

REFORM SCOTLAND

2016

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16 policies the next Scottish Government should pursue
with the powers that have been, or are about to be,
devolved to Scotland.

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Reform Scotland's manifesto for the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections focuses entirely on powers that have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament or are due to be devolved as a result of the Scotland Bill 2015/16.

Each of the 16 policies set out in this document is based upon Reform Scotland's work over the last 8 years. The longer reports, briefings and factsheets are all available on our website.

These policies focus on key themes of greater devolution, choice and diversity.

Alan McFarlane
Reform Scotland Chairman
March 2016

1. Fully devolve council tax and business rates to local authorities.
2. Pilot schemes to devolve health to local authority control.
3. Give people greater choice over their GP surgery.
4. Give local authorities a proper role in policing by re-instating the split in funding between central & local government and giving each council a seat on the SPA.
5. Make police deployment an operational, as opposed to political, decision by removing the 1,000 extra officers pledge.
6. Transfer all quango functions either to government departments, independent bodies or councils.
7. Have one Scottish department responsible for both tax and welfare powers due to be devolved to Scotland.
8. Ensure every school and GP surgery has a website.
9. Reform the administration of Carer's Allowance.
10. Do not vary the Scottish Rate of Income Tax from the UK level.
11. Scrap Air Passenger Duty.
12. Introduce a virtual voucher to ensure parents are able to access their child's nursery entitlement in any pre-school environment that meets required standards.
13. Give every child the same basic entitlement to nursery education, regardless of when their birthday falls.
14. Give schools greater autonomy to ensure they are able to make decisions necessary to meet local priorities and circumstances.
15. Ensure colleges and universities have a level playing field.
16. Introduce a deferred tuition fee so that once graduates earn above average salaries they contribute towards the cost of their higher education.

Devolving power within Scotland

1. Fully devolve council tax and business rates to local authorities.

Local priorities cannot in anyway be accounted for in the way that local taxation operates at present because local councillors have no real control over local taxation. By devolving Council Tax and non-domestic rates in full, councils would have the ability to take local priorities and circumstances more fully into account. This would also allow individual councils to choose the structure of local tax most appropriate for their area.

Further reading:

- [Localising Local Tax, 2015](#)
- [Improving Scotland's Business Environment, 2015](#)
- [Renewing Local Government, 2012](#)
- [Planning Power, 2011](#)

2. Pilot schemes to devolve health to local authority control.

The 14 health boards in Scotland are quangos, with little direct accountability to their populations. Councils should take over their responsibilities and be able to decide how best to meet the healthcare needs of their local population. It would also help ensure better cohesion between social care and health care. This could easily be piloted in areas such as Fife, Dumfries & Galloway, Highlands and the Islands where councils and health boards are coterminous.

Further reading:

- [Examining Access: Survey of GP Practices in Scotland, 2014](#)
- [Patients First: Improving Access to GP practices, 2012](#)
- [Renewing Local Government, 2012](#)

3. Give people greater choice over their GP surgery.

Our work has revealed real differences exist with regards to access arrangements across Scotland's GP practices; differences to which the practices' size or location are irrelevant. Yet, despite these differences, patients have little choice over who and where their GP is. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of GP practices are privately, not publicly, run.

Further reading:

- [GPs Fact Sheet, 2015](#)
- [Examining Access: Survey of GP Practices in Scotland, 2014](#)
- [Patients First: Improving Access to GP practices, 2012](#)

4. Reinstate the the split in funding between central and local government and giving each council a seat on the Scottish Police Authority.

Reform Scotland fundamentally disagrees with the idea of a single police force across Scotland as we don't believe that a single force allows for the necessary flexibility to deal with the differences that exist throughout Scotland. However, we accept that wholesale police re-organisation on this scale is unlikely and, as a result, it would be better to find a way to re-inject localism into the existing structure. We believe that there are two ways, in particular, that this can be done - through the funding and governance structures.

Further reading:

- [Policing Fact Sheet, 2015](#)
- [The Thinning Blue Line, 2015](#)
- [Striking the Balance, 2011](#)
- [Power to Protect, 2008](#)

5. Make police deployment an operational, as opposed to political, decision by removing the 1,000 extra officers pledge.

Reform Scotland believes that this pledge should be removed and greater operational freedom be given to the Chief Constable to use resources in the way he feels is most effective - this may be to maintain existing police numbers, but it may be to deploy some of his budget elsewhere.

Further reading:

- [Policing Fact Sheet, 2015](#)
- [The Thinning Blue Line, 2015](#)
- [Striking the Balance, 2011](#)

6. Transfer all quango functions either to government departments, independent bodies or councils.

Quangos are not sufficiently accountable to the Scottish Parliament or the Scottish people. The current lack of openness and accountability is not conducive to good governance. This needs to change because the power exercised by government in our democracy derives from the consent of the people and should be exercised in their interests.

