

Bursaries for students fall by £60m under the SNP

Hamish Macdonell

The amount of money given to students in Scotland in the form of bursaries has fallen by £40 million, according to Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, who urged Nicola Sturgeon to increase support to students from poor families.

At first minister's questions, Ms Davidson said that the Scottish government's approach to higher education had failed, seizing on a report from academics at the University of Edinburgh that was sceptical about the effect of scrapping student fees.

Ms Sturgeon said that she would not take lessons on support for students from a Conservative party that had just scrapped bursaries in England.

Ms Davidson said that she had obtained figures through a freedom of information request which revealed the extent to which the Scottish government had cut bursary support.

She said that bursary support had been £104 million a year in 2007, when the SNP came to power, and next year it was forecast to be just £60 million.

Ms Davidson also highlighted a Universities UK report which she claimed showed that students from poorer backgrounds in Scotland were half as likely to go to university as those from the rest of Britain.

She declared: "The SNP claims its policy on no tuition fees helps those from the poorest backgrounds. Now that experts have dismissed this, she has to face up to the facts.

"Not only are those people from the most deprived areas not getting their foot through the door, but their bursary support has fallen too."

She asked Ms Sturgeon: "How can you explain to them that when the SNP came to power there was more than £104 million in the pot, but next year it will have plummeted to just £60 million?"

Ms Sturgeon said: "We will continue to make sure that we have a funding support package for our students that supports students, particularly those from the poorest backgrounds, to go to college and to university."

Ms Sturgeon rounded on Ms Davidson, saying that she could not believe

that the Conservative leader had raised the issue of bursary support just after

George Osborne had abolished all bursary support for students in England.

The first minister said: "The UK government are going to abolish all bursary support for students from April next year: not reduce it, not take it back a little bit, but abolish it completely, abolishing it for student nurses as well as students in general."

The Conservatives want to see the introduction of a graduate contribution, under which former students pay back some money once they earn a reasonably large salary.

They claim that this would ensure that universities are sufficiently funded, and allow more support to go to those from poorer backgrounds who would not otherwise be able to afford higher education.



Ms Sturgeon said Westminster was going to abolish all bursary support

Bursary support for students falls £40m

BURSARY support for students has fallen by £40 million since 2007, according to figures obtained by the Scottish Conservatives.

The Student Awards Agency for Scotland confirmed the total level of bursaries fell to £63.6m last year. The grants body said the figure stood at £104.8m in 2007, when the SNP came to power, and rose to £127.7m in 2010 before being cut. The figure is forecast to fall further, to £60m, next year.

Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Conservatives' leader, accused the SNP of failing students from poorer backgrounds.

The attack followed a report from experts at Edinburgh University that concluded the SNP's policy of free tuition had not widened access to higher education but had "embedded social inequality".

A separate Universities UK report said students from poorer backgrounds in Scotland were half as likely

to get to university than those in the rest of Britain.

Ms Davidson said: "The SNP claims its policy on no tuition fees helps those from the poorest backgrounds. Now experts have dismissed this, Nicola Sturgeon has to face up to the facts. Not only are those people from the most deprived areas not getting their foot through the door, but their bursary support has fallen too."

Ms Davidson challenged Ms Sturgeon on the issue during First Minister's Questions. She told MSPs the SNP had "gutted" funding for student bursaries.

Ms Sturgeon said there had been a 24 per cent increase in the number of people from the most deprived communities achieving a university qualification since the SNP came to power and the number of 18-year-olds applying to university was up by 50 per cent.

She said: "Scotland is reducing the attainment gap at university faster than the rest of the UK."

