

Scotland's government

It wasn't meant to be like this. Gordon Brown and Tony Blair pushed through devolution for Scotland, telling us that would kill off the nascent Scottish independence movement. I wrote at the time:

"Usually , the granting of more and more powers for separate development and separate government within a once unified state leads inexorably to stronger nationalist movements" (The Death of Britain? 1999)

I drew attention to the many ways a canny Scottish government could press for more powers and exploit the compromises of the settlement. It always looked like a political journey, not a fixed constitution. The SNP could blame the UK government for things that went wrong and demand more powers to fix them.

Some defenders of the Union still think Gordon Brown was right, if only the UK Parliament grants a few more powers. They naively think that there is some amount of power for a devolved Parliament that will satisfy nationalists. Surely we have seen enough to know that whatever powers they have they will want more, because they do want their version of independence.

Today I would be interested in your thoughts on the state of Scotland's government and Parliament. I myself have no intention of rushing to judgement or intervening in the tense battles between the present and former First Ministers. This is a debate best conducted between those involved and through the voices of the Scottish parliament, now at the very centre of the row. We have heard Mr Salmond's serious allegations about the conduct of the senior Ministers and Law Officers, including allegations of misleading the Parliament and obstructing the work of its Committee trying to get to the truth. We now need to hear the government's defence.

My question during the Growing Back Better Report, 25 February 2021

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I strongly support the green VAT cuts. Did the Committee examine the future of the petrol and diesel car industry, and especially the future of the diesel engine parts, with all the skilled staff and big assets, if the Government move to an early ban on these new vehicles?

Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question.

The Committee is taking an interest in the impact of a transition from the current economy, with its carbon-intensive sectors, to a net zero economy. We are looking at our future programme and some of the impacts of green jobs, which we are in the middle of an inquiry on now, and we will be addressing specifically the point that he makes about the impact on the motor sector.

In the future, we are interested in some of the impacts of moving from an internal combustion engine source of transport to electrified transport and what that might do across different transport sectors. We will be working with the Transport Committee to ensure that we do not duplicate efforts, but that we are able to look into those matters.

[My question during Business of the House, 25 February 2021](#)

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): As businesses large and small need more orders to power jobs and economic recovery, can we have a debate on Government buying? Can we learn from the great success of buying so many vaccine doses from UK science and facilities, and buy more innovative and competitive goods and services from companies here at home?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees Mogg): My right hon. Friend, as always, raises interesting and important points.

The Government are planning on creating a much simpler and nimbler procurement system, which will open up procurement opportunity to small and medium-sized businesses. However, I hope he will contribute to the Budget debate that is coming up, which will be an opportunity to talk about these matters at greater length.

[The rise of the pound](#)

In the first two months after our exit from the single market and customs union, the pound has risen against the dollar, the Euro and the yen. It is up by 3.6% against the dollar and Euro, and by 8.6% against the yen. In the referendum campaign I rightly criticised the silly pessimism of Remain forecasters saying there would be large falls in GDP immediately after a Leave vote, a collapse in house prices and a surge in unemployment. On sterling I merely said that the pound would doubtless continue to fluctuate once we had voted to leave as surely as it had varied widely during our

period in the EU. I thought relative interest rates, QE rates, dollar money policy and the other usual issues would have more impact on the pound than Brexit. So it has proved.

Today the pound is at the same level against the dollar and the yen as it recorded before the referendum vote, a time when the establishment and market view was that Remain would win. It would not have been easy to forecast that the pound should now be exactly where it was against the dollar and yen after a Leave vote and after exit given the elapse of time and the many other influences and variables involved. It should worry Remain forecasters that their one remaining gloomy forecast of a big fall in sterling has not proved to be right either. The pound is down by 5.5% against the Euro over the same time period, as the Euro has appreciated against the dollar and yen.

The future of the pound is never easy to forecast given the huge volumes of currency transactions and the differing money policies of the USA, Japan, the Euro area and the UK. We seem to be living through a current period of dollar weakness, probably reflecting the very loose money and fiscal policy being pursued in Washington. The rise this year so far in sterling will help limit inflationary tendencies on all those imports and will make exporting a bit more difficult. What is interesting is that in the first two months of exit sterling has risen against all major currencies including the Euro.

