

# Rebuilding Roadmap

## Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party

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# Introduction

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Throughout the pandemic, we have supported the bulk of the Scottish Government's measures to tackle Covid-19, with the exception of their schools plans and their lacklustre business support. However, we believe they are now taking an approach that is too slow and sluggish in the face of new public health evidence.

Scotland and the UK's vaccine scheme has been such a success that we have vaccinated more than half of the adult population. The positive impact is clear in public health data. Hospitalisations have dropped by more than 75 per cent in a month. Transmission rates are well below the level where the World Health Organisation considers Covid-19 to be under control.

The current Scottish Government guidance was not intended to be permanent. It was supposed to move as the public health evidence moved, and that data has now become far more encouraging.

The evidence supports a more optimistic roadmap out of restrictions, while still remaining cautious.

People are waiting to get on with their lives. They should not wait any longer than public health data shows is necessary. The SNP Government should not keep Scotland under restrictions any longer than we need to because every day that the government delays, the impact grows on mental health, physical health and family finances. Now that the Covid-19 virus is being suppressed more effectively by the UK vaccine scheme, more emphasis must now be put on those key aspects of life.

Any delays will have a direct, negative consequence on livelihoods. Jobs will be lost. As it stands, we are already facing a looming economic crisis that will be far worse if we delay

returning to normality any longer than necessary.

Our Rebuilding Roadmap outlines a safe but more optimistic path out of this pandemic. We would ease restrictions faster and get the focus onto economic recovery now.

Now is the time to start tackling the mammoth task of rebuilding our economy, not dragging Scotland back to the uncertainty of another referendum.

We believe a three-phase plan of urgent action is necessary, although we would not wait for phase one to conclude before commencing the next phase.

# Phase One: Easing the Restrictions

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Provided that the current encouraging public health data trends continue, we would look to safely accelerate the easing of restrictions by approximately three weeks on most measures, with the exception of indoor mixing.

The specific differences with the Scottish Government plan are as follows -

## **The Scottish Conservatives would immediately:**

- Reopen gyms.

## **From 26 April, we would:**

- Move Scotland to level two.
- Allow hospitality venues to serve alcohol indoors.
- Restart outdoor adult contact sport and indoor group exercises.
- Reopen cinemas, amusement arcades and bingo halls.
- Resume small indoor and outdoor events with restrictions.
- Resume face-to-face support services.

## **From 17 May, we would:**

- Move Scotland to level one.
- Allow all indoor non-contact sports to take place.

## **We would then aim to:**

- Move Scotland to level zero not before 7 June.
- Lift all legal limits on weddings and funerals not before 28 June.

By reopening safely slightly faster, we would get Scotland's economy moving again ahead of the SNP's schedule, while remaining cautious.

Not only would people be able to use gyms for their own wellbeing sooner, people in jobs such as personal trainers would be able to start earning again.

Not only would people be able to celebrate or mourn in slightly larger groups, but hospitality premises may be able to start hiring more workers.

Not only would people be able to socialise with friends playing sport, watching a film or meeting for a drink, but leisure facilities, cinemas and restaurants would get three weeks more earnings through their tills, helping them to protect jobs.

We would mainly prioritise reopening where there is a clear benefit to physical and mental health, particularly sports and leisure facilities. We would also prioritise those areas of the economy where jobs are most at risk, particularly the hospitality industry.

# Phase Two: Securing our Recovery

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The easing of restrictions will kick-start the economy but it will not prevent an economic crisis. A tsunami of job losses and business failures will still hit Scotland unless urgent action is taken.

As the most anti-business First Minister since devolution, Nicola Sturgeon is not suited to lead an SNP majority government through the looming economic crisis.

An SNP majority would seek to drag Scotland through the economic uncertainty of another divisive referendum, but it would also fail to support Scotland's recovery with the necessary jobs plan to match the scale of this emergency.

Our economy needs investment and ambitious plans to get back on the road to recovery.

We would seek to end the SNP's anti-business approach with a series of key measures:

## **1. Set an ambition for full employment by 2025.**

Unemployment is going to be a key challenge, despite the ongoing support provided through furlough, which has protected around a million Scottish jobs throughout this pandemic.

