

SNP Manifesto 2021

What we're doing for students

From free tuition, to record investment in our colleges and universities, the SNP has a proud record of championing Scotland's students while in government.

Re-elect the SNP to:

Protect free education and widen access

We remain absolutely committed to the principle that access to education should be based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. Scotland is the only country in the UK that offers free university education, saving Scottish students studying in Scotland up to £27,000.

As long as the SNP are in government there will not be tuition fees in Scotland.

This has helped in the drive to widen access - which now sees record numbers of students from the poorest background attend university. In the next Parliament, we will widen access further, implementing the recommendations of the Commissioner for Widening Access.

As part of this goal, we will undertake a review into the funding provision for postgraduate students.

Expand our student support package

We will expand our total student support package to reach the equivalent of the Real Living Wage over the next three years.

No student should lose their benefit entitlements because they are in receipt of student funding. We will introduce a special support payment so that students who are in receipt of benefits do not lose out because they are in receipt of, or entitled to, student support.

We will improve the support available to estranged students - those without parental financial support - with a package of support equivalent to the Real Living Wage. We will explore whether a programme of guarantorship for estranged students, who are disproportionately vulnerable to exploitation within the housing market, can be created in partnership with colleges and universities.

Full-time college students in Scotland benefit from the highest bursary of anywhere in the UK, and we've expanded the Education Maintenance Allowance in Scotland - now scrapped south of the border - to support even more college students from low income families.

Promote student welfare

We will put in place a student mental health action plan which addresses waiting times, ensures equity of access to counsellors and embeds mental health and wellbeing into the curriculum.

We will undertake a comprehensive review of the Purpose-Built Student Accommodation sector and bring forward a student accommodation strategy for Scotland.

We remain committed to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, and will ensure access for all young people to evidence-based prevention education on consent and healthy relationships and fund work in our colleges and universities.

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Tackle digital poverty

We will tackle student digital poverty. The lack of electronic devices and connectivity hinders too many students from less well off backgrounds. We will bridge the divide by providing universities and colleges with £5 million per year to provide support to students.

Ensure opportunities post Brexit

Due to Brexit, the UK will no longer take part in the Europe-wide Erasmus exchange programme. The Erasmus exchange programme has helped transform the lives of thousands of our students, schoolchildren, teachers, adult learners and young people, from all across the UK.

In Scotland proportionally more participants have gone abroad through Erasmus+ than from anywhere else in the UK, while proportionally more visitors from the rest of Europe have visited Scotland in return.

We remain committed to Erasmus, and will continue to advocate for Scotland's inclusion in the programme. Until then, we will create a Scottish programme of exchange to provide mobility and cooperation opportunities in higher education, vocational education and training, school education (including early childhood education and care), adult education, youth and sport.

Help graduates into work

Whilst employment law is currently reserved to the UK Government, we are using all levers at our disposal to promote Fair Work and to tackle worker exploitation.

Our Fair Work First programme makes adoption of fair work practices part of the criteria for winning public contracts and receiving grants. It uses the financial power of government to make fair work the norm.

Exploitation of graduates through zero-hours contracts, unpaid internships and workplace discrimination is not welcome in Scotland, and we will keep fighting for a fairer deal for young workers.

The principles of Living Hours - ensuring workers get the hours they need to make ends meet - are reflected in Fair Work First good practice and promoted through Fair Work First where this applies to grants or procurement. If re-elected, we will go further and support a specific accreditation programme for Living Hours in the same way we have supported Living Wage accreditation.

Only the full devolution of employment powers will allow the Scottish Parliament to provide long term guarantees and help deliver our progressive fair work agenda and we will continue to press the UK Government to devolve these powers.