

Northern Ireland elections 2016 – Response from the DUP

Ahead of the 2016 Northern Ireland elections, the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) wrote to the leaders of all political parties with at least one MLA, inviting them to set out their party's policies on science and engineering.

Below is the response from the DUP.

Investment

Research and development has been a key element of the work carried out by Invest Northern Ireland. Arlene Foster and Jonathan Bell as Economy Ministers have placed research and development as a key area for growth within Invest NI and the Executive.

The DUP will continue to prioritise collaboration between our universities and industry in developing innovation and working towards gaining a competitive advantage for companies doing business here. Going forward it is key that universities and innovators are enabled to work more closely together and this will be a priority for the DUP in the next mandate.

The DUP fought for and secured the devolution of corporation tax to the Northern Ireland Executive. A reduction in corporation tax to 12.5% will undoubtedly encourage business from all sectors and industries to look at Northern Ireland as a viable place to set up and sustain their company. The DUP has pledged to examine the impact of a further cut in corporation tax to 10%.

Corporation tax is not the only lever available to Northern Ireland in encouraging businesses to establish themselves here. Many FDI investors have pointed to the Assured Skills programme as a key driver in making an initial investment, but more crucially to reinvesting in Northern Ireland. Assured Skills seeks to assure potential investors, and existing employers considering expansion, that the skills they need to support a growing business can be found in Northern Ireland. This programme needs to be built upon and expanded to give industry further confidence to invest in Northern Ireland.

Education & skills

The DUP would generally favour a stronger focus on science in schools. Regarding teacher training there is good work to be built upon that is ongoing at Stranmillis College, and in particular mentoring arrangements where there is a pairing of trainee teachers with a science background but little teaching experience along with experienced teachers who lack confidence/ knowledge of science. Similarly there is much to be gained through collaborative arrangements between schools so that there can be peer learning on science. We are strongly supportive of the involvement of science in continuing professional development.

On the question of the World Around Us, there is a lack of confidence in teachers in the science element. This leads to them concentrating their teaching on history and geography. The solutions are twofold- CPD; and not breaking up the World Around Us but some form of guidance specifying at least a minimum level of science content.

We want to see greater employer involvement with the curriculum and linkages with teachers, and there is a key role for engineering firms in this area in particular.

Widening pathways of vocational subjects will lead to a greater involvement in engineering and practical science.

The new skills barometer will match pupils much better with the real world of work, which will help a shift from obsession with the traditional professions to a greater focus amongst other things on science and engineering.

A shake up of careers advice to professionalise it again will shift focus towards applied science, technology and engineering.

Science, Engineering & Policy-Making

The DUP believes that it is important the best data is used when making informed public policy decisions. That means utilising the expertise of professions from across different disciplines, including science. The best evidence must be used to guide policy.

Scientific advice and knowledge from research are vital to government policy formation. A range of professional staff provide scientific advice to Ministers, and in addition Departments have links with or membership on a wide range of expert committees at UK level.

The DUP Health Minister last year announced the appointment of Professor Ian Young as the Chief Scientific Advisor to the Department of Health in Northern Ireland.

In addition to providing scientific advice to Ministers and Departments, a chief scientific adviser helps raise the profile of research and development, builds partnerships with the external scientific community, promotes local R&D, provides leadership in the implementation of our R&D strategy and provides advice on development of the wide range of health care scientists that are vital to current work.