The Scottish Conservatives would make full employment the number one priority for the next Scottish Government. We believe the next government and the next Scottish Parliament should be judged primarily on that ambition.

## **2. Create a Business Recovery Council.**

Businesses do not have a seat at the SNP Government's table. Too often, they are treated as an afterthought.

We would change that with a Business Recovery Council that Scottish Ministers would be required to consult regularly about restrictions, grants and new economic policies.

## **3. Rush through emergency legislation by the end of the summer.**

To fulfil our full employment goal, we would treat the jobs crisis as an emergency, similar to the first wave of Covid-19, and seek to pass legislation to tackle it by the end of the summer.

We would seek to rush through an Enterprise Bill within the first 100 days of the next term. That Bill would establish an economic development agency in each region of Scotland to help protect jobs all over Scotland and ensure the whole country rebuilds at the same pace.

This would enable us to create lasting partnerships between government, local authorities, education providers and business and build on the work started by Growth Deals and the increased contact between councils and businesses as a result of the coronavirus grants process. These new agencies would be a single point of contact between businesses and wider government.

## **4. A 10-day grant turnaround guarantee and rapid review to streamline the business grants system.**

We would also simplify the interface for businesses to access government support, both for COVID and non-COVID related funding. We would rapidly review the grants system and make it a single payment system. This would include funding for any businesses that may remain closed later than others, such as nightclubs.

Too many business have been left waiting for months on the SNP Government finalising guidance and getting grant funding out the door. We would introduce a 10-working day national standard for all grant applications to be processed, with support for councils that are lagging behind.



## 5. Innovate to Rebuild award scheme.

We would seek to capitalise on Scotland's famous entrepreneurial spirit with a new Innovate to Rebuild scheme. We would seek to match public and private investment funding to deliver 100 grants of up to £100,000 for the most innovative projects across any field by the end of the summer, to immediately spur investment and start creating new jobs.

The projects would be chosen by the Business Recovery Council, in conjunction with Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament economy committee, to ensure the funding reached the best possible projects. We would set a deadline of August to have all projects funded.

## 6. Job Security Councils.

As we first proposed in September 2020, we would introduce Job Security Councils - agile, sector-specific 'Job Centres' where work coaches help to match skills to new job opportunities.

With the expected rise in unemployment over the coming months, we need government to step up efforts to find new jobs, especially for young people. Job Councils in sectors such as oil and gas would help provide quick re-skilling opportunities for people – so that the "Covid Generation" is not left behind.

## 7. Internal tourism drive.

We do not just need to sell Scotland's products abroad, but also its potential as the best place in the world to visit as a holiday destination.

The Scottish tourism industry is reliant on international customers, yet the pandemic has meant that holidays have been cancelled last year and the sector is almost certainly going to miss out on another peak season in 2021.

Given that our tourism sector is going to be more reliant on domestic tourism this year, we would deliver a fresh campaign to market Scotland as the destination of choice for the rest of the UK.

## 8. Rapid Retraining Courses.

People affected by unemployment need to acquire skills to help them get a job quickly, which

means courses with inflexible entry dates which take a year or longer are not suitable.

We would bring together employers, skills providers and colleges to form new Institutes of Technology and work with them to design a new system of Rapid Retraining Courses - short, sharp courses tailored to employment opportunities. Given the pressing need for digital skills in our economy, we would make an early priority to ensure every single Scottish adult has basic digital skills by 2026.

# Phase Three: Recovery and Rebuilding

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The Scottish Fiscal Commission estimates a similar length of recovery from this economic crisis as the 2007-08 financial crash. As such, while we must focus on immediately delivering jobs, we must also keep one eye on rebuilding Scotland over the next few years.

By investing in Scotland's recovery, we would seek to drive economic growth higher than the levels seen under the SNP over the last 14 years, generating more funding to protect public services in the process. Our plan would include the following:

## 1. Prevent teaching cuts crisis.

Around 1,700 teachers have written to Nicola Sturgeon with a plea that they are not left without work this summer. We would guarantee those teachers a full-time job either in schools or as part of our national tutoring programme.

We would also immediately launch a recruitment drive to deliver our key election pledge of 3,000 new teachers over the next Scottish Parliament term.

