



Third Level Education

The SDLP will strive to ensure a proper alignment between the skills development and higher education services currently offered by the training and higher education sector. We must identify the future needs of a growing high value-added economy, which will require an ongoing dialogue with industry and with universities so that this evolution can get underway smoothly.

This will mean directing more of our efforts towards the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) subjects which will be in greatest demand in the new economy and which will form the bedrock of future well paid jobs. It will also mean training more young people in the skills of the future in particular ICT

and specifically, coding. We intend to establish a Digital Technology and Coding Academy during the next Assembly mandate.

We believe we must:

- Focus support for third level education toward the STEAM subjects and the areas graduates can add maximum immediate value to employers and the economy.
- Refocus existing skills provision to ensure we better meet the future needs of a modern fast moving global economy.

Public Sector Reform

The SDLP believes that there is considerable scope to improve the operation of the public sector by raising productivity to improve services. The SDLP believes that the streamlining of the public sector to date could have been achieved by prudent management rather than by borrowing huge amounts of capital to finance a severance scheme. The end of the civil service pay freeze must mean increases for lower paid civil servants. It cannot be used to fund more special advisers or rehire at the highest levels.

Corporation Tax

The SDLP has campaigned for many years for the devolution of corporation tax powers. The setting of a date and a rate provides a significant opportunity for expansion by local companies and for us to attract investment from foreign businesses. Growth in these two areas has been the bedrock of the current economic boom in the Republic and is the only way we can stop the forced emigration of young workers every year.

The Northern Ireland market is too small for local demand to deliver significant growth. That means we need to compete on the world stage to sell products and services and to attract companies to Northern Ireland.

It is also critically important that we retain our place in the European Union to ensure maximum benefit from any devolution in corporation tax powers.



Building for Better

In order to ensure a stronger private sector delivering more jobs which are better paid the SDLP will design and implement 'Building for Better' - a strategy which will boost our local economy. Its key vision is better jobs, better wages and a better economy.

Agri-food

The agri-food industry in Northern Ireland has itself produced an ambitious strategy for growth and this must be facilitated by government. The sector is jobs intensive and can serve the dual purpose of maintaining our existing farming base and supporting rural employment while offering limitless potential for high value food production. There is considerable scope for expanding Northern Ireland's export base in this sector to delivering at least 15,000 jobs by 2021.

Agree and implement a Northern Ireland Manufacturing Strategy

This will support the development of 'factories for the future' and encourage companies to become more consumer-focused and innovative. It will also position Northern Ireland as an attractive place for

foreign manufacturers and support further development of our home grown industry. This will aim to create an additional 7,000 jobs between now and 2021.

Increase our level of exports & FDI

Companies from Northern Ireland primarily export to other parts of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, with limited exports to Europe or the rest of the world. The SDLP will ensure that Invest NI and local economic development agencies strengthen and co-ordinate existing links abroad, and build new links through the Republic's IDA and UK Trade & Investment. We must ensure that the region becomes a hub for exports. Relying solely on domestic demand is not enough. We will also lead a refocus of FDI and export efforts to Europe in addition to North America. Northern Ireland is part of the world's biggest domestic market and we must make the most of this opportunity. The devolution of corporation tax in 2018 will see the creation of 3,000 direct FDI jobs by 2021 and will create an additional 1,500 jobs indirectly.

NI Digital Technology and Coding Academy

The SDLP will establish Northern Ireland's first Digital Technology and Coding Academy. This will provide real-time and online coding and digital education for people of all ages across Northern Ireland. The Academy will be the home for technology start-up and accelerator programmes and will also ensure that their reach stretches across the North. This will be accompanied by a new Digital Technology Strategy, which will directly link with the Department of Education to ensure that coding and technology feature in all schools. By 2021, Northern Ireland will have ten "Tech Towns" generating 7,000, new jobs in an expanded ICT sector and where awareness and skills in digital technology have increased dramatically.