Roadmap – Return to full attendance at Education Settings

On the 22 February, the Department for Education announced that all schools, colleges and further education settings should allow full attendance from 8 March. Furthermore, higher education providers are asked to recommence in-person teaching and learning in a phased manner from the 8 March for students on practical or practice-based (including creative arts) courses who need access to specialist equipment and facilities.

Key messages

- Our shared goal now is to support pupils and students returning to face-to-face education, and to reverse the long-term impact of the pandemic on their education.
- The Government will review, by the end of the Easter holidays, the options for timing of the return of remaining students. This review will take account of the latest data and will be a key part of the wider roadmap steps. Students and providers will be given a week's notice ahead of any further return.
- Although the public health picture is improving, it remains crucial that steps are taken to reduce and mitigate any risks within education and

childcare settings. DfE has worked closely with PHE to develop and refresh the system of controls to reduce the risk of transmission in education and childcare settings, based on scientific rationale.

Key Q&A

Infection rates within the community continue to remain high. Why have you asked schools and colleges to return to full attendance?

- We are committed to getting all pupils and students back as soon as it is possible to do so.
- We are clear that the decision is based on the balance of risk: to the NHS of rising admissions, but also to students and pupils of the continued educational, social and psychological harms of missed education.
- In doing so, the Department for Education will be informed by the scientific and medical experts, where data and evidence is considered regularly including by SAGE, the Joint Biosecurity Centre, Public Health England, and the Chief Medical Officers.

Why are you not asking remaining HE students to return?

- We are committed to getting all students back into university as soon as the public health situation allows, taking into account the spread of the virus in communities and the pressures on the NHS. In doing so, the government has been informed by the scientific and medical experts, where data and evidence is considered regularly including by SAGE, the Joint Biosecurity Centre, Public Health England, and the Chief Medical Officers.
- The Government will review, by the end of the Easter holidays, the options for timing of the return of the remaining students. This review will take account of the latest data and will be a key part of the wider roadmap steps. Students and providers will be given a week's notice ahead of any further return.
- Until then, we ask universities to continue to provide high-quality remote education, enabling students to access the help that they need to continue learning whilst at home.

What about clinically extremely vulnerable pupils, students and staff?

- People in the highest risk category (the clinically extremely vulnerable) are currently advised by the Government to shield and stay at home as much as possible until further notice, except to exercise or to attend health appointments (including your vaccination appointments). These individuals will know who they are as they will have been written to, informing them that they are on the list.
- CEV children and young people are advised not to attend educational settings and wraparound childcare. Education settings should make appropriate arrangements for them to continue their education remotely.
- CEV staff should not attend their workplace. Staff should talk to their

employers about how they will be supported, including to work from home. Schools and colleges should continue to pay clinically extremely vulnerable staff on their usual terms.

- CEV advice applies to individuals, not households. Those individuals who live with someone who is CEV, but who are not CEV themselves, can still attend education and wraparound childcare settings and work (if they are unable to work from home).

Can parents send their children to wraparound childcare or out-of-school settings to support them to work?

Until 8 March, wraparound childcare providers and out-of-school settings should only offer face-to-face provision to children of critical workers and vulnerable children and young people, in line with those children eligible to attend school for onsite provision.

- From 8 March, wraparound childcare providers and out-of-school settings will be able to offer provision to all children, in line with those returning to school. However, parents and carers will only be able to access settings for certain essential purposes. Providers will be able to offer provision to vulnerable children and young people as normal, but other children should only be accessing this provision, where it is:
 - o Reasonably necessary to enable their parents or carers to work, seek work, undertake education or training, or attend a medical appointment or address a medical need.

- Being used by electively home educating parents, as part of their arrangements for their child to receive a suitable full-time education.

- Being used for the purposes of obtaining a regulated qualification, meeting the entry requirements for an education institution, or to undertake exams or assessments.

- Schools should be working to resume all their breakfast and after-school clubs for their pupils, where this provision is necessary to support parents to important for providing enriching activities which support children's education, vulnerable children's wellbeing, as well as supporting parents to work, attend education and access medical care, and to support pupil's wider education and training.

- From the start of the school summer term, it is our ambition that all children will be able to access this provision for both indoor and outdoor activities as normal. This will be no earlier than 12 April and will be confirmed as part of Step 2 of the Government's Roadmap.