

# Debating Scottish economic data on BBC Scotland at 12.3...

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Less than a month ago I rather innocently, but I think entirely appropriately, [wrote a blog](#) about the lack of suitable data available to the people of Scotland that might inform their choices when a second independence referendum took place. I also sought to make the point that the Scottish government was limited in the same way. The piece was not party political: I am not a member of a party. Not did it have an axe to grind, bar the fact that I wanted to promote informed debate. But it seems that I lit a blue touch paper.

I confess I was unaware of the passion about this issue in Scotland, but I soon became aware of it. Other blogs followed (you can find them [listed here](#)). I have not changed my mind, in the slightest. I hardly need to do so. It is apparent that the data Scotland has is not designed for Scotland's needs because it treats Scotland as if it is just an extrapolated part of the UK as a whole when that is not the case, and does not in any way indicate the extent of Scottish choice over the outcomes in its economy and how these might change if it was independent. Twenty five of the twenty six income variables in the Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS) data are estimates of varying quality and are not necessarily based on actual Scottish information when it is my argument that actual data could, should, and indeed must be collected if meaningful decision making is to take place in Scotland, whether or not it is independent.

Today the debate moves forward. I am discussing this issue on BBC Radio Scotland at 12.30 this lunchtime with presenter John Beattie (who happens to be a chartered accountant) and another guest, although I am not sure who as yet. I hope we can stick to the issues, and they are simply stated.

The first is that this is about Scotland having the data Scotland needs to make decisions. It is powermongering from Westminster that denies it this data. Anyone in Scotland should be annoyed about this if they want the Scottish government to act in their best interests. I fail to see how this is a political issue. Saying that Scotland is not a part of the rest of the UK is not a nationalist claim anymore: it has its own parliament to prove the fact. But without Scottish data that parliament is being asked to govern in the

dark. This would be true whoever held power there. This has to change. The assumptions in GERS are simply inappropriate now.n

Second, when Scotland has taxing powers it is shocking that data on so much of the tax paid in that country is unavailable. Again, this is not just bad for Scotland it is also a bad precedent when devolved tax powers are being discussed for many other parts of the UK. Managing tax without data is impossible. It's ludicrous that this situation has been allowed to develop and it must be addressed if proper decision making is to take place not just in Scotland but in other regions as well.

Third, when it is suggested that Scotland runs a deficit it is only right that Scotland knows how much if this is because of decisions imposed upon it by Westminster and how that situation might change if more powers were devolved or there was independence. Current data is very poor at indicating that.

And, yes, this matters in the independence debate. Of course that must be based on informed debate. And right now that is impossible. We have already seen the consequences of one referendum (the Brexit decision) based in deliberate misinformation. Surely we don't want another one?

I look forward to the discussion.