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Indy Scotland could tackle educational inequality better, say LSE academics

Sunday 4 August 2013

Scotland may be better able to tackle the inequalities in its education system with independence, according to economists at the London School of Economics.



Educational inequality is "a huge problem that devolution has been unable to solve", the economist have found.

Scotland "is unable to raise taxes or alter many other aspects of fiscal policy, which somewhat limits the level and distribution of spending on education", according to a blog by LSE economist Stephen Machin and education researchers Sandra McNally and Gill Wyness.

They said: "When considering whether or not Scotland should gain independence from the UK, voters may wish to think about how their nation has fared in areas of public policy that are already highly devolved.

"One such area is education, where there are several key differences between the Scottish system and what is in place in the rest of the UK.

Scotland's exam performance has been static while UK performance has been increasing, and children in Scotland are more likely to leave school early.

There are "deep levels of inequality in Scotland, particularly between pupils from different socioeconomic groups," the economists found, with the difference in attainment as wide as the educational gulf between wealthy Hong Kong and relatively poor Turkey.

The blog states: "Educational inequality is a huge problem that devolution has been unable to solve. But while this may be cause for alarm, it is a problem that is shared by all four nations of the UK, with Scotland faring no worse in these terms than England.

"Furthermore, while Scotland is in charge of its education system, it is unable to raise taxes or alter many other aspects of fiscal policy, which somewhat limits the level and distribution of spending on education. Perhaps with independence Scotland would be better able to tackle the inequalities in its education system."

A Scottish Government spokesman said: "With the full fiscal and economic powers of independence the Scottish Government could do more address inequalities in Scottish society, and welcome the LSE's recognition of this. While outcomes are improving for most people in Scotland they are not improving fast enough for the most disadvantaged in our society.

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"Until Scotland gains full control of its own finances, and is able to develop our own system of welfare, benefits and taxation, we will continue to be at the mercy of decisions taken remotely that limit our ability to do the best we can."

A Yes Scotland spokesman said: "Independence presents a real opportunity to tackle inequality, not only in education, but also in narrowing the gap between the richest and poorest in our society and addressing other social ills such as child poverty and fuel poverty. After all the UK is currently the fourth most unequal society in the developed world, reflecting the fact that Westminster isn't working."

"The Scottish Parliament has made progress in trying to tackle inequality, including in educational opportunity. But only with the full powers of independence can inequality in all its forms be tackled."



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Jon Legorburu, Ayr · 2 days ago

Hey hold on a minute! I thought we are all better together, so what has gone wrong here? I wonder if these inequalities exist in Woking?


" "When considering whether or not Scotland should gain independence from the UK, voters may wish to think about how their nation has fared in areas of public policy that are already highly devolved". Now that would be a novelty for all those who say they don't have enough info.

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Alastair Gordon, West Lothian → Jon Legorburu, Ayr · 2 days ago

Jon,

I thought this article lacked political balance. There's not a quote in the article from 'Better Together' or even Patrician Ferguson - surely they had something to say about how the Union works . . .

20 ^ | ▾ Reply Share >
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Alastair Gordon, West Lothian → Alastair Gordon, West Lothian · 2 days ago

Although it looks daft to be replying to myself, a thought has just come into mind.

This report comes from the London School of Economics, and as we all know, 'Better Together' and Comrade Lamont *never* disagree with *anything* that comes from London!

And therein lies another problem, if the Scottish Government welcome a report from 'London' how can the 'Better Together' parties agree with the report (it can't be wrong remember - it comes from London) while at the same time they can't be seen to be agreeing with the SG either - it's just not in their DNA to do anything as radical as that!

15 ^ | ▾ Reply Share >



iain Lawson, Paisley → Jon Legorburu, Ayr · 2 days ago

Sorry Jon Mr OBE is spending his life in front of his TV these days watching all the Scottish BBC channels he can get on his Sky box so he is completely unaware of what is happening in Woking, or Scotland for that matter, it's BBC Scotland he is watching!

