in their monthly meetings is not shown publicly. Although we are promised minutes, these do not yet seem to be available despite the meetings' having been going on since late spring. In any case, I expect these will be the kind of sketchy notes with which government minute-takers adeptly conceal anything controversial.

At least, though, these 22 are named, and there might be minutes. Beyond these people are 13 'Collaborative Community Groups', which are described as 'recognis[ing] and embrac[ing] the diversity of Scotland's learners and communities'. No details are given of who is on these groups, of how they operate, or of the papers and controversies that they might be addressing. So the chances of anyone outside this invited circle being able to distinguish between, for example, scenarios (1) and (2) above are not good.

If each of the 13 Groups also contains about 20 members, this policy-making process involves perhaps around 300 people, fewer than 10% of whom are named, and almost all of whose procedures are invisible. That number 300 is probably larger than in most consultations by the Scottish government, but it is perhaps 0.02% of those currently involved in Scottish education. In other words, the agenda of debate here is being set by about 0.008% of the Scottish population age 16 or older.

I should declare an interest here. Back in August, I was invited to join one of the 13 Groups. I asked for an assurance that everything that was tabled and discussed at the Group would be fully public. My argument was that, as a member of the Group, I would want to be able to enter into public debate of the kind that would provoke me into thinking carefully about the questions that were being raised, and especially into questioning my own presuppositions. After all, Professor Hayward had the 22 members of the Independent Review Group to stimulate her thoughts. Each of these 22 people, likewise, could turn to one of the 13 Collaborative Community Groups for similar opportunities to sound out ideas. Therefore, I reasoned, as a member of one of these Groups, I would want to be able to air ideas outside. If every member of these Groups did that, then a full range of options could be debated in public – including some very controversial opinions – rather than only those options which the review officially wanted to have debated.

But no such assurance of public openness was forthcoming, and so my invitation did not translate into membership.

One result of this ostensibly open but actually opaque process is the one-sided and rather flimsy consultation paper which was issued last week. Nowhere in that paper, or on the review's website, is there any indication of anything like the full range of views about assessment that are debated worldwide. Nor is there any accurate history of Scottish exams, or of the ways in which, in the past, they helped to establish the reputation of Scottish education as broad and rigorous. There is no acknowledgement of the role which exams played in ensuring the credibility of Scottish comprehensive education. There is apparently complete ignorance of the way in which exams have provided better opportunities to social groups that have suffered from invidious discrimination – girls, Catholics, minority ethnic groups, low-status social classes. The consultation paper thus presents a mainly negative view of the existing arrangements. And that partiality is the result of the secrecy of the review's processes.

Secrecy of this kind was supposed to have been set aside by the pluralism of the Scottish parliament. Yet that is not what has happened since its advent in 1999. Consultations have had a veneer of openness, but a reality of invitation-only introspection. Professor Walter Humes has [called](#) this the 'iron cage of educational bureaucracy', the capturing of the policy process by second-rate managers of educational quangos. An [investigation](#) by the Times newspaper (15 September 2022) of the current reforms to Scottish education confirmed this, finding that change was being insidiously guided by the people in charge of the institutions that are being reformed.

When this consultation on assessment is completed, government ministers will claim that the way ahead has been widely consulted on. Yet all the really difficult discussions will have happened in private, if they have happened at all, with only selected snippets given out for public debate. Many difficult questions will have been ignored because only a limited range of points of view will have been at the table where decisions about recommendations are made. This consultation paper itself is such an example, with its list of ex cathedra questions presented without any explanation of how they arose, and without any prior opportunity for anyone to debate publicly what should be asked about.

These criticisms are not intended to impugn the integrity or expertise or public-spiritedness of any of the people involved in either the Independent Review Group or the Collaborative Community Groups. The problem is not with them, but with a process that lacks the robustness that can come only from unfettered public debate.

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Scottish General Practice: The Right Way Forward

– Dr Alastair Noble

Originally posted 31 October 2022

The House of Commons' Health Committee in its latest report has said clearly that we must return to personal lists for GPs.

The committee called for a return of personal lists, so each patient is assigned an individual GP, alongside an expansion of GP training places.

