

Email Chain 1

From: [Redact – 38(1)(B)]

Sent: Saturday, October 12, 2019 4:59:36 PM

To: Finnie J (John), MSP <John.Finnie.msp@parliament.scot>; Cameron D (Donald), MSP <Donald.Cameron.msp@parliament.scot>; Grant R (Rhoda), MSP <Rhoda.Grant.msp@parliament.scot>; Halcro Johnston J (Jamie), MSP <Jamie.HalcroJohnston.msp@parliament.scot>; Mountain E (Edward), MSP <Edward.Mountain.msp@parliament.scot>; Stewart D (David) MSP <David.Stewart.msp@parliament.scot>; Todd M (Maree), MSP <Maree.Todd.msp@parliament.scot>; Swinney J (John), MSP <John.Swinney.msp@parliament.scot>; Sturgeon N (Nicola), MSP <Nicola.Sturgeon.msp@parliament.scot>

Subject: Downgrading of Education provision

I call on all MSPs, MPs and those whom have responsibility for the education and continuation of sustainable communities within the Highlands of Scotland to bring an end the unfair and discriminatory formula of pupil role dictating teacher numbers within secondary education. One size does not fit all. The full curriculum must be available to all young people in Scotland and this formula is actively discriminating against those who reside in remote and rural locations reducing the fundamental right to quality education in such areas to a post code lottery.

Just this week I have learned that despite covering a vacant post [Redact – 38(1)(B)], (originally due to sickness), for over a year in [Redact – 38(1)(B)] and this post being a one teacher provision within the subject area – [Redact – 38(1)(B)], there is no funding to maintain subject provision and this post will cease to exist in its current form after Easter 2020. In recent years this establishment has lost two curriculum subjects, soon to be three, and yet still being told that it is over staffed. How can this be fair? This erosion of the curriculum is not only detrimental to the development of children and young people, but the wider community also. The impact of the downgrading of the curriculum to this community could be devastating, families are already contemplating leaving the area because of the lack of adequate provision to maintain a full and properly delivered curriculum. Not to mention the knock-on effect of the potential relocation of myself and partner – [Redact – 38(1)(B)], yet another loss to the community.

A recent development to alleviate this situation has been to adopt “Virtual Teaching”. An inferior and untested practice which can in no way replace the expertise of the classroom practitioner, not to mention take account of learning styles, differentiation needs, pace, motivation or other minutiae of the teaching and learning process. Virtual or online provision within secondary education should be an “add-on” and not a money saving alternative to quality provision.

Young people in the Highlands and Islands deserve better, for too long they have been disadvantaged by this discriminatory formula. The Scottish government must take steps now to scrap this practice and commit to providing suitably qualified subject specialists for all curricular areas as a base line for provision ensuring that all young people in Scotland have access to the full curriculum.

[Redact – 38(1)(B)]

GTC no: [Redact – 38(1)(B)]

Supply Teacher – [Redact – 38(1)(B)]

[Redact – 38(1)(B)]

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Email 2

Nicola Sturgeon MSP
Glasgow Southside
Constituency Office (constituent enquiries only)
Govanhill Workspace
Unit 3, 69 Dixon Road
G42 8AT
Tel: 0141 424 1174
nicola.sturgeon.msp@parliament.scot

All other enquiries to nicola.sturgeon@snp.org

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From: [Redact – 38(1)(B)]
Sent: Saturday, September 28, 2019 4:04:27 PM
To: Lochhead R (Richard), MSP <Richard.Lochhead.msp@parliament.scot>; Swinney J (John), MSP <John.Swinney.msp@parliament.scot>; Sturgeon N (Nicola), MSP <Nicola.Sturgeon.msp@parliament.scot>; Russell MW (Michael), MSP <Michael.Russell.msp@parliament.scot>
Subject: Tertiary education - FFS - help please!

Hello all,

I know you are all busy MSPs - quite possibly far too busy to deal individually with such a personal dilemma, but IF you can find time to read - or even better to advise - thoughts (however brief) would be very much appreciated. As a parent, for 17 years I've relied on intuition and trusted in Scottish education systems to yield answers if/when issues have arisen, but this time I'm hopelessly lost in what appears to be an entirely unfair and illogical system within admissions to tertiary education, hence the plea to you (for the first time!) for HELP!