17 ^ | v Reply Share >



Bill Cruickshank · 2 days ago

Scottish solutions to Scottish problems, sounds common sense to me. Roll on 2014 and the chance to vote for the common sense of independence.

33 ^ | v Reply Share >



David Hall · 2 days ago

As a devolved power, the blame for the lack of success lies firmly with Holyrood. Trying to turn it into a separation issue loses the point that so much money and time has gone into Mike Russell's failed policies. Now we have centralisation of colleges collectables by Russell Yes men.

3 ^ | 14 v Reply Share >



David Hall → David Hall · 2 days ago

Should read colleges controlled by Yes men

^ | 2 v Reply Share >



ben leiper, lossiemouth → David Hall · 2 days ago

"Trying to turn it into a separation issue loses the point that so much money and time has gone into Mike Russell's failed policies."

Well if you believe that Don't vote for Mike Russell and the SNP in an independent Scotland then.

"As a devolved power, the blame for the lack of success lies firmly with Holyrood."

Well tell that to the LSE then: "Educational inequality is "a huge problem that devolution has been unable to solve", the economist have found."

Did you notice how LSE bothered to back up their stance with logical arguments.

5 ^ | v Reply Share >



John Paterson, Glasgow → ben leiper, lossiemouth · 2 days ago

Some of them might be logical arguments, but the lack of tax varying powers comment isn't.

^ | 1 v Reply Share >



ben leiper, lossiemouth → John Paterson, Glasgow · 2 days ago

"Some of them might be logical arguments, but the lack of tax varying powers comment isn't."

What difference would it make to the block grant?

^ | v Reply Share >



David Hall → ben leiper, lossiemouth · 2 days ago

They are saying it's a funding problem. There's a funding problem everywhere. So why do Scotland fail? Ask a Scottish teacher. The main problem is policy.

^ | 3 v Reply Share >



ben leiper, lossiemouth → David Hall · 2 days ago

"They are saying it's a funding problem. There's a funding problem everywhere."

Policy reserved to Westminster and the Block grant. For example: Should the UK be spending as they do on defense? Why is Scotland still stuck in a vicious circle of exporting skilled educated people, and is it related to decades of infrastructure underspend? Still we have HS2 and more runways in the SE to look forward to ;-)

"The main problem is policy."

Well if you believe that Don't vote for Mike Russell and the SNP in an independent Scotland then.

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David Hall → ben leiper, lossiemouth · 2 days ago



[David Hall](#) → [ben leiper, lossiemouth](#) · a day ago

I wouldn't vote SNP in a one party state. If things are so bad why aren't they concentrating on that rather than a fruitless campaign for a watered down independence.

^ | 1 ▾ Reply Share ›



[ben leiper, lossiemouth](#) → [David Hall](#) · 18 hours ago

"I wouldn't vote SNP in a one party state."

What a silly thing to say. The only thing that holds the SNP together is the they agree on Independence.


"If things are so bad why aren't they concentrating on that rather than a fruitless campaign for a watered down independence."

The thing about reserved matters is they are reserved to Westminster. What do you suggest they do?

"watered down independence."

Another silly comment. An Independent Scotland would have as much control of everything that matters as any other nation.

^ | ▾ Reply Share ›



[Bill Cruickshank](#) → [David Hall](#) · 2 days ago

Have you ever taught in a Scottish school? I did, for 35 years. The problems were always about funding and very rarely about policy. Scottish Educationalists have never failed the youngsters of Scotland. Failure in Scottish Education is about not providing wind and watertight accommodation for our young people and that particular charge lies firmly at the door of unionist politicians.


5 ^ | 1 ▾ Reply Share ›



[David Hall](#) → [Bill Cruickshank](#) · a day ago

Might be worth investigating who funds Machin et al. That's why he blames the economies of education. Do you agree with the closures, amalgamation and curriculums being imposed on the education sector by Russell?

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[Ian McKellar](#) · 2 days ago

Amazing is it not that people who are in effect on the payroll of the state in identifying a problem always come up with a solution involving higher taxes?

^ | ▾ Reply Share ›

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