

REFORM SCOTLAND

2016

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POLICY

TRACKER

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Reform Scotland Policy Tracker

Introduction

This is the first Reform Scotland annual policy tracker.

It is our intention to use the annual publication to measure government and opposition progress against our policy recommendations.

For the purpose of our first tracker, which we are publishing just over one year on from the 2016 election, we are measuring how well the Scottish Government and the opposition parties have performed against the 16 manifesto policies that Reform Scotland set out in its own 2016 manifesto.

Our 2016 manifesto looked exclusively at policy recommendations that were relevant to the powers that the Scottish Parliament had, or were due to have, following the Scotland Act 2016.

However, in future years this will widen to consider all of Reform Scotland's policy recommendations, including those which are directed at the UK Government, as well as newer policies which have been subsequently published.

While the tracker will focus on the Scottish Government, it will also consider the policy positions taken by opposition parties in the Scottish Parliament. There is a minority government in Scotland and, therefore, it is not enough for just the SNP to pursue a policy. For it to be implemented, it will need some level of cross-party support. For example, in its 2016 manifesto the SNP gave a commitment to cutting Air Passenger Duty in half, a policy which Reform Scotland supports. However, at that point none of the other parties supported such a proposal and in order for it to be delivered, broader support is required.

While it is straightforward to look at what the Scottish Government has or has not done, opposition action and policy is not always clear. It is all very well for opposition parties to criticise government policy, but unless they offer an alternative, that criticism is neither particularly helpful nor constructive. An effective opposition needs to act like a government in waiting and that requires having the maturity to say where they agree with the existing government and to set out clear alternatives where they do not. However, party policy positions are not always clear or up-to-date. For the purposes of this publication, Reform Scotland has used the best available public sources to make its assessment of the various party positions.



Situation has got worse

No change

Some progress

Policy adopted

Devolving power

Scottish Government:

Although the Scottish Government believes more powers should be passed from Westminster to Holyrood, it is disappointing that this belief in devolution does not seem to extend beyond Edinburgh. Reform Scotland believes that too much power has been taken away from local authorities in recent years and unfortunately, over the past year, that trend has not been reversed. The end of the council tax freeze is to be welcomed, but the imposition of caps is reminiscent of the 1980s. It means that local authorities don't have full control over any tax income, only controlling 14% of their own expenditure through customer and client receipts.

It's not just a lack of fiscal control, but also over key areas such as the police. Although no further powers have been taken from councils over the past year, there has also not been any improvement. Unfortunately, the Scottish Government is set to create a new quango to manage the Crown Estate that is being devolved to Scotland, as opposed to passing the powers to the relevant local authorities, as had been envisaged by the Smith Commission.

Opposition parties:

The Scottish Greens in particular have continued to highlight the importance of local authorities and local democracy and argued against centralisation, whether with regard to finance or responsibilities such as the police. The Liberal Democrats have also argued these points. Scottish Labour's Vision for Local Government document doesn't devolve council tax and business rates in full, preferring central reform. However, it does propose to devolve powers to allow councils to introduce tourism taxes and a land value tax, though the parameters within which those taxes could operate would be controlled centrally. Credit must also go to the opposition parties for opposing the Scottish Government's proposals to keep and redistribute a proportion of council tax. While we would agree with the Conservatives that councils should be able to retain NDR and LBTT income, it is disappointing that the party did not argue that local authorities should be also be able to set and control the taxes in full.

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Fully devolve council tax and business rates to local authorities, including the ability to replace the tax.	 The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba	 Although the council tax freeze has ended, the Scottish Government has introduced a cap on any increase. Although this is better than a freeze where a council has no control, it is still very limited and restricted fiscal responsibility and there are no proposals to give greater powers over that tax or NDR.
	 Conservatives	 Although the party wants councils to retain NDR and LBTT income, it still wants the taxes to be centrally controlled.
	 Scottish Labour	 Would give councils powers to introduce tourism tax and LVT, though parameters still set by Holyrood.
	 SCOTTISH GREENS	 Believe local taxation should be controlled by councils which should be responsible for raising more of the income which they spend.
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats	 Believe local taxation should be controlled by councils which should be responsible for raising more of the income which they spend.

