

May 2008

STEWART MAXWELL MSP

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A National Conversation

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Maxwell Welcomes Funding To Keep Girls Physically Active

West of Scotland MSP Stewart Maxwell welcomed the investment of almost £530,000 to a programme to tackle high levels of physical inactivity amongst girls which is to be rolled out across all of Scotland's 381 secondary schools.

Mr Maxwell said

"The benefits of physical activity to the health and wellbeing of girls are enormous and the Scottish Government is committed to increasing participation across all ages. Worryingly, as young girls approach adolescence there is a decline in participation and involvement in exercise. At age 11-12 only 56 per cent of girls are meeting the national recommendation for physical activity of one hour most days per week. This figure drops to just 41 per

cent by the time girls are aged 13-15 year. We are keen to tackle this trend and to encourage girls to continue to enjoy activities into and well beyond their teens.

"Fit for Girls' (FfG), is a national drive that will be led by sportscotland and backed by Government investment of almost £530,000. It is aimed at schoolgirls aged 11-16 with the intention of encouraging them to adopt more active lifestyles. The FfG programme will involve five Youth Sport Trust (YST) trainers providing training for teachers and Active Schools Coordinators, so that specially tailored activities can be developed for girls both



in school and outside the curriculum. Successful pilot schemes, supported by funding from the Big Lottery Fund and YST expertise, have already been run in 27 schools, with research showing that average participation rates increased from 18 per cent to 26 per cent in three quarters of the schools involved.

"This new investment will give girls and young women more opportunities and choices to enjoy the social, psychological and physical benefits possible through physical activity."

Small Business Grants Scheme Introduced

"The introduction of the Small Business Grant Scheme is most welcome and it highlights yet again the commitment of the Scottish Government to boost small businesses throughout Scotland.

I particularly welcome the accelerated removal of business rates, which will have a very

significant impact on the region's economy. From April this year the rebate for businesses with rateable value of £15,000 will be increased from 10% to 20%, the rebate for businesses with rateable value of £8-10,000 increases from 25-40% and the rebate for businesses with rateable value of £8000 increased

from 50% to a massive 80%.

This constitutes the biggest business tax cut that Scottish business has ever seen and I am confident that it will be good for this region, which relies heavily on the success of the very large number of small businesses who stand to gain from this policy.

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Graduate Endowment Abolished

West of Scotland MSP Stewart Maxwell has welcomed the scrapping of the graduate endowment by the Scottish Government, which came into effect from the beginning of April.

This means that undergraduates will no longer face financial barriers to higher education as all those who graduated in

2007 will not have to pay the fee.

Commenting Mr Maxwell said:

"Across the West of Scotland, and throughout Scotland, the end of the graduate endowment will be met with smiles from those who will have seen a £2289 weight lifted from their shoulders.

"The abolition of the graduate endowment is a key step towards widening access to higher education, it is not the only step, but it is a very important move in the right direction.

"I look forward to seeing the Scottish Government continuing to promote positive policies which will benefit the young people of the West of Scotland."

Maxwell Welcomes Cut in Prescription Charges

It is great for the people of the West of Scotland that the Scottish Government has introduced this initial reduction in prescription charges, leading to their eventual abolition. This is a move which will have a direct impact on the lives of many of the people of the West of Scotland.

Prescription charges are little more than a tax on ill-health hitting hardest those who suffer from chronic conditions that do not qualify for an

exemption. They are a real burden for hard working families for whom every bit of expenditure can stretch a tight budget to breaking point. By announcing a timescale for the abolition of prescription charges, the Scottish Government is bringing an end to this unfairness.

Since the 1st April prescription charges have been reduced to five pounds, a cut of over 25 per cent, with further

phased reduction towards a total abolition of the charges in 2011. The Scottish Government is bringing to an end this unfair tax on ill-health, which impacts most upon the chronically ill. Many people in the West of Scotland will be thousands of pounds a year better off.

This extremely welcome development is another example of this Scottish Government acting to improve the lives of everyone in Scotland.

One Year in Government

This month, May, marks one year since the Government came to power. The First Minister, Alex Salmond, delivered a statement to Parliament on the anniversary of this occasion. He announced the following measures:

- A Scottish university for Sporting Excellence to be based at the University of Stirling.
- An annual £2 million Saltire Innovation Fund.
- A plan to launch a new framework for public accountability called 'Scotland Performs'
- A new pilot scheme by the Government to increase the information available to the public.

This set of measures continues the fast pace of delivery that has been seen in the past year.