## 2. A major broadband and housing drive.

We would create tens of thousands of new jobs by investing in major infrastructure projects including the biggest social housebuilding drive since devolution and full-fibre broadband rollout by 2027. Our manifesto will also set out an infrastructure plan to rebuild local roads and railways across Scotland.

## 3. Rebuild Together.

Rishi Sunak's economic interventions have supported Scotland and the UK's economy throughout the pandemic, showing what is possible when we work together across the UK.

To build on the success of programmes like

Rishi Sunak's furlough scheme, we would develop shared strategic oversight of regional economic agencies with the UK Government as part of a 'Rebuild Together' policy, seeking increased collaboration between Scotland's two governments.

One of the first schemes we would seek to establish under Rebuild Together would be a network of Scottish trade hubs in major UK cities to support investment and export opportunities both to and from Scotland, since 60 per cent of Scotland's trade is with the other three UK nations.

By pursuing a collaborative instead of an adversarial approach, we believe investment can be streamlined and it can go further than it currently does with two governments who do not trust one another.

Instead, we would work with the UK Government and local government on developing projects for funding through the Community Renewal Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

## 4. £500 Retrain to Rebuild grants.

To incentivise lifelong learning, we would introduce a Retrain to Rebuild Account for every single Scottish adult by 2023, worth £500 every year, to be spent on training.

We will fund 100,000 accounts as a pilot in 2021 and 2022 to help people who have been made newly unemployed as a result of the pandemic to acquire new skills.

## 5. Unlimited apprenticeships.

Rather than the SNP's approach of government setting a target for funded apprenticeships, we would work with employers to agree how many places there is demand for and then deliver government funding for those apprenticeships.



This will also ensure that our apprenticeship system is more responsive to the demands of industry and our economy.

We would use the full UK apprenticeship levy for what it was intended for – apprenticeships – instead of the SNP’s approach of spreading the funding wider. By doing so, we would expand funding for graduate and foundation apprenticeships.

## **6. Reskill our Regions.**

We would establish new Reskill our Regions Taskforces in each college region across Scotland to better align the needs of businesses and job opportunities with college provision.

They would seek to bring together the local college with local enterprise bodies, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, and the Scottish Funding Council.

These Taskforces would also consider how colleges can directly support their local communities through recruitment, procurement and real estate, including occupying vacant sites on high streets.

## **7. Rebuild our exports.**

Our exports have taken a major hit during the pandemic. To rebuild them, the Scottish Conservatives would follow the Irish model to maximise the use of our diaspora to sell Scotland. We would expand the GlobalScot network to enhance Scotland’s international presence and exports, with the aim of doubling sign ups by the end of the Parliament.

To provide expertise to Scottish companies selling abroad we would establish an export mentor scheme, where companies with exporting experience can support those looking to expand abroad. We would also drive a national exporting campaign, encouraging companies to expand internationally and establish a Scottish Exporting Institute, following the model of the National Manufacturing Institute, to act as a hub of trade expertise in Scotland.

## **8. Rule out new regulations for two years.**

To ensure businesses can continue to focus on protecting their staff and customers from coronavirus and on recovering from the pandemic, we would delay the introduction

of any new non-COVID related regulations on businesses to April 2023.

## **9. Community Growth Deals.**

We would make sure that all of Scotland rebuilds at the same pace by investing £550 million directly into Scottish communities through Community Investment Deals.

We would back projects that can create skilled local jobs in communities across Scotland. The communities could bid for up to £25 million each to invest in growth opportunities. We envision this benefitting at least 22 communities across Scotland in the first tranche.

# Approximate Costings

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**Phase one:** Minimal, as it predominantly focusses on easing restrictions.

**Phase two:** Less than £100m, although a precise figure is difficult to pinpoint because it would depend on demand.

**Phase three:** Approximately £4.55 billion over the course of the next Scottish Parliament term, escalating as economic growth returned, plus £2 billion between 2021 and 2027 on broadband, and £1 billion between 2021 and 2031 on the North East Enterprise agency.

The total spend would be met from a mixture of Barnett Consequentials, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the £4.8 billion of unallocated capital spending in the SNP Government's capital spending plans.