Further reading:

- [Quango Salaries \(2\), 2014](#)
- [Quango expenditure, 2012](#)
- [Democratic Power, 2010](#)

Supporting individuals and the economy

7. Have one Scottish department responsible for both the new tax and welfare powers due to be devolved to Scotland.

Welfare expenditure is currently divided between two departments, HMRC and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Income Tax is due to be devolved to Holyrood as is Carer's Allowance which is taxable. Reform Scotland believes that a single department should be responsible for these new responsibilities to ensure a simpler and more user-friendly system where benefits can be taxed at source with greater transparency.

Further reading:

- [The Basic Income Guarantee, 2016](#)

8. Ensure every school and GP surgery has a website.

Research carried out by Reform Scotland has highlighted the fact that a large number of schools and GP practices don't have websites. All public services need an online presence. This requires not just health boards or local authorities to have websites, but individual GP practices and schools as well.

Further reading:

- [Examining Access: Survey of GP Practices in Scotland, 2014](#)
- [Public services need internet jump start, 2012](#)
- [Patients First: Improving Access to GP practices, 2012](#)

9. Reform the administration of Carer's Allowance.

The UK system for taxing benefits is overly complicated, totally inefficient and not at all user-friendly. The Scotland Bill 2015/16 devolves Carer's Allowance to Scotland, a taxable benefit. This gives the Scottish Government the opportunity to lead by example and change the administration arrangements so that the benefit is either taxed at source or not subject to tax.

Further reading:

- [Tax & Welfare briefing, 2016](#)

10. Do not vary the Scottish Rate of Income Tax from the UK level.

Although Income Tax is due to be devolved to Scotland, the Scottish Government will not have a basket of taxes from which to produce a more effective new tax system. Following the passing of the Scotland Bill 2015/16, 71% of Scotland's devolved tax income will come from a single tax, making it difficult to introduce coherent tax reform.

Further reading:

- [Tax & Welfare briefing, 2016](#)

11. Scrap Air Passenger Duty.

A study by Edinburgh Airport has suggested that the Scottish Government's pledge to cut the tax by 50% could generate up to 3,800 jobs by 2020 and bring an economic benefit of £200m per year. Reform Scotland believes that by going further and scrapping the tax altogether, the economy will benefit even more, a stance shared by the Scottish Chambers of Commerce. We believe that such a policy change would also help improve Scottish businesses' international reach.

Further reading:

- [Improving Scotland's Business Environment, 2015](#)

Transforming education

12. Introduce a virtual voucher to ensure parents are able to access their child's nursery entitlement in any pre-school environment that meets the required standards.

As long as a partnership provider meets the standards set by both Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate, parents should be able to take up their entitlement with that provider.

Further reading:

- [Improving Scotland's Business Environment, 2015](#)
- [Nursery Fact Sheet, 2015](#)
- [The Virtual Voucher, 2015](#)
- [An Equal Start, 2013](#)

13. Give every child the same basic entitlement to nursery education, regardless of when their birthday falls.

Entitlement to government-funded nursery provision begins the term after a child turns three. As a result, there can be a difference of up to 15 months between children's legal entitlement.

Further reading:

- [Nursery Fact Sheet 2015](#)
- [An Equal Start, 2013](#)
- [Ending Birthday discrimination in Nursery Provision, 2013](#)
- [Only 50% of children guaranteed two years of government-funded nursery provision, 2013](#)

14. Give schools greater autonomy to ensure they are able to make decisions necessary to meet local priorities and circumstances.

Research by the OECD demonstrates that systems with high levels of autonomy tend to fare better than others. Autonomy promotes initiative and innovation. It secures greater commitment from staff to make necessary change. It allows dialogue among schools, parents and young people to be more productive. Schools can see themselves as more directly accountable to those to whom they already feel most responsible; families, young people and the local community.

Further reading:

- [Commission on School Reform - Challenge paper 1, 2015](#)
- [By Diverse Means: Improving Scottish Education, 2013](#)

15. Ensure colleges and universities have a level playing field.

College should be seen as a different, not a lesser choice. It is also a vital path for many pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds, either onto higher education or into training and work. Colleges are government public bodies, yet universities are autonomous charities. Colleges must be set free of government and become autonomous charities, a status which universities must also retain.

Further reading:

- [Improving Scotland's Business Environment, 2015](#)
- [A New Deal for Scotland's Colleges, 2013](#)
- [Power to Learn, 2010](#)

16. Introduce a deferred tuition fee so that once graduates earn above average salaries they contribute towards the cost of their higher education.

There needs to be a better balance in funding with the individual graduate as well as taxpayers contributing towards higher education. A deferred fee should cover a proportion of the cost of the tuition incurred by the graduate. The Scottish Government would fund a percentage of the average cost of a degree, broken down by subject area.

Further reading:

- [Power to Learn, 2010](#)

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