

Brexit - like independence – is bad for Scotland's economy

By Kezia Dugdale

The Brexit process is a shambles. First Theresa May said there shouldn't be a vote in Parliament, then her hand was forced. Next she said she wouldn't be publishing a White Paper on her plans for leaving the European Union, but again she was forced into a u-turn.

With each passing day it becomes clearer that this isn't a government in control but an administration being dragged further to the extremes in order to win over support on the Tory backbenches.

As opposed as I am to leaving the EU, I accept that the referendum result didn't go my way. This was a UK-wide vote and the UK voted to leave. We have to accept that we are leaving the European Union. The battle must now turn to how we get the best deal for the country.

That's why today in the Scottish Parliament Labour will vote against the government's current plans to trigger article 50 and begin the process of withdrawal. Brexit is happening, but it doesn't have to be the right-wing version that Theresa May is advocating.

The Tories are threatening to inflict economic vandalism on our country and we must fight that.

But the only thing more damaging for our economy than a Tory Brexit is the SNP's reckless plan for independence.

Labour will not support another independence referendum under any circumstances.

This isn't a knee-jerk reaction. It's based on standing up for the working people the Labour Party was founded to represent.

Brexit will be terrible for Scotland, but independence would be an outright disaster. Our public finances are already struggling. The SNP's budget will impose nearly £170million of cuts on local services like schools and care of the elderly. But leaving the UK would turbo charge that austerity, meaning £15 billion in cuts over and above those already happening today.

That would put the life chances of the next generation of Scots at risk, and have severe consequences for our health service, the payment of pensions and defence in a separate Scotland. Being part of the UK means all of these things are protected. Remaining in Britain secures jobs, helps our economy and bolsters our public finances.

But just as important as the impact of actually leaving the UK, another independence referendum would be deeply divisive.

We all remember what happened the last time – family rows, difficult relationships at work, and communities ripped apart. Scotland is divided enough already, whether along constitutional lines or between the richest and the rest. We can't afford any more division, but that is exactly what another independence referendum would bring.

The majority of people in Scotland voted for working together, in both the EU and Scottish referendums. People know that together we're stronger – as a nation and as communities across the country.

So instead of trying to use Brexit as an excuse to force another independence referendum on the people of Scotland, the Nationalists should stick to the day job.

This article first appeared in the Daily Record on 07/02/2017

[Skills Minister outlines plans for aligning Apprenticeships to the needs of the Welsh Economy](#)

That is the message from Skills and Science Minister, Julie James, as she launches the Welsh Government's new Apprenticeship policy today (7 February).

Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh Economy sets out the Welsh Government's vision for addressing the needs of Welsh businesses and the wider economy and has been designed to increase skills levels in priority areas, including where shortages have been reported.

Developed in consultation with businesses, the policy and its five year action plan sets out how the Welsh Government will support the delivery of its manifesto and Taking Wales Forward commitment to create a minimum of 100,000 high quality apprentices in Wales over this Assembly term by focussing on four priority areas:

- Increasing the number of apprentices aged 16-19 by increasing the take-up of quality apprenticeships amongst school leavers.
- Addressing skills shortages by developing apprenticeships particularly in growth and emerging sectors such as the ICT, Engineering, Construction and Financial and Professional Services.
- Developing higher level skills by focussing on apprenticeships at level 4 and above where returns tend to be higher.
- Developing skills pathways by integrating apprenticeships into the wider education system and making it easier for someone to enter into an apprenticeship from another learning route.

Skills and Science Minister, Julie James said:

“This policy highlights our intention to prepare for the jobs of tomorrow, which will require higher levels of competence than in the past.

“It also contains a stronger focus on both technical and professional skills needed for high quality employment opportunities within our communities. This will send a strong message about the value of apprenticeships and technical education in supporting people into sustainable employment and self-employment.”

The policy and supporting information also outlines how the impact of the Apprenticeship Levy – a UK Government employment tax due to come into effect on 6 April 2017 – will be managed in Wales.

The Minister added:

“We have said all along that this levy directly conflicts with areas of devolved responsibility, completely overlooks and undermines our very distinctive approach to supporting apprenticeships in Wales and its introduction means that no new significant money is coming to Wales.”

“To help minimise the impact of the levy in Wales the Welsh Government is taking a different approach to its counterparts in England, one which is better aligned to and supports the growing needs of Wales, its people and economy.”

