
CaSE Analysis of Core Commitments – Northern Ireland Elections, 2011

CaSE wrote to each of the main political leaders in Northern Ireland, asking them to set out their policies on science and engineering ahead of the 2011 elections. All of the parties responded. We have analysed the responses, and taken further detail from the party manifestos, to set out what we think their key commitments on science and engineering are.

We do not claim that this analysis is definitive, and we have focused on policies affecting science and engineering, rather than their use – this excludes details on transport, energy, and health infrastructure, for instance. We would therefore recommend that you read the party manifestos and letters for a comprehensive policy overview.

Science, Engineering & Policy-Making

1. What commitments will your party make to ensure that science and engineering advice is at the heart of evidence-based policy making within government?

Alliance Party

- We support the ongoing work of AFBI [Agri-Food and BioSciences Institute] to: produce independent scientific advice to influence the decision making process (Manifesto, page 127)

Democratic Unionist Party

- As we develop our political institutions we want to ensure the highest quality evidence-based public policy development, and that we harness expert advice. (Letter to CaSE)

Social Democratic and Labour Party

- The SDLP believes that government should widely consult in order to gather expert knowledge and opinion, to inform the decision-making process... In government, we would take a similar approach with experts from the science and engineering worlds in order to ensure that good evidence informs policy. (Letter to CaSE)
- The SDLP will make sure the forthcoming literacy and numeracy strategy initiates the type of research and crossdepartmental approach needed to tackle the root causes of educational underachievement which lie in social deprivation. (Manifesto, page 14)

Sinn Fein – no details

Ulster Unionist Party

- We recognise that the science and engineering research base is the foundation of many aspects of policy throughout government departments and consequently if we fail to pay it the attention that it deserves, in the long term we would only be limiting Northern Ireland's potential for growth. (Letter to CaSE)

2. What are your plans for setting out a long-term strategy for science and engineering in Northern Ireland?

Alliance Party – no details

Democratic Unionist Party – no details

Social Democratic and Labour Party – no details

Sinn Fein

- In order to promote innovation and R&D, we propose: Adoption of the EU target of 3% of GDP investment in R & D by 2020. (Manifesto, page 23)

Ulster Unionist Party

- As regards setting out a long term strategy for science and engineering in Northern Ireland, the Ulster Unionist Party would support such a approach to create a vision for science and engineering and translate that into a programme for action. (Letter to CaSE)

3. Will you commit to appointing a dedicated minister for science and a Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA)?

Alliance Party – no details

Democratic Unionist Party

- It is our intention to reduce the number of Government Departments and Ministers rather than creating more but we see no reason why a specific Minister couldn't be directly accountable for science alongside other responsibilities. (Letter to CaSE)

Social Democratic and Labour Party

- In the next Assembly, we want a serious debate with all parties on government reform, including on the number of Stormont departments and ministers. In this context, we would consider the appointment of a dedicated minister for science and a chief scientific advisor, if we believed this would best meet the economic and social needs of the people of the North. (Letter to CaSE)

Sinn Fein – no details

Ulster Unionist Party – no details

Education & skills

1. How will your party make sure that all children in Northern Ireland have access to a stimulating education in science and mathematics taught by appropriately qualified teachers?

Alliance Party

- ... encouraging the uptake of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects is critical to the future success of our economy. There must be investment in these subjects in schools, as well as increasing awareness amongst pupils of the importance and value of studying in these areas. (Letter to CaSE)

Democratic Unionist Party

- The DUP will encourage high quality teaching and prioritisation of STEM subjects, at primary, post-primary and university levels. It is important that non-grammars schools are not overlooked. It is crucial at a time of high unemployment levels amongst young people that apprenticeships are developed and businesses are encouraged to participate in vocational training. (Letter to CaSE)

Social Democratic and Labour Party

- Increasing the number of our young people studying STEM is an essential part of the SDLP's job creation and economic growth strategy... In government we will work with industry, educationalists and young people themselves to examine ways of increasing uptake of STEM subjects, courses and degrees. This is also crucial in retaining and growing the number of STEM teachers in the future. (Letter to CaSE)
- We will also aim to make sure all young people continue with numeracy and maths post-16. (Manifesto, page 14)

