

Kirsty Williams calls on Welsh universities to become Living Wage employers

In her annual remit letter to Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) she has set out her expectations from the higher education sector, including the need for universities to pay their staff the Living Wage.

Currently only one Welsh university is an accredited living wage employer. The Welsh Government has been an accredited Living Wage employer since 2015.

Kirsty Williams said:

“I am ambitious, and confident, that higher education can deliver on our national mission to open up opportunities for all our citizens, raise standards across the board and ensure an education system that is a source of national pride, innovation and confidence.

“The Welsh Government has been an accredited Living Wage employer since 2015. I would also like the Council to begin working with institutions to create a living wage sector. I expect to see rapid progress on this. It is disappointing that only one of our universities is an accredited living wage employer.

“Universities’ commitment to a civic mission requires reach beyond campus and into their host communities. This is not restricted to teaching and research and widening access. It should be demonstrated in how they value their staff and students, and be an example of a progressive and fair employer.

“I would like to see HEFCW work with institutions on these matters, such as procurement, with an emphasis on efficiency, social responsibility and impact, and student, graduate and employer opportunities.”

Last year the Education Secretary called for Welsh universities to reconnect with the communities that surround them.

Press release: PM call with Chief Minister of Gibraltar: 2 April 2017

The Prime Minister called the Chief Minister of Gibraltar, Fabian Picardo, this morning.

She reiterated our long-standing position that the UK remains steadfastly committed to our support for Gibraltar, its people and its economy. The Prime Minister said we will never enter into arrangements under which the people of Gibraltar would pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes, nor will we ever enter into a process of sovereignty negotiations with which Gibraltar is not content.

The Prime Minister said we remain absolutely dedicated to working with Gibraltar for the best possible outcome on Brexit, and will continue to involve them fully in the process.

Sturgeon would struggle to pass the salt – never mind pass a bill

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2 Apr 2017



Nicola Sturgeon's SNP Government is set to become the first administration since devolution not to have passed a single substantive bill in the year following their election, new figures show today.

In further evidence of how she has ignored the day job in pursuit of a 2nd referendum on independence, Ms Sturgeon's government's only legislative act so far since last May's election has been to pass a Budget – a legal requirement.

By this point in the parliamentary cycle, both the 1999 and 2003 devolved governments had passed four bills.

By contrast, this SNP Government has spent a total of 43 hours debating either Brexit or Independence – and has delayed its flagship education bill.

It comes as Nicola Sturgeon plans to step up her focus on constitutional politics, by threatening to derail Brexit legislation, and outlining further efforts to stage a second referendum.

This is despite the fact that said that education would be “number one priority”.

Scottish Conservative chief whip John Lamont said:

“The SNP once said of its opponents that they wouldn’t be able to deliver a pizza, never mind a parliament.

“That turned out to be wrong. But now they’re in charge, it seems Nicola Sturgeon would struggle to pass the salt, never mind pass a bill.

“It is a disgrace. Nicola Sturgeon promised to prioritise our children’s education. Instead, she’s dumped that pledge in order to focus on the SNP’s only priority – splitting our country in two.

“She has become a part-time First Minister, and full-time nationalist activist.

“Instead of a competent government, we have a chaotic administration which has back-tracked on education, u-turned on the economy, and put up taxes on job creators.

“The threat of a second referendum will further damage Scotland’s reputation. It is time Nicola Sturgeon got back to the day job and delivered.”

LEGISLATION PASSED IN SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT SESSIONS

Bills passed by the Scottish Parliament (completing Stage 3) by the 1 April in the year following a Scottish Parliament election. Dates included are of Stage 3 completing rather than Royal Assent. Budget Acts are not included.

Following 1999 election

Mental Health (Public Safety and Appeals) (Scotland) Act 1999	8 September 1999
Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000	1 December 1999
Census (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2000	15 March 2000
Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000	29 March 2000

Following 2003 election

Education (School Meals) (Scotland) Act 2003	11 June 2003
Robin Rigg Offshore Wind Farm (Navigation and Fishing) (Scotland) Act 2003 [Private Bill]	26 June 2003

Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act 2004	18 December 2003
Vulnerable Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2004	4 March 2004

Following 2007 election

Abolition of Bridge Tolls (Scotland) Act 2008	20 December 2007
Graduate Endowment Abolition (Scotland) Act 2008	28 February 2008

Following 2011 election

Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012	14 December 2011
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Labour questions legal basis for abandoning NHS treatment targets – Ashworth

Labour have today questioned the basis for the downgrade of NHS treatment targets announced this week, saying the changes could contravene patients' legal rights under the NHS Constitution.

Speaking on Sky's Sophy Ridge Show this morning, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary Jonathan Ashworth said he would write to Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt seeking urgent clarification of the legal advice underpinning the move.

Jonathan Ashworth MP, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary, said:

"The NHS Constitution isn't just a pledge by politicians, it's a legal guarantee about the standards of care that patients can expect to receive in the English NHS. That includes a guarantee to treatment within 18 weeks, which NHS England have now said they can no longer provide because the Government has denied them the funding they need.

