

Northern Ireland elections 2016 – Response from the UUP

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 UUP.

Thank you for your letter regarding investment in science and technology, and the position of the Ulster Unionist Party on this important subject area.

All the major parties in Northern Ireland will be engaging in negotiations about a forming a multi party government (plus opposition) post the election. We can absolutely give a commitment that the party recognises the importance to our economy and society of fully embracing evidence based policy making and the scientific method.

Regarding the specific request to appoint a Science Minister, this will not be possible at this time because of a recent agreement to reform the Executive with 10 Departments.

So for the time being science will be a cross cutting issue across primarily, the new Department of the Economy and the new Department of Education.

We will absolutely resist any efforts to bring non science into science lessons in our schools, which has been suggested from time to time by other parties in Northern Ireland.

The Ulster Unionist Party has published a suite of policy papers in the run-up to this election

<http://uup.org/our-vision/policies#our-vision>

<http://uup.org/our-vision/policies#the-knowledge-economy->

<http://uup.org/our-vision/policies#2016-manifesto>

The following points in our manifesto answer a number of your questions:

Northern Ireland is a global leader in medical research and local breakthroughs have undoubtedly saved millions of lives across the world, yet despite this we have been too slow to incorporate technology into the delivery of care here.

Whilst some new technologies and medical treatments are available, with the availability to the patient being neither automatic nor consistent, we are still trailing far behind some other nations in the adoption of new medical techniques.

Through maximising the technology that exists we believe we could better improve patient care through more effective, targeted health interventions which in turn would lead to significantly fewer adverse health events.

We will:

- Utilise technology such as new genomic tests, biomarkers, electronic sensing devices and smart technologies such as the d Nav insulin system for diabetes, to specifically identify people either with or at risk of disease and trigger preventive and supportive care;
- By 2021 ensure that every patient and service user has access to their individual electronic medical record;
- Develop new a new system of comprehensive data collection and access for clinical purposes, including a national genomic database;
- Invest in a new integrated IT system which links staff between primary and secondary care and which reduces the administrative burden on them.

The Ulster Unionist Party recognises the continuing central importance of manufacturing for creating jobs and economic growth. We appreciate the fact that around 90% of manufacturing companies based in Northern Ireland are locally owned. Recent heavy job losses represent a major setback, and despite the Minister's claims to the contrary, many companies find themselves in a very difficult situation. *Northern Ireland* needs a *Manufacturing Renaissance*.

Manufacturing creates wealth, putting money in people's pockets. These are well paid jobs: on average around 20% higher than the service sector. There can be no real debate about the effect of the imminent introduction of the National Minimum Wage.

It is imperative that policies implemented by the new Department of the Economy protect the 85,000 plus existing jobs in manufacturing, which make a contribution of 14% to our Gross Domestic Product.

We will:

- Address the competitive disadvantages of doing business in Northern Ireland;
- Involve the Unions and business organisations including Manufacturing NI in drawing up and implementing a bespoke, long term manufacturing strategy;
- Set a target to match the EU target of having 20% of GDP related to manufacturing industry;
- Support a long term commitment to keep the 30% cap on industrial rates to recognise the vital importance of the sector.
- Without investment in infrastructure, we will not be able to maximise our advantages. Roads, rail, airports, power stations and grids all have 30+ years life spans, but many of these are already reaching the ends of their lives. We need to invest, province wide, in cost effective energy smart grids, latest generation information networks, an integrated road/rail transport system, cycling networks, airlinks, affordable logistics systems, that support our economy and, where it makes sense, fully integrating our communication systems across all these Islands.

With the right decisions made in a timely fashion, we can transform our country to one that supports our vision of Northern Ireland as a peaceful, prosperous, innovative, welcoming, stable and secure region; the leading place in the United Kingdom to do research, build that business, raise that family, at ease within itself and with its neighbours, working cooperatively, integrating when it is appropriate, always looking after its own best interests.

We would:

- Equip the agri-food industry to grow and evolve further through the provision of skills, education and training that address gaps and long term industry needs ;
- Promote the broad range of careers in the agri-food industry;

- Ensure that the Department for the Economy fully recognises the importance of the agri-food industry and our rural areas to our economy by for example promoting food tourism and unique aspects of Northern Ireland's natural heritage, such as the Ulster Way, as key parts of our tourism offering ;
- Support research and development to help drive further innovation, build upon the excellent work of local researchers to further develop collaborative networks and seek to continually improve the transfer of research and knowledge to farm level;

In addition I would draw your attention to our paper on the Knowledge economy which covers some of the areas of particular interest to your campaign.

- Introduce a course on professional soft skills, financial and business awareness
- Ensure schools promote and provide access to contemporary market-relevant subjects like Mandarin and Entrepreneurship
- Consult on establishing Computing and Entrepreneurship as core curriculum subjects
- Consult on establishing English and Maths as a continued educational requirement for those in full-time education
- Consider ways of increasing the incentives to attract and retain STEM subject teachers
- Introduce careers education within the school curriculum on a par with the attention devoted to curriculum subjects
- Ensure that school key performance indicators reflect the importance of careers advice, and introduce earlier than the recommended age of 16-18
- Adopt recommendations as they emerge from the newly-established Careers Advisory Forum
 - Establish a peripatetic arms-length careers advisory service, leading the delivery of careers provision to support nominated careers teachers
 - Set out a formal structure for developing links between schools and local businesses, to include mentoring and work experience for all pupils