

# GCSE



Revised GCSE  
Student Guidance  
**Government  
& Politics**

**The Northern Ireland  
Political Parties**

For first teaching from September 2017







## The Alliance Party for Northern Ireland

### History

Alliance was founded in 1970 with the objective of healing the bitter divisions in our community. We believe in a shared society, free from intimidation, discrimination and fear, where everyone is safe, can play their part and is treated fairly and with respect. We believe in a society for everyone. Alliance members contributed to the creation of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

### Key aims and beliefs

Alliance believes that a shared future will enable us to build a stronger Northern Ireland, making it a more attractive place to invest and leading to an increase in employment opportunities. We want to see more integrated schools, to help Northern Ireland move forward as a shared society. We want to see a society where mixed housing is the norm and public buildings and spaces are open to everyone. We want to celebrate Northern Ireland's cultural diversity and find an inclusive way to display flags, and agreement on how to regulate parades. We want a shared, inclusive process to deal with our past, which includes input from all political parties and the British and Irish Governments.

#### ***Specific policies on:***

#### **The Economy:**

Alliance believes a prosperous Northern Ireland is based around private enterprise, job creation and increased exports. Our economy is held back by the costs of division, which makes it difficult to attract investors. Tackling a divided society and creating economic prosperity go hand-in-hand.

A joined-up approach (everyone working together) to the economy is essential. That is why we supported the reorganisation of government departments in 2016 which means that the Minister for the Economy now also has responsibility for further and higher education, including skills.

Our proposals to boost the economy in Northern Ireland include:

- giving the Assembly the power to raise and lower tax rates to stimulate economic growth;
- supporting small businesses to grow;
- supporting industries with significant potential to become world leaders, such as the agri-food industry, cultural industries, ICT, tourism and the social economy;
- improved infrastructure;
- investment in renewable energy to tackle climate change and create jobs; and
- protecting town centres and high streets by: supporting independent shops, keeping business rates low and opposing charges for on-street parking.

## Education

Improving our schools will tackle a divided society and create a prosperous economy.

Currently, Northern Ireland spends more on the school system as a whole than anywhere else in the UK. However, less of this money makes it through to the frontline (classroom) than anywhere else in the UK. This needs to change.

Integrated education is a key part of Alliance's plans. It allows children from different backgrounds to be educated together. We support targets to increase the number of children in integrated education, backed up by legislation to make it easier to establish new integrated schools and help existing schools to integrate.

Our other plans to improve education in Northern Ireland include:

- increased spending on early and primary education;
- building consensus on what should replace the 11+; and
- providing additional resources to children with learning disabilities to ensure they can reach their potential.

## The Environment

Alliance is an environmentalist party. We believe that climate change is happening and that humanity is responsible. However, we are optimistic that this very serious danger can be addressed. We support a sustainable Northern Ireland, as part of a sustainable world. Alliance is a consistent and vocal advocate for the environment.

## Immigration

Alliance believes in an open and free society. We welcome the vital role immigration has played in Northern Ireland's economy, in both the public and private sector.

Alliance believes that we should:

- ensure regional flexibility is built into immigration strategy (the UK Parliament is responsible for immigration);
- make the visa system simpler and easier; and
- continue to argue that the UK should fully contribute to its international obligations to look after refugees and people fleeing persecution.



## The Democratic Unionist Party

### History

The DUP was formed in 1971. The leader was Dr Ian Paisley, the MP for North Antrim at Westminster. He was also elected to the European Parliament in 1979. Three more DUP MPs were elected to Westminster in the same year, including Peter Robinson, and a further 3 in 1983. The party opposed the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, which gave the Republic of Ireland a say in Northern Ireland affairs. It also opposed the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement.

In 2003, the DUP became the largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly, although the Assembly was suspended at that time. It won 36 seats in the Assembly elections in March 2007, following the St Andrews Agreement in October 2006 and Dr Paisley became the First Minister. He was succeeded by Peter Robinson in 2008 and the DUP remained the biggest party following the 2011 Assembly elections, with 36 MLAs. Arlene Foster became leader in December 2015 and First Minister in January 2016. In the May 2016 election, 38 MLAs were returned to the Assembly. In the 'snap' election of March 2017, with the number of MLAs reduced from 108 to 90, the DUP returned 28 MLAs. In the 'snap' Westminster election held in June 2017, the DUP won 10 of the 18 Northern Ireland seats and agreed an arrangement with the Conservative Party to enable the Conservatives to form a government.