Sinn Fein – no details

Ulster Unionist Party

- ... it is a 2011 manifesto commitment of ours that we will continue to support strategies which promote enrolment in STEM subjects. (Letter to CaSE)
- In order to halt this decline in the numbers of young people who were enrolling in STEM subjects, we proposed a systematic review of the subjects in the early years of primary school as well as continuing throughout to post-primary schools. The Ulster Unionist Party believe that all children in Northern Ireland should have access to a stimulating education in science and mathematics taught by appropriately qualified teachers. (Letter to CaSE)
- Not only that but we believe that there needs to be action focused on improving the performance of pupils in STEM subjects, particularly science and mathematics. There also needs to be a programme of support for primary school teachers to ensure that they develop the confidence and enthusiasm to teach science in ways which motivate and engage pupils. We need to make learning in schools more investigative and enquiry based so the relevance of science and mathematics is related to everyday life. (Letter to CaSE)

2. How will you sustainably fund science and engineering courses in your universities?

Alliance Party

- Alliance believes that Government should remain the primary funder of higher education teaching and will resist a move toward the level of student contributions in place in England. (Manifesto, page 57).
- Alliance supports a progressive system of repayment, where the amount paid back is tied to what a student earns and an increase in the repayment threshold to reflect specific Northern Ireland conditions is key. We will also consider the introduction of real rate of interest and a reduction in the student loan subsidy for graduates in the highest income brackets. (Manifesto, page 57).
- We will limit the level of support available to Northern Ireland students studying in GB to the maximum available to Northern Ireland students studying at local universities. (Manifesto, page 57).

- Alliance supports the introduction of parity of funding for part-time participants in higher education. (Manifesto, page 57)

Democratic Unionist Party

- We want our universities over time to be granted greater autonomy so they can attract more private donations. Our manifesto is proposing home loans to encourage STEM graduates to live in Northern Ireland and student loan reliefs for those committing to work in the province for the next decade. (Letter to CaSE).
- continue to oppose any rise in student fees beyond the routine year-on-year inflationary uplifts . (Manifesto, page 13)

Social Democratic and Labour Party

- The SDLP in government would restructure the flawed Budget to ensure adequate long-term support for universities so that students can avail of a wide range of courses, including science and engineering courses. (Letter to CaSE)
- The SDLP will not and cannot support a fees increase, and we will urge the other parties in the Executive to resist and reject it too... To support our graduates, we will introduce further funding for graduate training apprenticeships. (Manifesto, page 16)

Sinn Féin

- Sinn Féin opposed the introduction of student fees and continues to oppose student fees – including any increases (Manifesto, page 17)

Ulster Unionist Party

- The Ulster Unionist Party believe that science and engineering courses in Universities could be funded through various means such as STEM scholarships. Business, professional bodies and the DEL [Department for Employment and Learning] should introduce prestigious scholarships in STEM subjects for students entering Further and Higher Education, targeted at retaining our most able STEM students following graduation. (Letter to CaSE).

4. Other

Alliance Party

- Alliance will work to improve engagement between education suppliers and business, including the development of industry-led innovation and learning communities. Improved engagement is required for two reasons: firstly to ensure our institutions provide the skills required by our employers; and secondly, to support product and process development and encourage research and development and promote innovation activity through our business base. (Manifesto, page 53)
- STEM subjects should be designated as priority skills areas within higher and further education. There must be an uptake in STEM-related subjects across all levels, from entry, to apprenticeship, technician, degree and higher degree. (Manifesto page 54)
- We support the ongoing delivery of apprenticeships, with a focus on their delivery and promotion in non-traditional areas such as IT and science. (Manifesto, page 54)

- An easier transfer between FE and HE in STEM related subjects needs to be facilitated. 10% of STEM students in our universities drop out within the first year, rising to 18% in engineering and technology subjects, this group should be offered alternative pathways within the STEM framework. (Manifesto, page 54)

Democratic Unionist Party

- seek to introduce a graduate home loan scheme for first time buyers with a degree in subjects crucial to improving our economy such as STEM, finance and business- we would investigate the potential for the Student Loans Company to be involved in operating the scheme (Manifesto page 9)
- facilitate unemployed skilled young people, such as trainee teachers to undertake conversion courses to find employment working in STEM areas (Manifesto page 9)
- seek to create a specialist Technology Institute (Manifesto page 13)
- increase the numbers studying STEM subjects (Manifesto page 13)

Ulster Unionist Party

- The Ulster Unionist Party supports the development and encouragement of apprenticeships across a range of businesses and industries. They are important for both the business and the apprentice and it is similarly important that incentives are provided for both. (Manifesto page 29)

Research

1. What will your party do to ensure that excellent researchers from around the world see Northern Ireland's universities and research institutes as the most attractive place to base their work?