Increase skills, productivity and job market awareness

Reduced corporation tax is not enough to attract foreign investment. While government has a role to play in improving productivity, the SDLP will introduce a 'Productivity Partnership' initiative whereby industry leaders are supported in efforts to share knowledge and best practice with firms who struggle with lower productivity. The 'Productivity Partnership' will also assist schools and universities in building awareness of our local job market by assisting with school and university placements.

Building our Tourism Sector

Northern Ireland has managed to protect some of the most unspoilt and beautiful parts of Ireland and offers an attractive destination to both international and domestic tourists. The tourism industry provides a living for thousands of people across Northern Ireland, particularly in coastal towns. Tourism in the North is worth over £750 million to the local economy, and is responsible for 43,000 jobs. It can go much further as a driver of investment and employment.

Our tourism and hospitality sectors require urgent reform if we are to capitalise on our potential. As part of Building for Better we will ensure all our tourist destinations are given proper profile. That means enhancing tourism facilities on our coastline, mountains and other areas of outstanding natural beauty; enhancing licensing laws to ensure we remain

competitive; reducing red-tape; ensuring full use of modern digital technology, protecting our environment and supporting food and drink and other niche areas. The SDLP will also ensure that Northern Ireland is included in the island's 'Wild Atlantic Way'.

To ensure we gain the most from this opportunity we also need to ensure our tourism and hospitality sectors can offer the best possible service. The SDLP have already delivered reforms in the regulation of taxis allowing the night-time economy to grow while ensuring people can travel home safely. We also believe that it is time to reform the licensing laws in Northern Ireland to allow our restaurants, bars and hotels to continue attracting tourists from across the world. Focused investment in tourism will generate 6,000 new jobs by 2021. We will continue to campaign for the rate of VAT in the tourism and hospitality sectors to be reduced to 5%.

Making government work for jobs

The financial priorities of the next NI Executive must be targeted at those areas which have the biggest benefit for the Northern Ireland economy. That is why we will ensure that funding in future governments is aimed towards sectors which deliver maximum value in terms of employment and infrastructure improvement. We will undertake capital appraisal so that resources are not wasted on vanity projects. Government must ensure we get the full benefit of EU funding to support our economy.

Support for Small & Medium Enterprises

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital for a flourishing economy with healthy job creation. The SDLP will ensure that SMEs operate in an environment which supports their growth by enhancing broadband provision across Northern Ireland, reducing government payment terms to 14 days, helping more SMEs trade online and ensuring that all public sector contracts are advertised on Central Procurement. Over 26,000 SMEs will directly benefit from Corporation Tax and we will also ensure that Invest NI, UK Trade and Investment and local Enterprise Agencies strengthen support provided to small businesses wishing to trade here and abroad.

A NEW DEAL FOR STUDENTS AND APPRENTICES



A properly funded and accessible university and vocational training system is vital if today's teenagers are to gain meaningful employment in tomorrow's economy.

A system where all young people can access third level education and training is the norm across Europe. That is the system our young people deserve. That is the system the SDLP will introduce.

We will reduce student fees, reverse cuts to student places and increase investment in apprenticeships.

Severe financial cuts have been placed on our universities. That means fewer places which are harder to access. Young people either don't proceed to third level education or are forced away.

Thirty percent of our young people travel to Britain each year to study where fees are higher and were they incur more debt. Two thirds of those who leave never return.

This will be accompanied by reform of our university sector to deliver an increased focus on STEAM subjects and in other areas which are undersupplied. The SDLP is also committed to increased language teaching at universities, especially as part of mainstream degree courses.

The SDLP will reverse the recent cuts in university places and fund increased student places in Northern Ireland, including at Ulster University, Magee. In addition, we will ensure additional investment in apprenticeships.

To build a better future we need to make sure our children and young people possess skills which are valuable on a global stage. That means broadening access and ensuring that as many of our young people complete third level education and training as possible.

We will also reduce the portion of the tuition fee paid by students to minimise the debt burden on young people and ensure comprehensive access to third level education.