

Swinney survives a no confidence vote

Following the U-turn over exam results which he presented to Holyrood earlier this week, along with a sincere apology, John Swinney still had one more hurdle to get over. The Scottish Labour Party had asked for a motion of no confidence to be debated today.

Mr Swinney survived the vote, having placated the Greens with his agreement of all their demands on exam results and the reviews of procedure which will follow. The Greens voted with the SNP to ensure that the Deputy First Minister also retained his education brief.

Mr Swinney announced on Tuesday that the results previously issued to Scottish students would no longer be downgraded from a teacher's estimate. This means that 125,000 results will be reissued by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Exams were not held this year owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

Nicola Sturgeon said in his defence that he was "probably the most honourable individual I have known in my life".

The motion was defeated by 67 votes to 58.



First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP with John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister and Education Secretary Poolphoto/Fraser

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Education spokesperson, Ross Greer MSP said: "I warned for four months that this would happen, and that it would be unacceptable. Unfortunately, the Education Secretary and SQA refused to listen then, but I am glad that they are listening now.

"The Scottish Government has agreed to implement the solutions demanded by the Greens, starting with the restoration of 124,565 grades which were lowered by the SQA's discriminatory 'moderation' system. In this extraordinary year pupils' grades should always have been based on the professional judgement of those who know them best, their teachers."

Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard said: "John Swinney refused to put his confidence in Scotland's school students and teachers – but tonight the SNP and the Greens expressed confidence in John Swinney.

"We moved this motion not out of retribution, but out of our duty, to the school students and teachers the Education Secretary disregarded and disrespected, to say we have no confidence in him to sort out the mess he created.

"As the Education Secretary clings onto his job, he should remember that tonight's vote is not an endorsement of his record of failure. It is an indictment of a governing party which prioritises looking after its own rather than standing up for education, and a so-called opposition party – the Greens – which could be mistaken for the SNP government's back bench.

"Scotland's education system will face many more challenges over the coming weeks, months and years. It is the Scottish Government's duty to ensure our children are never failed in this way again."

Scottish Conservative Holyrood leader, Ruth Davidson,

said: “John Swinney has been a huge contributor to this parliament – but he should have been removed today. For parliamentary responsibility to work, the sanction must fit the scale of the failure and this was the biggest exams failure in the history of devolution.

“When faced with the thousands of students whose dreams were dashed, he dug in and defended the system over the pupils.

“When presented with clear analysis showing children from the most deprived areas were hit hardest, he went on the nightly television news to deny it – saying the ‘data does not bear that out’ – when that’s exactly what the data did do.

“As high a regard as people cross this chamber may hold John Swinney, the timeline of a threat of no confidence and the total U-turn that transpired, opens the education secretary to accusations he cared more about his own job than our children’s futures.

“The scale of this failure is to such a degree that it prompts the question – if this isn’t a resignation matter, then what is?

“John Swinney survived today because of a last-minute pact with the Greens. But the principle of parliamentary responsibility is forever damaged by his clinging on.

“Scottish education desperately needs new leadership and damaged, discredited John Swinney simply isn’t able to deliver it.”

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie said:

“When the policy direction is constantly changing in an erratic and uncontrolled fashion it has an debilitating impact on the organisation. That is when the organisation just does not know what to expect next and loses confidence in the leadership.

“That has been happening to John Swinney for years now. The chopping and changing on the education bill, curriculum for excellence, testing, blended learning, the exams and the falling international standing of our education system are central to the reasons he should leave his post as Education Secretary.”