



Scottish Labour Party Scottish Policy Forum Discussion Paper **Build Back Better**

Introduction

The Scottish Policy Forum's Final Stage draft is currently being considered by party organisations. The closing date for amendments is **26 September 2020**.

The Final Stage paper includes many references to the pandemic and how this might impact on our policy programme. However, this is inevitably an iterative process as we learn more about COVID-19 and the impact on Scotland and the UK. Party organisations will, therefore, wish to consider these factors when discussing the paper and to consider amendments.

This discussion paper aims to assist this process by setting out the positions we have taken so far and highlight some of the ideas being circulated by think tanks and others. These are often promoted under the broad heading of 'Build Back Better'.

Pandemic measures

Scottish Labour stands with the national effort to beat coronavirus, to save lives and protect people's social and economic rights and standards. We will constructively hold the Scottish Government to account and review their decisions and actions – this will be done to help in the national effort in this global emergency.

Scottish Labour also supports a gradual easing of restrictions. However, this needs to be done as safely as possible, following the science and done at the right time. To achieve this, we need three things:

1. The government should publish the evidence behind the decisions it has taken.
2. We need a track, trace and isolate system that works.
3. The government's strategy must be flexible and able to adapt to changing circumstances quickly.

Our key asks include:

- For weeks the SNP have failed to get a grip of the virus within Scotland's care homes with tragic consequences. We need a robust contingency plan for the care sector based on regular testing, adequate PPE, additional resources, and support for staff - not the chaotic patchwork response we have seen so far.
- When schools reopen it will be essential that teachers, staff, parents and pupils have confidence that they are safe places to be. The Scottish Government must, therefore, meet the Educational Institute of Scotland's (EIS) three red lines on this issue. Ministers must also take immediate action towards developing a pupil equity audit and action plan focussed on face to face extra tutoring

for disadvantaged pupils, in order to review the impact of school closures due to Covid-19 on Scotland's most disadvantaged pupils.

- On employment matters, Scottish Labour is calling for a longer-term Jobs Guarantee Scheme which ensures workers are not thrown on the dole queues after the furlough scheme ends. This means tackling unemployment and tackling youth unemployment must be our number one economic priority, but it must be a social priority and a moral priority too.
- Non-essential workplaces should not reopen until health protection measures are in place. For those physically at work, there should be strict monitoring and enforcement of social distancing, PPE supplies, and testing, tracing and tracking will be required at a workplace level. This unwinding of the lockdown must be guided by a sectoral approach and informed by trade unions. Including the tapering of the furlough scheme to ensure support continues for those businesses and workers who cannot reopen as early as others.

Build Back Better

After the 2008 financial crash, a narrative developed that the only response to the economic consequences was austerity. A wide range of organisations quickly responded to this crisis to ensure that a similar negative narrative did not happen this time.

Health and Care

A critical discussion point has been the reform of the social care sector. Care homes have been at the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic in Scotland with over half of all deaths from the virus recorded in residential care homes. Our Final Stage paper outlines our plan to establish a national care service in Scotland, which will end the marketisation of social care. It will create a national framework, and delivery will remain local subject to democratic accountability.

Scottish Labour has published a consultation paper, [‘It’s Time to Care About Care’](#), seeking views on the implementation of this policy. UNISON Scotland has released a new [vision for social care](#) that includes the actions that need to be taken in the pursuit of a national care service. The Reid Foundation has published a paper from [SHA Scotland](#), which sets out the challenges for a national care service. The Scottish [Human Rights Commission](#) has followed Scottish Labour’s call for an inquiry into the situation in Scotland’s care homes.

NHS Scotland also faces huge challenges as it restarts services. In particular, cancelled diagnostic services like dental check-ups and cancer screenings risk a wave of cancer deaths, which will impact more heavily on disadvantaged communities. There is also strong public support for an [early pay rise](#) for health and care staff. A viable vaccine is still some way off, and a [strategy](#) will be needed to explain the benefits to the public.

With many more people being supported by the social security system, its failures have become more transparent, leading to renewed calls for a [Citizens Basic Income](#). Others point to the cost and practicalities of such a policy and favour a [Minimum Income Guarantee](#).

