

# Scottish Labour's Education Comeback Plan

## Contact

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## Our plan for Scotland's Education Comeback:



Scotland's Comeback Tutoring Programme



Personal Comeback Plan for every pupil



Resit guarantee



Supporting our workforce



Summer Comeback - Sports and Outdoor Education

### Background

School closures as a result of Covid-19 have resulted in unprecedented disruption to Scotland's education system. Since the advent of universal education provision, there has been no comparable loss in schooling for our young people. This year, the Institute for Fiscal Studies calculated that, by the time the pandemic is over, most children across the UK will have missed over half a year of normal, in person schooling. This is likely to be more than 5% of their entire time in school. The impact of this on general attainment, the poverty-related attainment gap, social & emotional development and ultimately life chances for impacted young people could be significant. Not only will this generation of pupils have to have dealt with the impact of this year but are likely to leave school to an uncertain economic situation. We must support them with all the ideas, energy, but most importantly, resources, that we have.

A year ago, we came together as a country to save lives and to protect our NHS. We now need the same level of leadership for education. Above all else there is a moral imperative to ensure that the pandemic does not hamper the life chances of the next generation in perpetuity.

Labour's plan seeks to deliver hope to our young people. We must ensure that emerging from the relentless negativity, doubt and anxiety of the last year we make a promise for their future – that they deserve the best of opportunities. That through hard work, imagination, the love of their community and the investment of a country that believes in them, they can make a good life in Scotland.

In recent years the attainment gap between the most affluent and poorest families has been at the centre of Scotland's education policy debate. There has been much rhetoric around how closing this gap was the defining mission of the current Scottish Government, but the reality is the gap remains stubborn and vast. The young people from the most deprived postcodes are less likely to leave school with one Higher qualification than the richest pupils are to leave with five<sup>1</sup>.

By P7, there is around a twenty-point percentage gap between the richest and poorest pupils in literacy and numeracy<sup>2</sup>. And before the pandemic hit us, the Higher pass rate had dropped for four years running<sup>3</sup>.

These numbers represent individual citizens and their unequal chances in life.

Analysis shows that the scale of that gap is set to widen greatly as a result of lockdown<sup>4</sup>. Disengagement of pupils from the poorest backgrounds must be addressed with the full scale of necessary resource.

There have been a number of welcome interventions from experts advocating different responses and possible remedies to this situation. Ideas and debate are both welcome and necessary. In developing our response Labour has adopted these principles:

- Put well-being and social re-engagement first
- Establish clear national leadership
- Interventions must command broad public support
- Resource must be additional and should be focused on delivering equity and improved attainment.

To date there has been no co-ordinated or proportionate response from the Scottish Government. Teachers, parents, pupils and Local Authorities have had to contend with a constant lack of clarity, urgency and leadership from the Scottish Government. This has been, undoubtedly, the most difficult of situations, but the situation has been made more acute by the lack of clear guidance and support.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/highers-success-exposes-gulf-between-rich-and-poor-areas-2mvxfnvm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/achievement-curriculum-excellence-cfe-levels-2018-19/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/06/scottish-exam-rates-fall-for-fourth-year-in-a-row>

<sup>4</sup> <https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk/attainment-and-disadvantage-in-scotlands-schools-the-impact-of-lockdown-briefing/>

## Our plan

### 1. *Scotland's Comeback Tutoring Programme*

The Education Policy Institute calculated in mid-February that lost learning equated to 11 weeks in Scotland<sup>5</sup>. International evidence from the 'normal' summer holidays shows that the poverty-related attainment gap in education widens. It is almost certain that this 'summer learning loss' effect will have been amplified even further due to the disruption we have faced<sup>6</sup>.

To recover the educational deficit, Labour believes that a **personal tutoring programme provided for all ages and all pupils** is the best method of engaging young people effectively.