By 2027, 80% of GP practices should be using personal lists, it said, and 100% by 2030. Why is this important? Simply that a unique consistent relationship is the fundamental building block for continuity of care. All the evidence supports how much better clinical care flows from that essential relationship.

In response to how that can work with so many part-time partners, I think one option is to look at job sharing so that you might have 2 job sharing GPs as your list GP. This means the responsibility lies with them to provide real continuity of care. This worked well for me in practice although it was not a formal job share. One of our excellent assistants (who had previously been a principal) covered my management and political time. The patients loved it and all the practice highly prized continuity of care and the patient's own individual GPs way of practicing, whilst still remaining very clear about getting it as near right as we could for the individual patient.

The practice is still doing our own Out-Of-Hours work with the community hospital nurses answering the phone and dealing with a lot of the patients. This again provides real continuity of care.

In a recent BMJ paper about learning lessons from Covid, in the paragraph about infrastructure for vaccine delivery, they emphasised again the importance of continuity. The NHS has used a range of sites to deliver vaccines, including locations run by hospitals, GPs and community pharmacies. The NHS needs to decide how covid-19 vaccines will be delivered in the longer term.

A GP-led programme, supported by pharmacies and hospital sites, offers many potential benefits, including easier access for patients to GP and pharmacy sites than hospitals and, importantly higher vaccination rates. This is as a result of the ongoing relationship that primary care teams have with their patients. Greater frequency of contact between primary care staff and patients also provides the opportunity for health promotion activities, including co-administration of other vaccines such as influenza.

The Italian Government is recommending 400 New Community Hospitals by 2026 following its response to Covid.

What about Scotland?

It appears to be to do away with General Practice and rely on Consultant Care only. The big problem with this strategy is that it clearly is not working.

Most patients have common conditions, most have more than one complaint and the overwhelming majority of patients are frail elderly who above all cherish their own GP's care and continuity of care is vital for them.

Those Scottish mainly rural communities where they continued to provide real Scottish General Practice are seen as beacons of good practice. We must build on that model of integrated health and social care teams delivering continuity of care in their own unique locality. That allows the essential clinical decision making between Consultant and General Practice to take place, firstly who will benefit from Consultant Care and even more importantly who no longer needs it or will not benefit from Consultant Care. The clinical accountability for Community Care then rests with the General Practitioner and their integrated locality team.

If we accept that the Clinical Decision is the Purchasing Decision, then we need accurate Clinical and Financial data. This will only work if we have a Fair Share Integrated Health and Social Care Budget for each locality, built on the Integrated Resource Framework. I am firmly convinced that the fairest way of paying for health and social care is by taxation, though I accept that this means to have to be able to show value for money for the taxpayer. (As clearly set out in Credit Crunch Health Care by Cam Donaldson)

This puts Clinical and Financial accountability on the Clinical Teams. Whatever is best for the individual patient in terms of current best practice will drive this model and resources, equalling mainly staff will follow.

The Centralist Specialist Model has failed. For example, in Covid; Medical admissions including Geriatrics (1800 Occupied Bed Days of Delayed Discharges; A&E with 4 hour target not being met; and repeatedly in Maternity (numerous recent reports and Marjorie Tew Safer Childbirth).

It also means that those patients who will benefit from Consultant specialist care are stuck on long waiting times and lists awaiting essential treatment. This is clearly not best current model of care.

We have all the necessary data and the Perth & Kinross Fair Share work is an excellent starting point. This can clearly be rolled out throughout Scotland.

We have excellent models for the right premises to house these integrated Community Teams like Nairn. We also have examples of community beds in nursing homes (Ullapool) and combined nursing homes and community hospitals on the same site (Stonehaven). Italy may well provide some interesting models going forward.

Co-location is key and must include health and social care teams. In the cities it may well mean community beds under the GP as separate wards in big teaching hospitals.

We also must ensure that all professions are taught in this sort of Community Care premises as well as big Teaching Hospitals. NES must ensure this happens. This will also ensure we train and employ more generalists in all professions and the right number of specialists. All students must have equal access to all the diverse ways of caring and understanding that medicine is not all about the latest machine in the Big Teaching Hospital!

Repeated reports highlight our consistent underspend on capital and the poor condition of our properties, this gives us a massive opportunity to prioritise integrated care properties combining all the community teams and right size our big hospitals to meet the work they will be doing in the future. It is just crazy to have our most expensive beds full of patients who should not be there!

