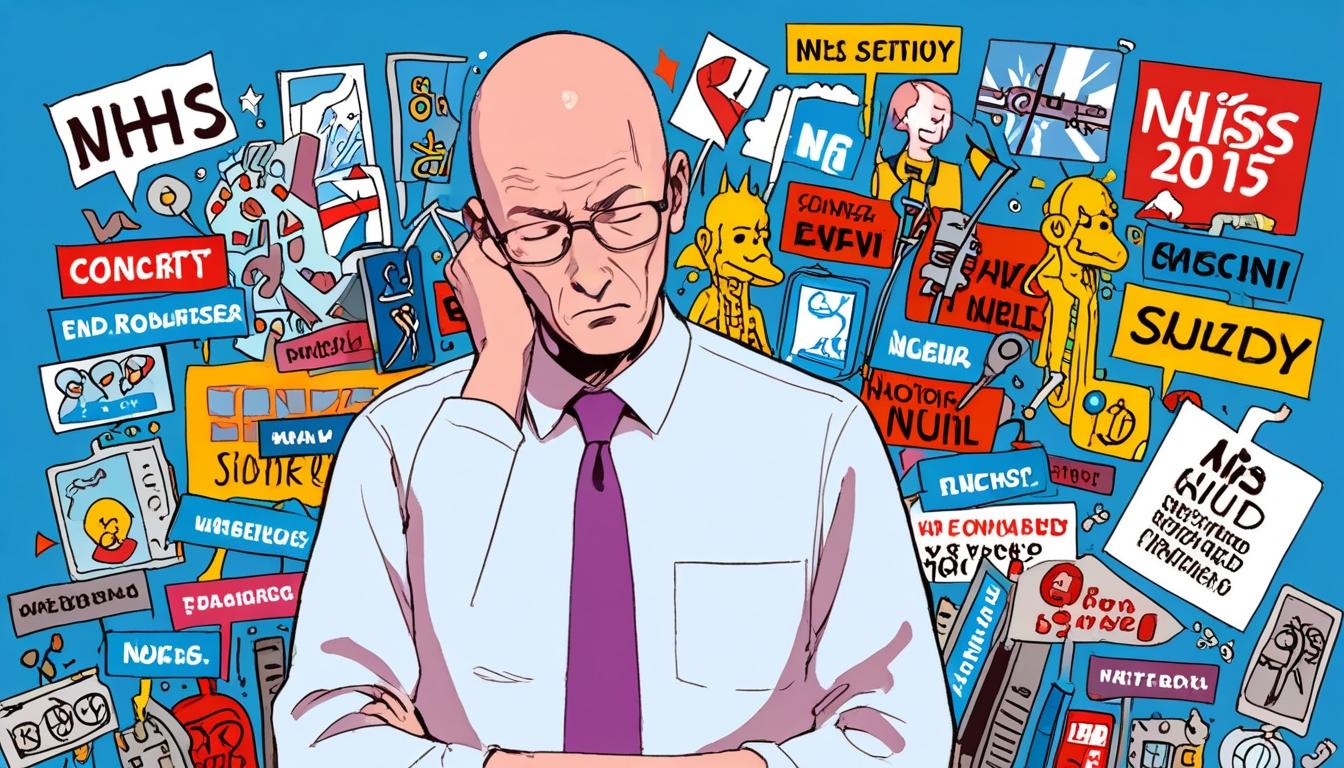
# John Swinney’s first year as First Minister marred by health, infrastructure, and party crises



John Swinney’s inaugural year as First Minister of Scotland has been overshadowed by a series of formidable challenges and deep political upheaval, particularly within his own party, the Scottish National Party (SNP). As he nears the anniversary of his leadership, the fallout from his policies and the growing discontent from various sectors are coming under intensified scrutiny.

A significant area of frustration has emerged within the National Health Service (NHS), which Swinney has boldly promised to transform into a “renewed and stronger” institution. However, a recent health survey by The Press and Journal lays bare the severity of the crisis, revealing that many NHS workers believe the service has regressed, pushing patients toward private healthcare options. For example, a disappointed resident from Culloden resorted to paying £17,000 for a private hip replacement, voicing feelings of betrayal by a system that should be safeguarding public well-being. While Swinney has acknowledged “much more” progress is essential, the looming question is whether his government can genuinely deliver comprehensive healthcare before the next elections or if it will continue to falter.

Infrastructure failures under Mr. Swinney's stewardship have further highlighted his administration's shortcomings. Critical road projects, such as the A9 and A96 dualling, remain incomplete despite promises made over a decade ago, leading to vocal criticism from local politicians. Aberdeenshire Tory MSP Alexander Burnett has denounced Swinney for “betraying” the north-east, as the completion of the A9 project has now been pushed to 2035—ten years later than anticipated. Although Swinney did announce the abolition of peak rail fares starting this September, this minor concession hardly alleviates the disillusionment felt by numerous constituents over delayed infrastructure.

Internally, the SNP's fractious dynamics have added another layer of complexity to Swinney’s leadership. Since the leadership contest won by Humza Yousaf, Highland MSP Kate Forbes has been reinstated as a key player, while Fergus Ewing has signalled his intention not to stand for the party again, potentially running as an independent. This ongoing dissent threatens to undermine Swinney’s authority and control.

Moreover, the SNP's energy policy proposals have issued further cause for alarm. Plans to impose a "presumption against" new oil and gas licenses have faced significant setbacks, with Swinney's recent programme failing to articulate a clear strategy. Business leaders are expressing grave concerns over dwindling confidence and job security in the sector, highlighting the urgent need for a decisive and coherent energy policy.

Education, too, is in turmoil, exemplified by strikes at Robert Gordon University over looming job cuts and financial woes at Aberdeen University resulting in hiring freezes and potential redundancies. With North East College Scotland forced to turn away students amid funding shortages, the educational landscape is on the brink of crisis. Although Swinney’s government allocated £22 million to Dundee University, it underscores a troubling disparity in how funds are distributed, further intensifying pressure as political winds shift.

As Swinney grapples with these multifaceted challenges, the responses from various stakeholders—including a frustrated electorate—will play a crucial role in determining the trajectory of his leadership and the future of the SNP. In the realm of opposition politics, there is growing impatience for a viable alternative that promises stability and effective governance to counter the flaws of the current administration.

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

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