"Government ministers need to urgently clarify they are not breaching the NHS Constitution and must outline the consequences of denying patients their legal right to treatment within 18

weeks. As a first step the Secretary of State must publish his Department's legal advice urgently.

"Earlier this week NHS chiefs announced – without any public consultation or changes to the law – that the NHS will no longer be required to meet the 18 week treatment target because the financial crisis has got so bad. It's utterly unacceptable and a striking admission of how badly the Tories are running the NHS.

"Since Theresa May became Prime Minister standards of care for NHS patients have been in a rapid downward spiral. She might be prepared to ignore

NHS staff and the public but she can't just ignore the NHS constitution based on legislation voted upon by Parliament.

"The Government now urgently needs to clarify the legal basis upon which the 18 week right has been jettisoned. Will

they be amending the NHS Constitution to remove these rights from patients? Will they be tabling new legislation in Parliament to unpick these commitments?

Or will they will finally give the health service the funding it so desperately needs to deliver the quality of care to which patients are entitled?"

Ends

Note To Editors

Full text of the letter to Jeremy Hunt from Jonathan Ashworth:

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to ask for urgent clarification about the legal basis of the changes to NHS standards announced in the update to NHS England's Five Year Forward View.

Every relevant provider is under a legal duty imposed by part 9 of the National Health Service Commissioning Board and Clinical Commissioning Groups (Responsibilities and Standing Rules) Regulations 2012 to see 92% of patients within 18 weeks of referral by a GP to a consultant . For the last 10 months on the basis of figures provided by the NHS itself this standard has been missed. The update indicates that the NHS accept this standard will further decline.

The update document says:

"Given multiple calls on the constrained NHS funding growth over the next couple of years, elective volumes

are likely to expand at a slower rate than implied by a 92% RTT incomplete pathway target."

This is an acceptance the 92% requirement will be missed.

The duty to meet the 92% is absolute and is not subject to any funding constraints.

The absolute nature of this legal duty to meet the 92% is reflected in the NHS constitution.

The Government and NHS England are acting unlawfully in continuing on a course which puts them in breach of their legal duty. The only way to avoid a breach for the future is to change the duty in part 9 by further legislation. That would require the Government to obtain parliamentary approval.

In the absence of any proposal for such legislation, The action described in the update document last Friday is unlawful. Could you publish your Department's legal advice on whether you are breaching part 9 in what is described in the update.

Will you in any event as a matter of urgency explain the basis on which you say you are entitled to ignore the legal duty in part 9?

Secondly and separately the reference to rationing of NICE approved drugs is a breach of the legal entitlement of patients pursuant to para 7 and 8 of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Constitution and Functions) and the Health and Social Care Information Centre (Functions) Regulations 2013).

The effect of these paragraphs is correctly summarised in the NHS Constitution as:

"You have the right to drugs and treatments that have been recommended by NICE for use in the NHS, if your doctor says they are clinically appropriate for you."

That entitlement is not subject to financial constraints. Rationing would be a breach of the entitlement.

Could you publish as a matter of urgency the legal advice you have received on whether rationing of NICE approved drugs is lawful in the light of the 2013 regulations, and in any event explain the basis on which you say rationing of NICE approved drugs on cost grounds is not unlawful?

NHS England made clear that the reason for downgrading these guarantees is because of “real pressure from rising demand within a tight funding envelope.” The funding squeeze you have imposed on the health service is now jeopardizing legally guaranteed standards of patient care.

Since Theresa May became Prime Minister standards for NHS patients have rapidly fallen. She might be prepared to ignore NHS staff and the public but she can't just ignore the law and the NHS constitution.

The public urgently need to know: will you be bringing forward legislation to amend the law and the NHS Constitution to remove these rights from patients? Or will you finally convince the Treasury to give the health service the funding it so desperately needs to deliver the quality of care to which patients are entitled?

Jonathan Ashworth MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Health

Press release: Millicent Fawcett to be honoured with first statue of a woman in Parliament Square

A statue of Millicent Fawcett, one of the leading figures in the campaign to win women the vote, is to be erected in Parliament Square

A statue of Millicent Fawcett, one of the leading figures in the campaign to win women the vote, is to be erected in Parliament Square – making her the first-ever woman to be honoured in this way. As president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett, GBE, led the peaceful campaign for women's suffrage. She also campaigned for women's rights in many other areas, including access to higher education. The statue will form part of celebrations to mark the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which was introduced thanks to Fawcett's campaigning and which first gave some women the right to vote. Full equality at the ballot box was not achieved until a decade later, just a year before Fawcett's death.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

The example Millicent Fawcett set during the struggle for equality continues to inspire the battle against the burning injustices of today.

It is right and proper that she is honoured in Parliament Square alongside former leaders who changed our country.

Her statue will stand as a reminder of how politics only has value if it works for everyone in society.

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Millicent Fawcett was one of the great campaigners for equal rights and all of us – women and men alike – owe her a debt of gratitude

This statue will be a fitting tribute to Fawcett and all she achieved. Standing in front of Parliament, it will remind us all of the sacrifices Fawcett made and the journey that we as a country have come on over the past 100 years.

The statue will be funded from the £5 million fund provided at the Spring Budget to support projects marking the anniversary.