Following recent University Open days attended at both Glasgow University and Edinburgh University, we write to ask whether or not you are aware of just how difficult the current policies make it for a fairly regular, nice, kind, ambitious and hardworking mainstream Scottish school student to win a place - and in particular what you might or might not consider to be best next steps we can or should take...?

Great strides appear to be being made to attempt to narrow the attainment gap in primary and secondary education, but if our recent experiences visiting tertiary education reflect the 'norm' then these improvements may come to prove meaningless to the motivated 'average' Scottish teen who works hard, aims high then finds themselves locked out of a system due to no fault on their part.

Whilst prospectuses and websites carry both 'minimum entry' and 'standard entry' qualifications information, it would appear that these can be far from accurate and that the actual bar set each year to actually obtain entry is much higher - whilst obviously not intended to mislead, this system DOES and can cause great trauma, disappointment and upset when this is revealed later.

Our experience at Edinburgh University Open Day included taking part in 4 subject specific information/mini lecture sessions. After the final session, one subject in particular stood out as being the perfect fit and we sought further information from the Admissions team. We had already well exceeded the entry requirements published by Edinburgh University by holding AAAAB at SQA Higher level in a range of subjects - a great achievement as we are from a 'rural remote fragile' region with a seriously understaffed challenged school (in an area faced with significant rural depopulation issues) with very narrow subject options and composite classes encompassing S4/5/6 at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Unfortunately our school does not qualify under any of the 'pathways' schemes - perhaps in part down to the controversial practice of not presenting students for exams if it is felt they may

not excel and strongly encouraging alternative routes which distorts attainment figures significantly - but that's a whole other hornet's nest for another time.

After the final (and perfect!) talk we sought clarification around competition for places on the MA Sustainable Development course for 2020 intake and any other additional information which might be useful.

The answers astounded us and included the following statements:

- **As we couldn't evidence AAAAA (only AAAAB) in S5 the application would literally be 'on the discard pile' immediately**
- **Once on the discard pile that was the end of the road - the Personal Statement would not be read or any additional information**
- **This means that despite having undertaken a high range of outside activities from DofE to Scouting, outdoor pursuits to additional reading and various environmental projects to support the application, none of this will be known, let alone considered, in support of the application, as it wouldn't ever be read**
- **There was no interest in or distinction made between state and public schooling in terms of final S5 outcomes**
- **S6 attainment would not be relevant whatever the outcomes as they would be ONLY looking at S5 outcomes so there was nothing additional that could be done to access this course**
- **There is a total intake of 30 students and only SIX (ie 20%) of places in total are available for Scottish AND EU students combined - these six places would be awarded roughly 50/50 between Scottish students and their EU counterparts - so we can surmise that this leaves just THREE places (or 10% of intake) for Scottish students. This figure ignores any equal access policies that may also be in place to reduce this figure further.**

So, here is my question to you - what would you do, say or suggest to your own or friend's hard working, diligent, conscientious, ambitious kid in the same situation? Determined to succeed but thwarted even before the UCAS has been submitted?

It's easy to explain that English and International students can have 80% of the places as they will help with University Funds more - but once beyond that (fairly clinical and very sad bit) what would YOU say next?

Would you simply say just give up, abandon your education and get a job instead?

Would you say select a different course, even if nothing similar is available, and your heart was set on this one? Say just make do with second (or third) best - that's IF you can get accepted for entry - and that's a very big IF as when we enquired about other humanities choices the situation was very similar - would you say just do ANYTHING to enable to continue into tertiary education - even if the subject isn't of great interest to you?

You might simply advise that another institution would be a better choice - but enquiries this far have suggested that this issue extends well beyond Edinburgh University. St Andrew's runs a similar (though also quite different content) MA Sustainable Development but they are unable to supply any statistics eg number of applicants last year for places and what the entry requirement was set at as they say they are neither obliged to collect or share such data.

Would you advise using one of the precious five UCAS course choice spaces to apply anyway and hope all the information given was wrong?

As I started by saying, I'm lost and can't believe that it is now SO hard for a proud Scottish school student to have any hope of accessing courses of their choice - traditionally we know that medicine and vet studies carry the high tariff on AAAAA in S5 but we had no idea this had spread to infect other areas - particularly in humanities - did you?

We look forward very much to any guidance or thoughts you may be in a position to offer - most helpful to hear would be what YOU would be saying/advising at this stage - or if you are aware of any recourse we could try to improve this situation or reverse such a policy please do share!!

With very many thanks in advance of your considered response,

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