### Key aims and beliefs

The DUP wants Northern Ireland to celebrate its centenary (2021) as a beacon of achievement within the United Kingdom and wants to strengthen our relationship within the United Kingdom. It wants Northern Ireland to have a global reputation as a thriving economy with a skilled and dedicated workforce; and as a place which is welcoming to all and 'the place to visit' as a tourist destination.

#### ***Specific policies on:***

#### **The Economy:**

Growing the economy and creating jobs is the DUP's top priority. This focus has helped rebuild our economy in the aftermath of the global economic crisis. Northern Ireland has seen the unemployment rate drop from 58,644 in 2011 to 39,320 in 2016. The DUP wants to keep our economy moving forward positively by creating more and better jobs.

The DUP wants to lower rates of Corporation Tax rates to encourage investment. It puts the development of manufacturing at the centre of its economic strategy, with a focus on skills development (including apprenticeship programmes), supporting entrepreneurs and helping companies to increase their exports.

Northern Ireland has seen its tourism sector flourish in recent years, but there is still untapped potential. The DUP is committed to driving up tourist spending in Northern Ireland.

#### **Education**

The DUP has worked hard to improve the educational outcomes of our children through its leadership

of the Assembly's Education Committee from 2007 until the 2016 election. The party seeks to promote excellence in our education system and maximise the potential of every young person by tackling educational underachievement.

The DUP will defend the parts of our education system that produce some of the best educational outcomes in the United Kingdom. We support academic selection and wish to see a transfer process that is straightforward for children and parents. With the growth of the knowledge economy and need for digital skills, it is vital that the curriculum is up to date.

The DUP remains fully committed to maintaining university fees at a level that will keep university places affordable and allow everyone in our society to have access to a university place.

## **The Environment**

Environment issues come under the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The DUP wants the creation of a special environmental division within the Department to help improve our natural environment.

The DUP wants policies which reduce negative environmental impacts while ensuring that our economy prospers. It also supports policies which protect our coastline and increase our woodland creation. Our natural heritage is part of what makes Northern Ireland a unique place to live or visit. It is something we wish to pass on to future generations in a beautiful, strong and sustainable form. This will also involve improving the public's access to that heritage and how the public treat it.

The DUP is committed to developing a Greenway Network across Northern Ireland that provides traffic free space for walkers and cyclists for both leisure and commuting. The DUP wants to launch a campaign to reduce litter on public roads.

## **Immigration**

The DUP believes in an immigration policy that is effective and which meets the skills, labour and security needs of the UK.

The rights of British citizens in the EU and those from EU member states living here must be safeguarded.



(SDLP)

## History

The SDLP was founded in 1970 and is the party of civil rights. Throughout its history, the SDLP has never deviated from its core values and vision of a reconciled people living in a united, just and prosperous new Ireland. We have always been completely opposed to all violence. From our earliest days - as illustrated in the 1972 Policy Document "Towards a New Ireland" - we argued for an agreement that addressed the three core sets of relationships; between Nationalists and Unionists in the North, between North and South, and between Britain and Ireland. These relationships are now at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement.

We want to use the institutions established by the Agreement to generate a stronger economy, grow greater solidarity in our community and build a better society for all.

## Key aims and beliefs

As the party of civil rights, the SDLP is working for an Ireland free from poverty, prejudice and injustice: a vibrant country where economic prosperity delivers better public services and greater opportunities for all. The SDLP wants to build an Ireland where conflict, violence and sectarianism become footnotes to our past. The SDLP wants this generation and those that will follow to live in an Ireland that stands tall in the world as a champion of global justice, environmental protection and sustainable development: an Ireland that stands out as a beacon of hope for peace, democracy, human rights and respect for diversity.

### ***Specific policies on:***

#### **The Economy:**

Our plan for revitalising the economy is based on providing regionally balanced investment in infrastructure, job creation and young workers.

The Northern Ireland economy can only grow and develop if it generates more employment and focuses on securing better paid jobs. While all job investment is welcome, we need to raise skill levels to attract more well-paid jobs in the Information and Communications Technology sector and other professional services. This will also stem the flow of our young people emigrating in pursuit of a better economic future.