Alliance Party

- It is vital that our universities have a strong research emphasis in order to compete in the global education market and ensure that our graduates are held in high esteem. (Manifesto, page 58)
- A Healthier Society... Priorities for research and development need to be identified in collaboration with clinical and academic health and social care professionals in the statutory and voluntary sectors and appropriate resources provided to ensure Northern Ireland has access to future cost-effective interventions. (Manifesto, page 93)

Democratic Unionist Party

- We will promote Northern Ireland's reputation for invention and innovation. We will encourage the research output of our universities, with Queen's University a member of the prestigious Russell group. (Letter to CaSE)
- target resources to technology areas of greatest future potential and exploit niche strengths in our research, development and science bases. (Manifesto, page 9)

Social Democratic and Labour Party

- As we work to rebuild our local economy, the Northern Ireland Executive must take advantage of the huge potential of our universities to further contribute to economic growth and innovation. We want recast the flawed Budget to fund the development of a strategy

and action plan to promote our universities to researchers around the world. For example, there is major potential to highlight that Queen's University Belfast is a member of the Russell Group of Top 20 leading research-intensive universities, thanks to its exceptional quality and quantity of research. (Letter to CaSE).

- The SDLP also supports expansion plans to increase the number of students studying at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster from 3,500 to almost 10,000. This would add an additional £1 billion per year to Derry's economy by 2040, and ensure Magee retains its appeal to researchers on a global scale. (Letter to CaSE).
- As part of our skills development policy which will underpin the future of the North's agri-food sector growth, we will channel investment to further develop training opportunities in food production, research and development. (Manifesto, page 8)
- Secondly, we will look at ways of increasing the use of renewable energy in transport, through increased investment in R&D for the transport sector. (Manifesto, page 36)

Sinn Fein – no details

Ulster Unionist Party

- However we need to continue to ensure that funding is made available to research and that certain subjects which are not currently represented, such as statistics and applied mathematics, as these have now been areas where research is needed. (Letter to CaSE).
- Therefore the Ulster Unionist Party is committed to; The nurturing of links between our universities and colleges and our local businesses; Supporting the ongoing funding of world class research and development projects at our universities; Supporting the building of a one-stop shop for training for industry, including inward investment; (Manifesto, page 30)

Innovation and growth

1. What will your party do to provide an environment that encourages industries based on science and engineering to locate in Northern Ireland, and that encourages higher levels of private-sector investment in research and development?

Alliance Party

- Alliance is committed to encouraging and facilitating research and development... R&D policies must be outcome rather than input driven with funding leading to the commercialisation of ideas or products and the granting of licences, patents and intellectual property rights. Success must be measured on the return that it generates rather than the level of monies invested. Alliance supports a realignment of the Invest NI strategy to support investment in businesses and projects with a high degree of innovation and R&D content. (Manifesto, page 14)
- Alliance calls for the exploration of a commercially orientated research organisation. The promotion of public, private, education partnerships are required to ensure there is a strong focus on the practical application of research. These partnerships should be industry led. Alliance supports the promotion of Knowledge Transfer Partnership between businesses and higher and further education. The sharing of expertise and knowledge is vital in supporting the increased competitiveness of our businesses. (Manifesto, page 15)
- Alliance will work to rationalise the innovation funding landscape to ensure both clarity for business and reduce administration costs. In addition the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI should ensure that they maximise funding from the EU Seventh Framework Programme (SP7) to fund R&D and innovation. (Manifesto, page 15)

