

# John Swinney announces his retirement from government

Deputy First Minister John Swinney has announced that he is leaving the Scottish Government after nearly 16 years.

He will stand down as Deputy First Minister once a new First Minister is appointed later this month and he says he will return to the backbenches.



The newly redeveloped James Gillespie's campus was officially opened by Deputy First Minister John Swinney MSP and Education Convener Paul Godzik on 26 October 2016 PHOTO ©The Edinburgh Reporter

He is the longest serving Deputy First Minister on record, having held the post for almost nine years, and also served as Education Secretary and two tenures as Finance Secretary, latterly in an interim role.

In a letter to First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, Mr Swinney said it has been an “honour to serve Scotland” and that he has always sought “to transform the life chances of everyone”.

In her reply, the First Minister pays tribute to Mr Swinney’s “deep care and attention to the wellbeing of our nation” and says she could not have wished for a better “partner in government”.



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

John Swinney MSP  
Member of the Scottish Parliament for Perthshire North

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP  
First Minister

2 March 2023

Dear First Minister,

It has been the privilege of my life to serve in the Scottish Government since 2007 as a Cabinet Secretary with responsibility first for Finance and the Economy, then Education and Skills and finally Covid Recovery. It has been my honour to serve Scotland as your Deputy First Minister since 2014.

These have been demanding commitments to fulfil over nearly 16 years and I have decided that, when the First Minister is appointed later in March, I will stand down from Government.

When I joined the Scottish National Party at the age of 15 in 1979, our political prospects were poor and I could scarcely have imagined that over so many years I would have the opportunity to serve Scotland in Government in the way I have.

In all that I have undertaken in Government, I have tried to listen carefully to different views and be open to the ideas and thoughts of people in Scotland. I have sought always to transform the life chances of everyone who lives here. I have acted to make Scotland a fairer, more prosperous and more confident country that I believe would be assured with Independence.

In all of that work, I have deeply valued the advice and professionalism offered to me by so many outstanding civil servants with whom I have had the privilege to work. They are a credit to their service. I have been touched constantly by the kindness of people in Scotland and their understanding of the many challenges with which we have to wrestle in Government. I am grateful to my Ministerial and Parliamentary colleagues for their collaboration and support. And I am indebted to you for your leadership, constancy, friendship and loyalty.

I will continue to faithfully represent my constituents in Perthshire North and look forward to sitting with you on the back benches of the Scottish Parliament to continue our contribution to Scotland's cause.

Thank you for the opportunity you have given me to serve my country.

Yours for Scotland,

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Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP  
First Minister of Scotland



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John Swinney MSP

2 March 2023

Dear John

Thank you for your letter.

Your contribution to our nation, over almost 16 years in government is considerable, indeed unique. Therefore, while I - perhaps more than most - completely understand your decision, I still felt a real sense of sadness when you told me of it.

As Finance and Economy Secretary in our newly formed Scottish Government in 2007, you steered us successfully through budget after budget, laying the foundations for a long list of policy successes.

You were also the architect of a new partnership with local government, and helped negotiate a new financial settlement with the UK government, the Fiscal Framework, resisting the process attempts to strip Scotland of funding.

As Education Secretary, you piloted reforms that are now delivering progress in our mission to close the attainment gap. You presided over an increase in teacher numbers and opened university education to record numbers of young people from the poorest backgrounds.

Perhaps most significantly for the long-term, you delivered the biggest expansion in early learning and childcare in our country's history - a transformation that will change the lives of future generations of children for the better. I know you are as proud of this policy as I am - and rightly so.

Your role in Scotland's recovery from Covid also merits special mention. From the darkest days of the first lockdown, you led our work on the 'four-harms' approach that guided exit from public health restrictions. From a more personal perspective, your friendship and wise counsel during the pandemic, which was by far the most challenging period of my tenure as First Minister, was invaluable and helped me through some really tough days.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

You returned for a second, interim tenure as Finance Secretary just as UK Government mismanagement was causing calamity in the nation's finances and economy. However, in the face of spiralling inflation, you focused firmly on protecting the most vulnerable, tackling child poverty, addressing climate change and building sustainable public services. Bringing to bear all your experience of government – and the deep care and attention to the wellbeing of our nation that I know you feel – you helped protect thousands from the full impact of the cost of living crisis. Securing funding for the expansion of the 'game-changing' Scottish Child Payment was the most important of many initiatives.

There is so much more that I could highlight. Over your years in Government, more than eight years as Deputy First Minister – indeed, the longest serving Deputy First Minister so far – you have made countless contributions to the good of our people and our country.

In short, I could not have wished for a better partner in government than you, and there is no doubt that our Scottish Government would have achieved much less had you not been in it.

Please accept my thanks for your support, wisdom and, above all, friendship as together with Ministers past and present, we sought to make Scotland a better place. As I said when I announced my own departure from office, serving as First Minister has been the privilege of my life - having done so with you by my side as Deputy First Minister has been an honour.

As for the future, I know you will continue to serve Scotland well and that you will be, as you always have been, a source of good advice and wise counsel to our party, government and movement. I look forward to this new phase - for both of us - as we move to the backbenches and make way for the new generation who will now lead Scotland forward.

With grateful thanks and friendship always.

*With all good wishes*  
*Nicola*

**NICOLA STURGEON**



fbpic- Nicola Sturgeon MSP First Minister with John Swinney MSP Deputy First Minister and Education Secretary in the background announces further changes to the Scottish Government Covid-19 lockdown today at the Scottish Parliament Holyrood Edinburgh. Scottish Lockdown Coronavirus. Scotland Scottish politics. Poolphoto/Fraser Bremner/Scottish Daily Mail Thursday 9 July 2020. Picture FRASER BREMNER 09.07.2020