Devolving power

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Pilot schemes to devolve health to local authority control.	  The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba	No progress
	 Conservatives	No comment
	 Scottish Labour	
	 SCOTTISH GREENS	
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats	
		

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Give people greater choice over their GP surgery.	  The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba	No progress
	 Conservatives	No comment
	 Scottish Labour	
	 SCOTTISH GREENS	
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats	
		

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Give local authorities a proper role in policing by reinstating the split in funding between central & local government and giving each council a seat on the SPA.	  The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba	Although the new Strategic Police Priorities for Scotland highlight the importance of localism, there are no practical changes to ensure local authorities have a greater role in policing.
	 Conservatives	Criticised centralisation but has not offered an alternative to reintroduce localism.
	 Scottish Labour	Criticised centralisation, but has not offered an alternative to reintroduce localism.
	 SCOTTISH GREENS	Want a significant devolution of power and resources to local division level.
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats	Police Scotland to be made into a single shared local government body.

Devolving power

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
<p>Make police deployment an operational, as opposed to political, decision by removing the 1,000 extra officers pledge.</p>	 	<p>The Scottish Government has dropped its 1,000 additional police officers target.</p>
	 	<p>The Conservatives have criticised the Scottish Government for allowing police numbers to fall. While budget decisions are rightly the responsibility of the Scottish Government, actual police numbers need to be an operational, not a political decision.</p>
	 	<p>Labour have criticised the Scottish Government for allowing police numbers to fall. While budget decisions are rightly the responsibility of the Scottish Government, actual police numbers need to be an operational, not a political decision.</p>
	 	<p>Have voiced concerns at police cuts, but support devolving power.</p>
	 	<p>The Lib Dems have criticised the Scottish Government for allowing police numbers to fall. While budget decisions are rightly the responsibility of the Scottish Government, actual police numbers need to be an operational, not a political decision.</p>

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
<p>Transfer all quango functions either to government departments, independent bodies or councils.</p>	 	<p>The Government is proposing to create a new quango for managing the Crown Estate in Scotland, despite the fact that it could be managed directly by government, and the fact that the powers are supposed to be being devolved to local authorities.</p>
	 	<p>No comment</p>
	 	<p>Support devolving the Crown Estate to local authorities, but no comment on other quangos.</p>
	 	<p>Support devolving the Crown Estate to local authorities, but no comment on other quangos.</p>
	 	<p>Support devolving the Crown Estate to local authorities, but no comment on other quangos.</p>

Supporting individuals and the economy

Scottish Government:

While the Scottish Government has limited fiscal powers, which is why we believe that it should not vary income tax, there are things that it can still do to encourage economic growth. It is disappointing that the Scottish Government has chosen to focus more on fiddling around with income tax thresholds rather than looking at how to increase the tax base and the number of higher and additional rate payers. It will be hard to attract the people to Scotland we need unless Scotland provides an attractive environment in which to live and work.

Unfortunately, other than looking at increasing the amount paid in some benefits, the Scottish Government seem content to simply replicate, where they have powers, the welfare system in the UK. Reform Scotland believes that this is an opportunity to think again about the administration of such services and that splitting tax and welfare, as it is between the DWP and HMRC at Westminster, is a mistake.

Opposition parties:

The Conservatives are the only party which has argued that income tax rates in Scotland should not be higher than they are in the rest of the UK. However, the party's stance on APD was disappointing. Rather than backing the Scottish Government on cutting a tax, which would have benefited families (as George Osborne's previous cut on child APD recognised) as well as business people flying further afield, the party's suggestion of only cutting the rates for long haul journeys looked as if the party was trying to disagree with the SNP over a policy with which it actually agreed. The other parties have focused on increasing the top rate of tax, as opposed to what we can do to increase the number of additional rate taxpayers in Scotland. Additional rate taxpayers account for only 0.7% of taxpayers in Scotland. This is lower than the UK as a whole where 1.1% of taxpayers are additional rate taxpayers.

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Do not vary the Scottish Rate of Income Tax from the UK level.	 	The Scottish Government has not varied Scottish income tax levels from the UK ones. However, it has not increased the threshold for the Higher Rate to keep it in line with UK levels.
	 	Wanted to keep income tax in Scotland the same as rest of UK.
	 	Wanted to increase the top rate of tax.
	 	Wanted to increase taxes.
	 	Wanted to put 1p on each rate.