The SDLP believes that skills education and training should be reviewed to ensure that we better meet the future needs of a modern, fast-moving economy. The SDLP recognises that, in addition to extra support for further education, the development of skills through quality apprenticeships is also essential to economic success.

The SDLP continues to support our traditional manufacturing and service sectors while prioritising newer sectors with significant potential for growth and export, such as Agri-food and tourism.

## Education

A high quality education system is the cornerstone of a progressive society and plays a vital role in preparing children and young people for the future.

Northern Ireland has a fragmented and disjointed education system which fails too many of our young people. While a minority leave school with better qualifications than their counterparts elsewhere on these islands, many leave school lacking essential skills.

Investment in educating children is investment in our economy and in our ability to compete globally. Equipping our pupils with cutting edge skills will create a sustainable, vibrant economy, able to generate the jobs which allow young people to enjoy prosperity and employment throughout their lives.

We recognise the value of faith-based education and the initiative of various churches in this regard. The SDLP is committed to parental choice and access for pupils to faith-based, integrated, Irish medium and state education. We want to see local schools based within and supported by local communities.

## The Environment

The SDLP has a clear focus - to create a cleaner, greener environment for us and future generations. We have a consistent record in supporting greater environmental awareness in Northern Ireland and reducing wastage within organisations and public bodies, including calling for councils and public services to become 'single-use-plastic-free'. It was an SDLP Environment Minister who introduced a Bill (2014) to extend the carrier-bag levy to all carrier bags (not just single-use bags).

The SDLP has consistently championed the introduction of Climate Change Legislation. Northern Ireland is the only region throughout Ireland, Britain and indeed most of Europe that lacks any legislation on climate change. Tailored legislation is the best way to recognise the realities and provide clarity to all industries and businesses regarding their environmental responsibilities.

The SDLP supports the 'Green Flag Eco-Schools' programme which has brought environmental awareness to younger generations in Northern Ireland, and seeks to expand it to other public institutions, e.g. hospitals. It fundamentally opposes the introduction of fracking in Northern Ireland, due to serious concerns around protection of our water supply and rural landscapes. The SDLP supports the development of new, safe and renewable sources of energy.

## Immigration

The SDLP opposes racism and xenophobia in all its forms. We believe that a shared future in Northern Ireland will only be achieved with the full inclusion of traditional communities and newer communities who have come to make a new home here. Although immigration is a reserved matter (Westminster is responsible for policy in this area), the SDLP believes it is important that decisions in this area should protect EU nationals after Brexit. The SDLP also believes that, as people in the North have a birthright to be citizens of Ireland, and thus European citizens, they should retain all of the benefits of EU membership.



## Sinn Féin

### History

Our Party was founded in 1905 and is the only all-Ireland party on the island.

We have elected representatives in the Dáil, 22 Teachtaí Dála (TDs) and 6 Seanadóirí (Senators); in the northern Assembly we have 27 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs); in Westminster we have 7 Members of Parliament (MPs) elected on a policy of abstentionism; and in the European Parliament we have 4 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). We also have around 250 elected councillors across the island.

We are the largest nationalist party in the Assembly and the major opposition party in the Dáil. We are the largest left-wing party in Ireland. Party Uachtarán (President) is Mary Lou McDonald and Leas Uachtarán (Vice-President) is Michelle O'Neill.

### Key aims and beliefs

We are a 32-County party striving for an end to partition on the island of Ireland and the establishment of a democratic socialist Irish republic in line with the Proclamation declared at Easter 1916. Our desire to see a democratic socialist republic established that best serves the needs of all of the people, rather than elites in our society, firmly locates us on the left of politics in Ireland.

We believe that a united Ireland offers the best future for all the people of Ireland. We believe that Irish reunification is needed if we are to address the divisions of the past and to build social and economic prosperity to meet the needs of all of our people.

#### ***Specific policies on:***

#### **The Economy:**

Sinn Féin believes that people should be put at the heart of an economy. An economy should serve society, not the other way round. We believe that a successful economy produces and redistributes wealth via the tax and welfare systems. Sinn Féin sees employment, education and training as a right, and it recognises activity not currently measured by modern economies, such as housework, child rearing, caring and volunteering.

Key Sinn Féin economic policies include:

- Governments should save in good times (booms) so they can spend in the bad (recessions).
- Income tax should be fair and progressive (those with higher incomes pay more). Welfare spending should be protected and based on achieving a decent living standard for recipients and supporting people to re-enter the workforce.