There are a variety of tutoring models for one-to-one and small group learning. Whichever is adopted will require significant financial resource to be delivered in addition to existing education budgets. Any Scottish Government must also reflect on the costs of *not* re-engaging young people effectively.

Tutoring programmes must be directed by teachers with referrals to this additional resource being based on professional judgment. There should also be a mechanism for referrals from other agencies, families, and pupils themselves.

There are a variety of options for the delivery of tutoring programmes with some existing and emerging good practice in parts of Scotland, across the UK and internationally.

One such example exists in East Lothian, where young people who struggled with learning during lockdown are benefitting from a tutoring initiative being launched by a partnership of East Lothian Council and Queen Margaret University. The project is supporting over 300 pupils in S4 – S6 across the county who have been identified as having the most to gain from this additional support, especially as their approach their National Qualifications.

The Educational Endowment Foundation state that short, regular tutoring sessions over a set period of time result in optimum impact, with small groups desirable and one to one tuition even better<sup>7</sup>. Tuition should be additional to, but explicitly linked with, normal teaching, and teachers should monitor progress to ensure interventions are beneficial. This is the kind of scheme Labour would deliver.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/reopening-catch-up-support-uk/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0907568218779130>

<sup>7</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/one-to-one-tuition/>

Tutoring benefits:

- Proven flexible model of enhancing learning outcomes focussed on individuals and small groups.
- Additional tutoring resource that can be directed by teachers and targeted to achieve equity through supporting those in most need of support.
- Provides employment opportunity and CV enhancement for students and graduates in an economy where youth unemployment is an urgent challenge.
- Introduces tutors to the possibility of a career in teaching.
- Incorporation of volunteer force of retired or former teachers.

Labour's Comeback Tutoring Programme will be led nationally and resourced by the Scottish Government. While delivery in local authorities will be negotiated and agreed, the impetus that can be delivered from a flagship national mission is critical if we are to build a 'comeback culture' in education. Too often in the pandemic education leaders have been abandoned by the Scottish Government. Real leadership is required if we are to succeed. And succeed we must.

## ***2. Personal Comeback Plan for every pupil + Resit guarantee***

The Education Endowment Foundation sets out that small group tuition is most likely to be effective if it is targeted at pupils' specific needs. With this in mind, every pupil in Scotland should have a **Personal Comeback Plan** developed based on a needs assessment. Teachers will be undertaking most of this work as a matter of course – assessing the impact on their pupils of the time out of school. The production of PCPs will allow appropriate resources and interventions to be allocated to the pupil. This will be key to ensuring equity in the system with resources being directed at those most at risk of long-term disengagement due to lockdown.

There will, of course, be pupils who have not slipped behind expected levels and who have been able to access ongoing learning support both at home and online.

A rapid expansion of the time spent in school to recover lost hours of learning is neither realistic nor desirable. Teachers in Scotland already have some of the highest class contact time in the developed world, with 78% of NASUWT members reporting an increase in workplace stress before the pandemic even began<sup>8</sup>. Crucially, we believe that such an approach could significantly risk the mental health of pupils.

Whatever approach is adopted must not feel punitive – especially for those groups who are already more difficult to engage in learning. We do not believe that a rapid expansion of school hours could command and sustain the support of families across Scotland.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nasuwat.org.uk/news/campaigns/big-question-survey.html>

The impact of school closures on children with Additional Support Needs has been particularly acute and Education Scotland have reported that local authorities have highlighted difficulties in ensuring appropriate provision for pupils with ASN. This comes against a backdrop of deteriorating ASN provision in Scotland, with the number of full-time equivalent specialist teachers having fallen across the past decade. All the while the number of young people with an ASN has increased.

While ASN pupils should also receive a PCP there is an urgent need for the Scottish Government to mandate reviews of ASN support in every local authority. Without enhanced overall support there is little chance of the losses of the last year in this particularly vulnerable cohort ever being recovered.

