

Welsh elections 2016 – Response from Plaid Cymru

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

Below is the response from the leader of Plaid Cymru

Dear Sarah Main,

Thank you for your letter dated 23rd March asking for Plaid Cymru's position on science and technology related policies. We agree that science and engineering is crucial to Wales' future. Plaid Cymru wants Wales to be a world-leader in science and technology. Our manifesto is full of innovative and ambitious policies that draw upon international best practice to our vision.

Investment

We will establish a National Innovation Body, working in partnership with the private sector, to achieve our target of doubling Welsh R&D expenditure spend as a % of GVA to the OECD average of 2.3%. The NIB will fund a national network of sector-led Research and Technology Centres, on the Fraunhofer or Catapult model, similar to SPECIFIC in Baglan and the new Advanced Compound Semiconductor Centre in Cardiff.

Our economic development programme includes and 'Innovation Foundry': Creating clusters of more specialized high tech and innovative companies, extending the UK's southern 'arc of innovation' and 'northern powerhouse' westwards. This includes the development of indigenous spin-out and start-up firms plus the targeted attraction of foreign direct innovation, creating high-skill jobs in high-tech firms with high-growth potential.

This change in culture and extra investment will help encourage science and engineering industries locate and remain in Wales.

Education and Skills

We recognise that sciences and technology have wider benefits to the economy. That is why we want to see STEM subjects promoted in schools by good quality teachers. It isn't right that Wales performs worst in the UK when it comes to science. To tackle this, we would attract and retain the best teachers in Wales through a teacher's premium, rewarding excellence in teaching.

We will also support women and girls to follow careers in key growth areas, especially in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) fields.

Plaid Cymru has announced reforms to student finance in Wales, scrapping the tuition fee grant and instead issuing a Learning Bond to students who return to Wales after graduating. This Learning Bond

is the equivalent of £6,000 a year. Reforming student finance in this way reaches a peak saving of £235m in 2021. This saving will be used to plug the funding gap which has been created by the Welsh Labour Government, improving research outcomes.

As a part of this, we have pledged that we will create a Higher Education Innovation Fund to support R&D and spinout activity within our University sector, and seek the devolution of Research Councils and Innovate UK monies to Wales to the NIB and a new Welsh Research Council.

In order to help to attract doctors and develop our own life-science industries, we will make the NHS the most research friendly health service in Europe. As part of our pledge to recruit an extra 1000 doctors, we have pledged to pay off tuition fees in full for medical students who study and work in Wales.

Science, Engineering and Policy-Making

Plaid Cymru wants to see a new transparent and dynamic way of governing. We will strengthen trust in the Welsh Government through:

- Publishing all ministerial decisions and holding public cabinet meetings across the nation
- By committing to the principles of Open Government in all areas of the Welsh Government's responsibilities
- By designating all private contractors public to bodies as subject to section 5 of the Freedom of Information Act

We want to see an evidence and research-based approach to policy-making. This is why we are advocating expert-led and evidence-based efficiency reviews in our manifesto.

We are also advocating the publication of documents such as the Governmental Expenditure Review Wales based on the Scottish GERS model which enhances the public understanding of fiscal issues in Scotland.

Feel free to get in touch if you'd like more information.

Yours sincerely,

Leanne Wood