We have a massive opportunity to get this right now in Scotland. The Status Quo is indefensible, and we can restore a happy, healthy work force who enjoy their job and benefit the Community in which they live and work.

The Greeks worked out the 'Healthy Body Healthy Mind' relationship 4000 years ago. Covid has again shown how important a healthy thriving Community is to us all.

Linking Health and Social Care into Local Place Planning will allow us to target those localities most in need and to support those localities who are doing the right thing by making them even better, greener and more sustainable.

Scotland is well placed to deliver on this place-based way forward. We have the clinical and financial data available to really integrate health and social care.

It also means we can deliver within existing budgets and improve patient care throughout Scotland. We already have excellent examples and all of Scotland's patients will benefit from continuity of care, have confidence in the quality of their individual care package and delivered by a happy confident workforce.

Sir Alex Fergusson would never expect an unhappy demoralised team who had never played together to win. It is essential that politicians, management and finance all play their essential part in supporting the individual patients and their communities to get optimal care. This means good housing, good jobs, good education and above all a healthy green sustainable environment. This will produce better health outcomes for all.

It is already being done in many parts of our country, we must make sure it is delivered everywhere.

Dr Alastair Noble worked as a GP in Nairn

A 3-point plan to save the National Care Service – before it's too late

– Gordon Hector

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It's official: plans for a National Care Service are in trouble. Yesterday Alex Neil said it should be [scrapped](#). That followed fellow SNP MSPs calling it a '[blank cheque](#)'. The [Fraser of Allander Institute](#), [Cosla](#), [unions](#), [NHS leaders](#) – and of course [Reform Scotland](#) – have all voiced concerns.

This is more than just the usual chuntering. This is the backbone of Scotland's public sector saying: stop.

It creates a nightmare scenario for the Scottish Government. It still has the votes to pass its bill, and it would be hugely embarrassing to drop it. And there is a strong case for change. But there will be a big, loud argument as it comes into being – big and loud enough to destabilise the care system. If that happens, then right at exact moment Ministers start taking responsibility for the whole thing, it might just fall over.

So Humza Yousaf is in a bit of a pickle. If he presses ahead, the system might collapse. And he probably ends his career.

But if he completely abandons the plan, the system loses the moment to make a change. And he probably ends his career.

What should the Scottish Government do? I'd suggest three things to get an NCS over the line by the next election, but in better shape, and without blowing the whole system up.

Make it a single process

First – the Scottish Government should make it a single process.

The National Care Service Bill is going through the Scottish Parliament. Separately, a big policy 'co-design' process with the sector is playing out.

This twin-track approach is good in theory: it makes sense to keep legislation focused, and engage broadly.

The problem is trying to do both at the same time. MSPs feel like they don't have the full picture, because many big choices simply aren't in the Bill. Experts like the FAI get frustrated they can't properly cost it, and that 'there will be relatively less opportunity for scrutiny than would be the case if a fuller set of NCS reforms had been ready for inclusion in primary legislation.'

At the same time, there is chatter that some of the co-design sessions are peppered with caveats that decisions are 'subject to parliamentary scrutiny'. That doesn't exactly breed confidence.

Ministers should align the two processes, so it goes 1) co-design and then 2) a Bill to enact the design. That would build trust, make it easier to communicate, and keep the policy coherent. It probably adds 6-18 months to the bill. That is better than losing control.

So that's point one: process. But opposition is also driven by substance. So my second act would be a substantial change: back down on taking care services away from local authorities.

Back down on removing local authorities

Why? Because this is the bit of the proposal which has by far the most political, financial and operational risk.

Political risk, because this is the kernel of opposition from Cosla, unions and bits of the NHS, and MSPs of multiple parties.

Operational risk, because this is the change which has the potential to send care into meltdown. Ministers can talk breezily about 'shifting commissioning from local authorities to the NCS' but what many staff will hear is 'my job is at risk'. They might start walking, with a ripple effect across the whole sector. We are already in a staffing crisis: structural reform in that context is an enormous gamble.

