

Learner drivers in limbo under the SNP

29 Jun 2020



Driving instructors have demanded clarity about going back to work, and are being left in “limbo” as their counterparts in England return to action.

Lessons and tests south of the border will be able to resume from July 4, the UK Government has confirmed.

But the Scottish Government has still to issue guidance, even though other businesses which involve more physical contact have been given the green light.

Glenn Norris, an instructor in Ayrshire, said the uncertainty was damaging both for the industry and people who need to gain a licence in order to work.

The Scottish Conservatives have backed his calls, and urged the SNP government to engage with the sector and give it a date for return.

Mr Norris, who runs the Glenn Norris Driving School in Cumnock, said: “We’re raring to go – we’ve got facemasks, gloves, sanitiser, steriliser, everything to make the instructor and the learner driver safe.

“But we don’t have any clarity. For some reason, hairdressers are able to go back in July, and that involves significantly more contact than our business.

“We don’t have any contact with the learner driver, and I’ve even got a thermometer and steam cleaner to make sure everything is as safe as possible.

“As an industry, we’ve been using this time to prepare for going back, but we’re not hearing anything from the Scottish Government.

“It’s frustrating for us and for people who have been waiting months for lessons and a test.

“And even when we go back, no-one will be able to go straight into a test after four months, so we will need at least three weeks to get drivers ready for that test.”

Scottish Conservative MSP Oliver Mundell recently asked transport secretary Michael Matheson about the issue.

However, in his parliamentary answer, he failed to give any assurances to the industry.

Scottish Conservative MSP Oliver Mundell said:

“There’s no need to keep driving instructors and their clients waiting any longer.

“This will resume in England from next week, yet here the SNP government is keeping them in limbo.

“That has a negative impact both on the finances of driving instructors and test centres, but also keeps young people waiting for months on end.

“Many of these people will need a licence for work, and this unnecessary delay only damages their prospects further at an already difficult time.

“The SNP needs to give this industry clarity and get instructors back out and on the road.”

Recovery plan is vital for the survival of newspapers

29 Jun 2020



The Scottish Conservatives have launched a newspaper recovery plan to support the long term future of the industry.

The recovery plan will support local journalism and local newspapers through additional funding streams, support national media with additional Scottish Government advertising spend, rates relief and a journalism foundation.

The plan itself has been drafted in collaboration with the National Union of Journalists and follows previous interventions from the Scottish Conservatives to support the sector.

In April, Donald Cameron, Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary launched a short term local newspaper appeal seeking increased financial assistance for the industry after lockdown caused serious damage to circulation figures.

And just last month, Murdo Fraser, Scottish Conservative shadow constitution secretary managed to secure the same financial support for local newspapers as the retail, leisure and hospitality industries.

Maurice Golden, Scottish Conservative shadow economy and culture secretary launched the plan today which will –

- Establish a Journalism Foundation – to invest in local journalism, innovative media projects, new start ups and vital areas of quality and investigative journalism which are no longer supported elsewhere.
- Confer “asset of community value” status on local newspapers, ensuring that titles facing closure, or potential sale to owners who fund little

local content, could be preserved for potential community ownership.

- Offer rates relief and other financial support for journalistic co-operatives and local social enterprises taking over titles from major commercial operators, and running them as not-for-profit enterprises.
- Ensure that government and agency advertising is strategically invested in innovative journalism and local and hyperlocal news initiatives, as well as in mainstream media.

Maurice Golden, Scottish Conservative shadow economy secretary said:

“The lockdown has had an extreme impact on local and national media circulations.

“Despite opposition from the SNP the Scottish Conservatives managed to secure additional financial support for local newspapers last month.

“At the time we said that it wouldn’t be enough and we called on the SNP government to put forward a longer term plan to help this struggling industry.

“Our plan supports local and national papers; from the ground up, through advertising and with support for journalists.

“A functioning media is absolutely crucial for a well functioning democracy – there is simply no option, the SNP government must support newspapers and ensure their long term survival.”

[Scottish Conservatives encourage Scots back to high streets](#)

29 Jun 2020



On the day most non-essential Scottish shops are allowed to reopen to the public, the Scottish Conservatives have repeated their commitment to revitalising high streets by encouraging consumers back to support Scotland’s retailers.

The Scottish Conservative campaign to Support Scotland’s High Streets was launched two weeks ago and called for a major ‘buy local’ campaign to be organised by the Scottish Government urging Scots to back local high streets.