Support for businesses to recruit new apprentices is already available in Wales and will continue to be available to both levy and non-levy paying employers provided the funding supports apprentices in the identified priority areas.

To deliver these priorities the Welsh Government will be increasing its investment in apprenticeships from £96m to £111.5m for 2017-18. This brings our total investment in apprenticeships and traineeships next year to over £126m.

Of the additional funding, £15.5m will be invested this year to ensure that both public and private sector employers are not disadvantaged as a result of the Apprenticeship Levy.

Julie James added:

“Our public services are essential to maintain functions related to education, fire services, waste management, social services and

healthcare. We are committed to working with public sector organisations to help them achieve greater consistency and meet future challenges. This will include the publication of specific apprenticeship plans for Local Authorities, the NHS and the 'blue light' services."

The announcement is being made during the Welsh Government's Jobs Week.

The policy: Aligning the Apprenticeship model to the needs of the Welsh Economy, its five year [action plan and additional supporting information](#) (external link) is available on the Welsh Government website.

Press release: Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood statement on Israel's Land Regularisation Bill

From:

First published:

7 February 2017

Part of:

Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood statement on Israel's Land Regularisation Bill being passed through the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset.

Minister for the Middle East Tobias Ellwood said:

It is of great concern that the bill paves the way for significant growth in settlements deep in the West Bank, threatening the viability of the two-state solution.

As a longstanding friend of Israel, I condemn the passing of the Land Regularisation Bill by the Knesset, which damages Israel's standing with its international partners.

We reiterate our support for a two-state solution leading to a secure Israel that is safe from terrorism, and a contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian state.

News story: UK company delivers first Euclid flight hardware

e2v, in Chelmsford, has developed a new Charge Coupled Device (CCD) imaging sensor for the space telescope and the first four have now been delivered to the Mullard Space Science Laboratory (MSSL), in Surrey. The remaining CCDs for the Visible imager (VIS), will be delivered over the coming months.

The UK Space Agency is funding MSSL to lead the European instrument consortium that is developing and building Euclid's Visible imager, to be delivered to ESA. The mission, due for launch in 2020, should revolutionise cosmology by improving our understanding of the evolution of the very fabric of the Universe since its birth in the Big Bang, around 13.8 billion years ago.

During its 6 year mission, Euclid's 36 CCDs will be bombarded with charged particles from the space radiation environment, causing damage. Supported by the UK Space Agency, the Open University's Centre for Electronic Imaging is working with MSSL to simulate this environment and conduct experiments to understand the impact of charged particles on detector performance, so that radiation damage effects can be removed from the eventual science images.

The entire VIS instrument will generate 610 megapixel images – 25 times larger than a top-of-the-range digital camera and with much better image quality. The field of view of VIS is 0.78 degrees x 0.7 degrees – slightly larger than the area covered by a Full Moon – and the spacecraft will manoeuvre to conduct a survey over the course of the mission.

The second instrument on Euclid, the French-led Near-Infrared Spectrometer and Photometer (NISF), is also making progress, and its first detectors are expected to be delivered in the spring. Light gathered by Euclid's 1.2 metre diameter primary mirror will be split and sent to the two instruments. Together they will map the 3D distribution of several billion galaxies spread over the entire extra-galactic sky.

This will enable scientists to determine in unprecedented detail the properties of the mysterious dark energy and dark matter which are thought to make up most of the Universe.

The UK Space Agency is also contributing to the development of the scientific data processing capability for Euclid, with UK involvement being led from Edinburgh's Institute for Astronomy.

Barbara Keeley responds to Panorama programme on Mental Health services in the Norfolk and Suffolk Mental Health Trusts

Commenting

on the BBC Panorama programme on issues in Mental Health services in the Norfolk and Suffolk Mental Health Trusts, **Labour's Shadow Cabinet Member for Mental Health, Barbara Keeley MP said:**

"Despite

years of Tory Government promises, funding for NHS Mental Health services has not increased but has actually fallen by £150 million.

"At the

Norfolk and Suffolk Mental Health Trust, funding cuts led to frontline community teams being disbanded, loss of experienced staff and the cutting of 136 inpatient psychiatric beds. The Panorama programme showed what can go wrong

when patients in crisis cannot be admitted to an inpatient bed.

"It is

disturbing that while the Prime Minister and the Health Secretary talk about transforming mental health services, what families actually saw in Norfolk and

Suffolk is an absence of support and no beds available during a crisis. It is time for action from Tory Ministers, not warm words which fail patients and their families."