And financial risk, because it creates all sorts of questions around the cost processes switching over, contracts needing reviewed, harmonising pay, the risk of rising agency spend, and more. This is why the NCS feels like a blank cheque. If you switch responsibilities from councils to care boards, you just cannot assume that it costs the same.

These risks are in themselves good reasons to rethink. But there is another bonus: which is that the local-national switch probably isn't going to achieve what Ministers want anyway. It takes about 30 seconds looking at the NHS, or ScotRail, or our ferry network, to realise that it just isn't as simple as Ministers taking accountability, and therefore services improving. It just isn't how complex systems work. We've spent 60 years re-learning this lesson. You need to find ways to hedge against the tendency of bureaucracies to turn inwards and become accountable only to themselves. Known methods include keeping diversity of provision, creating strong incentives to respond to user needs, and keeping leadership with a deep connection to places – all of which are represented in the current system.

So changing this bit of the plan reduces the political, financial, and operational risks, as well as removing the bit most likely to underwhelm.

But doesn't this just keep the system very patchy? Isn't this just a massive u-turn? Does it even mean that we'd have a 'national' care service at all?

This is where the third suggestion would come in. Ministers should go slower on removing local control. But if they do that, the path is clear to go *further* on creating a new central function, in one specific regard.

Creating central improvement

The NCS itself isn't an organisation. It's more an umbrella term for a series of organisations, mostly care boards, and in future 'special boards' reporting to ministers. A consultation last year proposed a National Social Work Agency as a new central body, but since then it's gone a bit quiet.

This creates a gap, and an opportunity. This is to accelerate the Agency, or something like it, and go much further and faster in creating a central improvement body. Improvement organisations deploy combinations of incentives, training, culture-change, communications and research to define standards, unlock innovation, and improve services. There are three reasons to think one would work.

First, improvement is not new. The [patient safety programme](#) is our best home-grown example of its potentially transformative effects. Elsewhere in the UK, organisations like Social Work England are heading in this direction.

Second, what is new is the advance of digital technology and data. This is taking improvement from being a bit touchy-feely into a much more robust public service profession in its own right, devoted to creating feedback loops of data, measurement and user-centricity. Technology creates lots of questions, ranging from the practical (social care data is often weak) to the ethical (we don't want to commoditise care) – so there's a lot to think about. But this is still a moment of immense potential for a new improvement organization that understands technology and the role it can play in driving quality.

And finally, the Care Boards look likely to be good at caution and meetings, and bad at driving change. This is because they are a Board, and most Boards end up this way. Particularly ones where everyone knows each other already.

If we really want to do something new, then we should build something new. Build a new organisation working from the centre, roving around the rest of the system as a cheerleader, champion and coach. Build it small, nimble, and impatient with mediocrity. This would be a new national *institution* trying to create a nationwide *ethos* but it would be working with local provision, not try to displace it. That makes it quite different from simply creating a national *structure* of Boards: it does still encourage the kind of consistency and quality and common identity which the NCS is supposed to achieve, but working with locally-responsive providers. Politically, it means Ministers would still get to claim, in all good faith, that they have created a national care service. It's just swapping the mechanism from a centrally-led NHS-style structure, to a supercharged central improvement agency working with locally-led systems.

Not a u-turn, just a detour

That's my three-part grand bargain: align the parliament and policy timelines; ditch the centralisation of provision; but put more emphasis behind centrally-led improvement. Maybe this sounds a bit like gutting the bill and moving very slowly. But then that is how we got the NHS: the NHS in Scotland was not invented overnight in 1948 but was built on 19th-century medical schools, the 1920s Highlands and Islands Medical Service, the 1930s Cathcart report, and 1940s wartime emergency services. If Ministers really do want the NCS to be like the NHS, there is really no shame in building it gradually.

I don't think we'll ever need to do that. My view is that a regulated system of diverse provision is more likely to work than a vast pyramid run from the top. But the beauty of being cautious for now is that it preserves options. If I'm wrong, then we can still create a bigger NCS superstructure in future.

This need not be a u-turn: more of a scenic route.

Put it all together and I think there is a package which takes the heat out of the process, brings civic Scotland along for the journey, preserves options for the future, and still gets you the 'we did an NCS' boast on a pledge card in 2026.

Above all else, it won't ruin the system as it's introduced. And if it preserves care, it will probably preserve a few careers too.

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