Supporting individuals and the economy

Policy	Verdict	Explanation	
Scrap Air Passenger Duty.	 The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba		The Scottish Government's Programme for Government stated: "We are committed to halving APD with a view to abolishing it when resources allow". However, there are no details on what the proposed Air Departure Tax rates will be.
	 Conservatives		Although initially against any change, now want to reduce the rate, but only for long haul flights.
	 Scottish Labour		Against cutting Air Passenger Duty.
	 SCOTTISH GREENS		Against cutting Air Passenger Duty.
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats		Against cutting Air Passenger Duty.

Policy	Verdict	Explanation	
Have one Scottish department responsible for both tax and welfare powers due to be devolved to Scotland.	 The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba		The Scottish Government has unveiled proposals to create a new department to deal with the new welfare powers. This means that tax and welfare will be split between Revenue Scotland (and HMRC) and the new department, just as it is at Westminster.
	 Conservatives		No comment
	 Scottish Labour		No comment
	 SCOTTISH GREENS		No comment
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats		No comment

Supporting individuals and the economy

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Reform the administration of Carer's Allowance.	 	The Scottish Government has signalled that it will make changes to the allowance, but has not commented on the taxable side of it, or its administration.
	 	Has signalled that it would make changes to the allowance, but has not commented on the taxable side of it, or its administration.
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	 	Has signalled that it would make changes to the allowance, but has not commented on the taxable side of it, or its administration.

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Ensure every school and GP surgery has a website.	 	No progress
	    	No comment

Transforming education

Scottish Government:

The Scottish Government has launched a number of consultations on education within its first year and signalled that it intends to make some changes. Suggestions which would give schools, teachers, parents and other stakeholders greater autonomy in education are to be welcomed, as are proposals to introduce virtual vouchers for nurseries. While the outlook is promising, it remains to be seen what the Scottish Government will do to follow on from these initial consultations.

Opposition parties:

While there has been a great deal of debate around the Scottish Government's consultations and proposals for increased school and parent autonomy, until the Scottish Government publish what it intends to do, as opposed to consult on, it is also hard for opposition parties to critique. However, there are positive cases being made for increased autonomy by the opposition.

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Introduce a virtual voucher to ensure parents are able to access their child's nursery entitlement in any pre-school environment that meets required standards.	 	The Scottish Government has consulted on childcare expansion. In the section on funding models, the option of the funding following the child; or a childcare account are put forward. These are both demand-led systems similar to Reform Scotland's proposals.
	 	Support a virtual voucher.
	 	Want more flexible provision.
	 	Want more flexible provision.
	 	Want more flexible provision.

Transforming education

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Give every child the same basic entitlement to nursery education, regardless of when their birthday falls.	 The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba	 No progress
	 Conservatives	 Support ending birthday discrimination.
	 Scottish Labour	 Support ending birthday discrimination.
	 SCOTTISH GREENS	 No comment
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats	 Support ending birthday discrimination.

Policy	Verdict	Explanation
Give schools greater autonomy to ensure they are able to make decisions necessary to meet local priorities and circumstances.	 The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba	 The Scottish Government has issued a consultation looking at school governance, John Swinney's introduction states: <i>"Decisions about children's learning and school life should be taken within schools themselves, supported by parents and local communities."</i>
	 Conservatives	 Wants schools to have greater autonomy.
	 Scottish Labour	 Believes Scottish Government plans centralise schools.
	 SCOTTISH GREENS	 No comment
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats	 Focus on pupil premium.

Transforming education

Policy	Verdict	Explanation	
Ensure colleges and universities have a level playing field.	 The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba		No progress
	 Conservatives		Want to give equal weight to vocational education and opposes moves to undermine colleges' autonomy.
	 Scottish Labour		Want to place more emphasis on colleges and wants parity of esteem between higher and further education.
	 SCOTTISH GREENS		Want funding parity for college and university students.
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats		Want to build back up the role of colleges.

Policy	Verdict	Explanation	
Introduce a deferred tuition fee so that once graduates earn above average salaries they contribute towards the cost of their higher education.	 The Scottish Government Riaghaltas na h-Alba		Against graduate contribution.
	 Conservatives		Would introduce a graduate charge.
	 Scottish Labour		Against graduate contribution.
	 SCOTTISH GREENS		Against graduate contribution.
	 Scottish Liberal Democrats		Against graduate contribution.

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