As Scotland moves from the public health emergency we are undoubtedly facing a significant economic crisis. In April alone total Scottish sales slumped by 40%, an unprecedented nosedive.

Speaking as shops reopen, Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative leader will point out that the Scottish Conservatives will continue to “stand up for people’s jobs and livelihoods” and will do everything possible to ensure our economy suffers as little as possible over the course of this crisis.

Scottish MSPs and Councillors will be taking to social media to display campaign posters and their local high street urging Scots to get shopping.

The campaign also calls for:

- Greater support from local authorities, BIDs or the enterprise agencies to facilitate high street shops switching to socially distant trading. Freeing up planning restrictions and licensing along with greater support for BIDs can help achieve this.
- The Scottish Government to bring forward its review of the 2-metre rule. International evidence already exists, and every day counts for businesses: even a few more days’ notice on any changes would help.
- Scrapping car parking charges as well as offering pop-up park and ride facilities to help people that will not be able to use a public transport network that is significantly under capacity.
- Sustained cuts to business rates including reducing the large business supplement. Rate relief should be extended for as long as possible.

Jackson Carlaw, Scottish Conservative leader said:

“The reopening of the High Streets is a really positive step for all of us – another big step towards normal life.

“As we move from the public health emergency of Covid, Scotland is undoubtedly facing a significant economic challenge.

“The Scottish Conservatives will continue to stand up for jobs and livelihoods to ensure our economy suffers as little as possible over the course of this crisis.

“Our message is that the Scottish Government must start to revitalise our economy, but so can we – we can get out there and spend money.

“Scottish Conservatives will be out there today, publicly highlighting the great shops we have, and the great people who work in them.”

SNP tourism delay to cost sector millions in cash and customers

28 Jun 2020



The SNP's two-week delay in opening Scotland's tourism industry will cost at least £11 million and almost half a million visitors.

Analysis by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed the huge blow to the economy dealt by Nicola Sturgeon's decision to delay the restart of tourism and hospitality until July 15 at the earliest.

That compares to the sector in England which is looking forward to getting back to business on July 4.

Now a study of previous tourism figures has revealed the cost of that delay to businesses across the country.

According to official figures, Scotland's tourism industry brought in £2.86 billion in 2018 from overnight visitors from within the UK.

That means a two-week period would have stood to generate £11 million for the sector, and that's without taking into account this time of year being far busier than average.

In the same timeframe, domestic tourists made 12 million trips in 2018 which, using the same calculation, would result in 461,000 visitors – again a cautious estimate considering this is peak season.

Yesterday, the Scottish Conservatives called for the SNP to provide more support for the very businesses they were forcing to stay closed.

And the party said the SNP government should be launching a far-reaching tourism campaign to make up for lost time.

Scottish Conservative leader Jackson Carlaw said:

"Even by the most cautious of estimates Scotland's tourist industry stands to lose millions of pounds and hundreds of thousands of customers.

"That's because the SNP government is refusing to open up the tourism and hospitality industry in line with the rest of the UK.

"The damage happens now financially, but also for the future too – these are people who would have come to Scotland but are now being made available to competitors.

"If Nicola Sturgeon is insisting on this lag, then her government needs to provide financial compensation for that delay.

"And it also needs to generate a marketing campaign to make up for lost time.

"This valuable sector is already on the brink – it needs an SNP government which will back it up, not make life even more difficult."

Time to honour our armed forces

27 Jun 2020



On Armed Forces Day, Scottish Conservative MP Andrew Bowie has put on record his thanks to the brave men and women of the armed forces community.

Mr Bowie, the MP for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine, has made special mention of the incredible efforts of the armed forces during the Covid crisis.

From mobile testing units, to evacuating seriously ill Covid sufferers, the British Army has stepped in and stepped up to help at this time of national crisis.

Andrew Bowie, Scottish Conservative MP said:

“Our armed forces continue to step in and step up to any crisis we, as a nation, face.

“I would like to put on record my sincerest thanks to everyone in the armed forces family, including veterans and their families, soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen; full time and reserve.

“The Covid pandemic has highlighted, once again, our armed force’s quiet dedication and humanity.

“These dedicated men and women are the best of us.

“Armed Forces Day is a chance for all of us to pause and appreciate all they have achieved and all they have sacrificed. And to say thank you.”