Economy

The consequences of the pandemic have been [enormous](#) for most sectors of the Scottish economy with mass unemployment on a scale not seen for generations. One in three 18-24-year olds are now economically inactive, and unemployment has risen by over 50 per cent among women since last year. Scottish Labour has called for a [Jobs Guarantee Scheme](#) as part of a coherent industrial strategy that puts manufacturing and a Green New Deal at its heart.

A report for the STUC by [Transition Economics](#) shows potential for a £13 billion green stimulus package to create 150,000 jobs in Scotland. A report by the [Resolution Foundation](#) calls for a targeted £200bn UK recovery plan. However, we must improve on past SNP failures, as the [STUC report](#), 'Scotland's Renewable Jobs Crisis and Covid-19', found that despite previous promises of 130,000 jobs by 2020, direct employment in 2018 was 23,100, down from 23,400 in 2014. Business leaders and investors have joined the call for a [green recovery plan](#), and the [IPPR](#) argues for an investment-led recovery.

The pandemic has put further pressure on Scotland's high streets and town centres as consumers have moved further towards online retailing. A series of closures and job loss announcements highlight the USDAW case for a [minimum wage](#) of £10 per hour and a radical new high street strategy. Scotland's tourism industry is facing similar [challenges](#).

The Chancellor's stimulus package falls way short of the [radical investment](#) we need. The Scottish Government's advisory group [report](#) on economic recovery calls for a review of the fiscal framework and investment-led recovery, including ownership stakes in companies. Neither the Tories nor the SNP has shown they appreciate the scale of the [economic catastrophe](#) we are facing.

Climate Action

The pandemic measures may have given our environment some breathing space, but as we come out of lockdown, there is a risk that increased car use could bring a return to the poor air quality that kills thousands of people in Scotland every year. Figures from [Transport Scotland](#) reveal a drastic drop in active travel rates since the lockdown. Labour has also called on the UK Government to take [urgent action](#) to ensure the UK remains credible on climate change ahead of the COP26 UN climate summit in Glasgow next year.

Public transport faces particular challenges as we come out of lockdown. The massive [job losses](#) at Alexander Dennis reflect short-term considerations that require government intervention to secure the long-term benefits of a shift from car use.

Communities

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of strong communities, supporting and looking out for each other. To achieve this requires properly funded support to build what is called social infrastructure or [social capital](#). However, the SNP has dumped austerity onto local services, cutting council budget faster than their own revenue budgets. The Local Government Benchmarking Framework [report](#) shows that the very services that build strong communities have suffered the most. The annual SCVO survey paints a similar picture for the voluntary sector.

Scotland has the most centralised governance of public services in Europe - it is time to decentralise power to local government and communities. This should include powers to raise more revenue locally. Support for Scottish Labour's case for a wealth tax has [grown](#) during the pandemic. The [Carnegie Trust](#) makes a case for building back better with a focus on the local.

Landlords have been busy [lobbying](#) for subsidies during the pandemic. Tenants have had no extra help despite continued pleas from tenants, politicians and Shelter, and CAS have warned of the potential for a large rise in evictions. The SNP and the Tories united in opposing Scottish Labour's Fair Rents Bill in committee.

Education

With schools going back this month, much of the focus has been on how this can be done safely. Scottish Labour has [highlighted](#) the muddled approach of the Scottish Government on this issue with no route map and inadequate resourcing. The attainment gap was widening before the pandemic, and [radical action](#) will be needed to repair the [impact of lockdown](#) on disadvantaged pupils. Larry Flanagan from the EIS sets out the issues in a [paper](#) published by the Reid Foundation. The August deadline for the expansion of early learning and childcare has also been [removed](#). The emerging exam results [scandal](#) is baking in the attainment gap.

Scotland's universities are facing a profound financial [challenge](#) as a result of this pandemic. The sector faces significant immediate losses of over £70m and projected losses in the coming academic year in the order of £400m. Universities and colleges will be key players in the [recovery](#).

The cultural sector has been [uniquely affected](#) by the lockdown measures, and Scottish Labour has been engaging with the sector to protect jobs and fight for the future of the industry. Workers in the industry, including those who are self-employed and freelancers, need to be properly supported throughout the sector's recovery.

August 2020

The issues discussed in this paper are part of our policy programme process. It is not a statement of Scottish Labour policy.

For further information on our policy development process, please visit our dedicated policy website at www.scotlabpolicy.org. Or contact us at: scottishpolicyforum@labour.org.uk