- Alliance will support the development of incubation and cluster zones. A joined up approach is required involving a step change in the use of enterprise parks and facilities to support high growth start up and early stage businesses through networking, clustering of expertise, appropriate peer mentoring, advice and support and links with universities, colleges and European and international trading partners. Where possible these parks should be developed to encourage the clustering of similar companies or those associated in the supply chain. These facilities should link with higher and further education, research and development centres of excellence and major companies. (Manifesto, page 18)
- The agriculture sector invests heavily in research and development and in growing skills. Both the Agri-Food and BioSciences Institute (AFBI) and the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) are highly regarded institutions. It is vital that there is on-going collaboration between these organisations and the wider business base and skills providers to ensure the sector is embedded within economic development. Technology transfer and information sharing must be a key element of the strategy to ensure that ideas, processes and product development make it from the classroom to the farm. Alliance supports the inclusion of AFBI and CAFRE in key business and college/university collaboration funds. (Manifesto, page 124)

Democratic Unionist Party

- We want our businesses and industry to increase innovation and research and development. We want to reduce corporation tax to 10% in Northern Ireland, and will expand knowledge transfer in Northern Ireland. (Letter to CaSE)
- The DUP will have the economy and employment as priorities for the incoming four years. DUP ministers will focus on [four areas, including] research and development. (Manifesto, page 8)
- increase commercialisation of intellectual property from the local university and company research base (Manifesto, page 9)
- continue to press the case for initiatives such as tax breaks for research and development (Manifesto, page 9)
- support Research and Development in renewable and low carbon technologies (Manifesto, page 26)

Social Democratic and Labour Party

- The SDLP will work in the next Executive to breathe new life into R&D investment and secure better all-island cooperation to exploit the potential of Framework 7, ahead of 2013. We will establish an expert team which would quickly identify the R&D opportunities attached to science and engineering, to facilitate researchers and companies in accessing a greater proportion of FP7 funds. We will also argue the case for continued EU programmes in support of R&D post-2013 with our colleagues in the Party of European Socialists, and in the North South Ministerial Council. (Letter to CaSE)
- The SDLP also proposes creating a virtual 'Open Faculty for Innovation'. This Open Faculty would serve as a platform to engage and encourage not only those studying science and engineering in our universities and our regional colleges, but also those working within science and engineering businesses to work towards achieving a culture that thinks innovation, works innovation and grows innovation. (Letter to CaSE)
- lowering corporation tax, in order to attract more multi-national science and engineering powerhouses to Northern Ireland. (Letter to CaSE)

- The Department for Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI) and Invest NI must integrate their long-term strategies for economic growth with the Irish government's plans to intensify efforts to create the best research, innovation and commercialisation ecosystem in Europe: the 'innovation island.' (Manifesto, page 10)
- we will scope the establishment of a fund to which grid companies and/or wind energy developers could bid for support for research and investment in significant new wind connections. (Manifesto, page 11)

Sinn Fein

- Campaigning for more support for small and medium business sectors, and for the social economy sector, including tax breaks/ incentives and consideration of enterprise zones. (Manifesto, page 11)
- Launch a specific job creation strategy refocusing the activities of Invest NI and its work towards innovation and R&D. (Manifesto, page 22)
- Draw down an additional 100 million from the EU 'Seventh Framework Programme' over the next two years to fund Research and Development and promote innovation (Manifesto, page 22)
- There should also be immediate application to EU programmes to help the North with its investment needs. (Manifesto, page 23)
- In order to promote innovation and R&D, we propose: Adoption of the EU target of 3% of GDP investment in R & D by 2020; Tax incentives for R&D; Developing all-Ireland networks to promote best practice and shared research; Promoting all-Ireland networks of universities and centres of R&D expertise in specific sectors; Increasing access to the 7th Framework with measurable targets for support for R&D; Development of a single body to promote innovation and high-tech industry across Ireland and to promote access to the global market place and capital. (Manifesto, page 23)

Ulster Unionist Party

- Private sector investment in research and development could be achieved through encouraging business to develop and lead a framework of stakeholders which will engage directly with schools, Colleges, Universities and Government to promote STEM and create a willingness in the private sector to get involved in research and development in relation to science and engineering. (Letter to CaSE)
- The Ulster Unionist Party believes that lowering corporation tax and making Northern Ireland an economic enterprise zone will have the effect of attracting a number of industries, including science and engineering, to Northern Ireland. (Letter to CaSE)
- Research & Development and Innovation. This area is critical to the private sector's future prospects. The Ulster Unionist Party will work to promote, advance and embed the culture of Research & Development and Innovative thinking by showcasing the successes of those already succeeding in this area, such as the roll-out companies created by our two universities. (Manifesto, page 9)