PCPs should be combined with a **mental health assessment** for every single pupil. The scale of the mental health challenge facing Scotland must be addressed comprehensively and in concert by the Scottish Government. We must start by ensuring that a return to full-time learning for some does not worsen the mental health challenges.

### **3. Resit Guarantee**

Labour would establish a **resit guarantee** of a free place at college to take national qualifications should this be the chosen path of any pupil from the affected cohort.

Those negatively impacted by the SQA Alternative Certification Model in 2020 – even after statistical moderation was scrapped – who had no right of appeal, will be given the chance to sit those qualifications again at college, with full student support.

Additionally, Labour would engage with colleges and universities to deliver a **no-detriment policy** for accessing tertiary education. There are significant challenges emerging for Colleges and Universities with graduating classes being delayed and intakes likely to be deferred. We must ensure that no young person misses out as a result.

Thousands of young Scots were unable to present for examinations as a result of the pandemic. Some strongly believe that they missed out on the grades that they would have achieved. A resit guarantee will address this directly and allow young people the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

This not only supports academic pathways but gives a clear signal to our young people that they will not suffer as a result of their age and stage in the time of COVID-19. We must make a commitment to our young people that gives them hope for the future.

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#### **4. Supporting our workforce**

The demands that the last year placed on our teachers may have changed - day to day - in nature but they have only increased in scale. This has been a time of extreme pressure: delivering online lessons, running hub schools and even learning new skills in technologies that were alien to many a few short months ago. Our teachers have done all of this and much more whilst also being carers, being community stalwarts and being home-schoolers themselves. In common with other key-workers, they deserve not just thanks but also our commitment to support them in the future. Concerns over workload must be addressed urgently in the new parliamentary term.

Labour would implement a **guaranteed completion opportunity for probationary teachers** to ensure that they can gain registration and help to refresh our workforce. Where trainee teachers have been unable to fully complete the necessary training, they must be afforded the right to do so at no cost to themselves.

We must put in place **enhanced digital training for staff** to ensure online teaching as well as task setting is possible in the event of future localised lockdowns.

**Digital devices and connectivity must also be available to all pupils in Scotland** to ensure that this work is possible. Evidence previously published by Education Scotland revealed that well into the establishment of home-schooling; many staff still felt that they did not yet have the skills and confidence to deliver remote online learning effectively. Furthermore, even where pupils should have been able to access this, IT problems hindered efforts, with all local authorities experiencing challenges regarding the sufficiency and supply of technology. Ministers have a legal responsibility to ensure that the right to education is delivered. Only by ensuring that the channels for learning are open will the work of teaching be possible.

#### **5. Summer Comeback**

Our first priority for our young people in Scotland's Summer Comeback is that they enjoy themselves. They must be the beneficiaries of the opening up of the country. They should see their friends, make new ones and begin to live a full life again. This is not as simple as it sounds. The COVID-19 landscape for young people will be still be restricted, however the economic problems faced by parents and guardians should be no barrier to young people beginning to enjoy life again. Mental and physical health – the wellbeing of our children – must come first.

For over a year, children have had little contact with any adults other than their parents or guardians. Our children must re-learn how to be with and trust the important and inspirational

other adults in their lives: sports coaches, music tutors, teachers, youth leaders and many more. For this reason, rather than focusing on hot-house academic catch up over the summer holidays we should have a national **Summer Comeback**.

This resourced programme should include:

- A clear and urgent timetable for the return of all organised and informal contact and non-contact sports for under 18s. Clubs must be supported to expand and offer chances to get involved.
- Urgent resources for national youth, arts and outdoors organisations to keep their doors open and ensure young people can engage with outdoor activities in residential and day-trip settings, as well as in music, arts and culture.
- Ring-fenced resource for school trips to outdoor activity centres for all young people over the coming two years.
- A 'Summer Comeback Pass' for young people to provide free access to sport, transport, outdoor activities and culture.



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