# Controversial proposal to lower school leaving age to 14 sparks debate



Scottish Tory leader Russell Findlay has sparked a contentious debate over the proposal to lower the school leaving age to 14, particularly for students more inclined towards vocational apprenticeships. The proposal aims to offer a pathway for children who are disengaged from the traditional academic environment, a situation that has become notably problematic in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, during which many students have exhibited chronic absenteeism.

Findlay argued that allowing children as young as 14 to leave school for apprenticeships or college courses could effectively address the issues faced by "school refusers". In remarks reported by The Herald, he referred to the plan as "bold" and explicitly stated that students should have an apprenticeship or educational course lined up before leaving school early.

The proposal has elicited a significant backlash from various political figures and education officials. Against this backdrop, Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth categorised the idea as “Dickensian”, indicating her concerns that it may disproportionately affect working-class children, potentially reserving academic pursuits for those from middle and upper-class backgrounds. Gilruth expressed fears that the plan would deprive children of essential academic tools required for their future development, criticizing the move as an attempt to sideline students who are struggling in a conventional setting.

The Scottish Labour Party’s Pam Duncan-Glancy described Findlay’s plan as "outlandish", arguing that it would effectively "write off" young Scots who do not excel academically. Critics fear that the proposal could push vulnerable students into vocational paths prematurely without adequately preparing them for such a transition, particularly in light of an educational system that has been grappling with various challenges, including increasing violence and a substantial attainment gap.

Yet, the proposal hasn't been devoid of support from industry leaders. Notably, Charlie Mullins, a former Tory donor and successful entrepreneur who left school at 15, endorsed Findlay's initiative. He asserted that it represented a lifeline for young people keen to learn trades and earn an income. Additionally, fellow entrepreneur Jim McColl echoed Mullins' sentiments, suggesting that many students currently do not wish to remain in traditional schools and might benefit from alternative approaches that prioritise practical skills and employment.

Despite this support, major industry organisations have raised concerns about the practical implications of allowing younger students to leave school. Fiona Hodgson, the chief executive of the Plumbing and Heating Federation (SNIPEF), labelled the idea "reckless" and "unworkable", pointing out the inherent risks associated with exposing children to workplace environments before they have acquired crucial safety and skills training. Hodgson advocated for greater educational opportunities aimed at older students who are truly ready to engage in vocational training.

Historically, the school leaving age in Scotland has remained at 16 since 1901, with earlier proposals for lowering the age being discussed in past political contexts, including the Scottish Tory party's 2011 Holyrood manifesto. Given the current reactions, it appears unlikely that any significant policy shifts will be made in the near future regarding the school leaving age.

As this debate continues, questions regarding the effectiveness of Scotland's current educational framework persist, particularly in light of concerning trends related to student engagement and performance. The arguments for and against Findlay's proposal reflect a broader discourse on the future of education and the critical balance between academic and vocational pathways for Scotland’s youth.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.scotsman.com/education/plumbing-trade-body-slams-reckless-scottish-tory-proposals-to-allow-pupils-to-leave-school-at-14-5020167> - This article supports the claim that the Scottish Conservatives' proposal to lower the school leaving age has been criticized by industry leaders, such as the Plumbing and Heating Federation, as 'reckless' and 'unworkable'. It highlights concerns about exposing children to workplace risks before they are adequately prepared.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNbmGlUkR2g> - This video corroborates the information that Scottish Tory leader Russell Findlay has called for a public debate on lowering the school leaving age, emphasizing the need for students to have an apprenticeship or educational course lined up before leaving school early.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides the original article discussing the proposal by Russell Findlay and the reactions from various political figures and education officials. It outlines the concerns and support for the proposal, highlighting the broader debate on education pathways in Scotland.
* <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/education/scottish-tories-want-to-allow-pupils-to-leave-school-at-14-for-apprenticeships/> - This article supports the claim that Russell Findlay described the plan as 'bold' and emphasized the need for students to have an apprenticeship or educational course before leaving school early. It also discusses the concerns raised by critics about the potential impact on working-class children.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-education-64811111> - This article provides additional context on the historical school leaving age in Scotland and past proposals to change it. It also discusses the current educational challenges and the reactions from industry leaders and politicians to the proposal.
* <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/scottish-tories-want-to-let-pupils-leave-school-at-14-for-apprenticeships-0r0j5z6g5> - This article supports the claim that the proposal has received mixed reactions, with some entrepreneurs endorsing it as beneficial for young people interested in trades, while others criticize it for potentially sidelining students who struggle academically.