- The state should provide essential services to the economy (nationalised/state services), e.g., a state bank, a state IT company (telephone/broadband etc.), a state health system, state transport and state schools & universities. While private enterprise is essential to economic success, the state also has a huge role to play.
- We caution against over-reliance on attracting foreign direct investment over the growth of indigenous (home-grown) industries. We are not an 'isolationist' party - we recognise the importance of international trade and inward investment. However, we believe that home-grown industries need greater government support.
- We support the protection of wages and income, and have strong policies on workers' rights. Workers are at the heart of an economy and should be treated as such, not just as a means to make profit. We believe in the right to join and be represented by a trade union. We support workers being paid a 'living wage'.

## Education

Sinn Féin believes that education is a basic and fundamental human right. An education system should assist everyone, without exception, to develop their full potential. Education is a lifelong process and individuals should be able to access it at any age and stage of their lives.

Key education policies include:

- Spending on education should be in keeping with best international practice;
- Schools should be properly funded and resourced;
- Government should provide an adequate number of schools and universities, and trained teachers/lecturers, including language and special needs support teachers;
- Addressing poverty in the education system by expanding breakfast clubs, school meals and book lending in primary schools, and providing adequate grants to third level students;
- Placing a new emphasis in the school curriculum on civic education - the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and encouragement of voluntary activity across society; and
- An end to the 11+/transfer test.

## The Environment

Sinn Féin recognises the importance of tackling environmental problems that threaten not only our own future but that of future generations. We are committed to sustainable development and want to see Ireland moving to a low carbon and, ultimately, zero carbon society. We support economic development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

We support:

- the use of environmentally safe and sustainable energy sources;
- investment in improved energy efficiency and conservation;
- safeguarding of our rivers, lakes, wetlands, coastal zones and oceans;

- sustainable use of natural resources, such as water, soils and forests;
- policies and legislation that will reduce pollution; and minimise the creation of waste, especially hazardous waste and, wherever possible, enable recycling of materials; and
- safe and responsible methods of waste disposal.

## Immigration

No nation knows more about migration than the Irish. Our people are dispersed across the world. Our patterns of migration have been based on social and economic need and persecution.

Our experience of migration means that we understand the needs of those who arrive on our shores. Our policy is one of welcome. We want to ensure that new migrants are treated fairly and integrated well into host communities.



## The Ulster Unionist Party

### History

The Ulster Unionist Party is the oldest political party on the island of Ireland. It evolved from the Ulster Unionist Council founded in 1905.

### Key aims and beliefs

- We believe that Northern Ireland will best prosper as part of the United Kingdom.
- We believe that respect for each other's sense of identity is crucial to a truly shared future.
- The rule of law should be applied equally to all without fear or favour.
- Social justice will remain at the heart of all UUP policies, especially those in relation to education, the economy, health and housing.
- Public service is what we do. For us, it's country first, Party second.

#### *Specific policies on:*

#### **The Economy:**

We are committed to helping rebalance the local economy and growing our private sector. The Northern Ireland employment market is rapidly changing - we want a refocus on Research and Development in order to ensure we are equipping our workforce with the skills they will need in the years ahead.

#### **Education**

We want to move towards a single education system in which children of all faiths and none are educated together. Whilst we will continue to support academic selection and parental choice, we also believe that schools must continue to assist every child with their own individual abilities and talents - whether academic, vocational or technical.

#### **The Environment**

The environment is our most important natural asset, giving us the materials and resources that so many of us now take for granted. We believe this generation has an obligation to create a clean and healthy environment to pass on to the next. As such we support a scoping study on benefits of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act; a new enforcement model for environmental crime; a major reform of the Northern Ireland waste sector; a statutory duty on tackling invasive species (e.g. Japanese Knotweed); and maintaining and expanding our woodland cover.

## Immigration

The Ulster Unionist Party believes in a prosperous, thriving society for all in Northern Ireland. In the modern world, that means embracing the many benefits that flow from cultural diversity and the positive role immigrants can play in the economic growth of the country. We want to see a sensible immigration policy, where those coming to our shores fully integrate into our society, which works to build a better Northern Ireland and is mindful of the finite resources available to our health service, benefits system and social housing stock.

