



"Reshaping Government, Rebuilding Public Services"
A Manifesto for Equality, Justice & Prosperity

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The only party FOR YOU FIRST

The SDLP stands in this election proud of our record and confident of our prospects.

After five and a half years of stop-go politics, we need non-stop progress. The SDLP serves the wider community fairly and the larger country proudly. We have the policies to invigorate our economy, improve our society and unite our community through working the Good Friday Agreement.

Important choices and future prospects rest on the outcome of this election. Ours is the politics of sanity, not vanity. Our established and unequalled platform of Opportunity through Social Justice; Prosperity through Competitiveness; Community through Partnership and Unity through Peace is needed **now more than ever**.

This manifesto sets out how we intend to achieve these goals.

As the only major party that has lived up to the Agreement, you can trust us to deliver.

As a progressive social democratic party, we outline our determination to build a new country where conflict, division and poverty will be the tragic footnotes of our history and peace, equality and justice will be the chapter headings in the new book we will write together.

As a positively nationalist party, we make clear our commitment to achieving a united Ireland in which the key features, rights and protections of the Agreement will endure.

Now more than ever, you want to vote for honesty. For real and radical change. For one party you know is FOR YOU FIRST. I am asking you to **vote SDLP on 26 November**.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Durkan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Mark Durkan SDLP Leader

sdlp...now more than ever

Leadership for a new Ireland

100% for the Agreement

The SDLP is 100% for the **Good Friday Agreement**. We are convinced that it has the potential to transform relations on this island for the benefit of nationalists and unionists alike, allowing us to work together as equals to transform our society.

The SDLP is the only party that has lived up to all the Agreement and worked to make each and every one of its institutions a success.

We are the Agreement's prime architects. Its principles are our principles. Partnership government. North/South co-operation. Equality. Human Rights.

As the party that has done more than any other to negotiate the Agreement, we can be trusted to stand up to those who want to renegotiate it.

The SDLP will not allow the DUP or anybody else to turn the clock back on progress. We will insist on the Agreement's full implementation and development.

In any review, it will not be the SDLP under pressure – it will be the parties who are falling short of the Agreement.



In any review the SDLP will:

- Resist attempts to renegotiate the Good Friday Agreement.
- Demand an end to opt-outs and cop-outs. As the only party that has lived up to all parts of the Agreement, we will insist that all parties meet our standard. We will propose a duty of service on parties that take up ministerial office to participate fully in the Executive and the North/South Ministerial Council.
- Demand the Agreement's full implementation and development, including the full implementation of the Joint Declaration's commitments on:
 - human rights;
 - equality;
 - demilitarisation;
 - community relations;
 - victims;
 - the Irish language;
 - devolution of policing and justice;
 - North/South co-operation.
- Demand acts of completion by all paramilitaries, loyalist and republican, in order to take the gun out of Irish politics for good. Paramilitary groups which do not engage in acts of completion must be closed down by the police.
- Secure repeal of the Suspension Act and an end to stop-go politics.

To make the Agreement's institutions work better, the SDLP will:

- Ensure that no First Minister can block nominations to the North-South Ministerial Council.
- Give the Executive the power to call persons and papers so that it can compel attendance of Ministers and their officials and ensure access to their papers.
- To enhance collectivity, make the Programme for Government binding on ministers.

Leadership for a new Ireland

100% for a United Ireland

The SDLP is also 100% for a United Ireland. Uniquely among parties in the North, the SDLP is clear that in a United Ireland the Agreement should endure. Its institutions - like the Assembly and the Executive - should stand. All its equality guarantees and human rights protections should continue.

Our vision of a United Ireland is based on equality. The SDLP believes that all the rights, protections, and inclusion that nationalists sought within Northern Ireland while it is in the United Kingdom, must equally be guaranteed to unionists within a United Ireland. We are emphatic that unity must not be about the entrapment of a new minority.

That is right in principle - since in a United Ireland we will still need to find a way of sharing our society as equals every bit as much as we do today - and that is what the Agreement is all about.

It is also right in practice. The best context for holding and winning a referendum is when it is clear that the Agreement is fully bedded down and that all its protections will continue regardless of the referendum's outcome. A majority is most likely to vote for a United Ireland when reassured that it is neither a vote against the Agreement nor a vote for constitutional uncertainty. People need to know what they are voting for. They need to have certainty that their rights, identity and interests will be protected in a United Ireland.

Achieving a United Ireland requires the consent of a majority in the North. That is what the Agreement says, and it is also the position of the SDLP. The consent of a majority of unionists and nationalists is not required.

Achieving a majority for Irish unity any time soon will require the persuasion of some unionists. It will also require the reassurance of many others. Because of our unblemished record of peace and partnership and our unqualified commitment to the Agreement, only the SDLP can persuade a majority in the North in favour of unity - just as we persuaded a majority of the North in favour of the Good Friday Agreement. That is why only the SDLP can deliver a United Ireland.



Working towards a united Ireland the SDLP will:

- Seek a referendum on a United Ireland within the lifetime of the next Assembly. As part of the review, the SDLP will seek a date for the referendum.
- Engage in outreach with the unionist community to persuade them of the merits of a United Ireland and reassure them of the protections that the Agreement offers them in it.
- Seek a referendum on a United Ireland within the lifetime of the next Assembly.
- Campaign vigorously in favour of a yes vote.

Leading on the North/South agenda

The SDLP is leading on the North/South agenda. We believe that it will help improve the lives of all on this island. Working together will help break down the barriers, which have hindered development and made lives more difficult throughout the island.

In negotiations, we already secured six powerful new implementation bodies, as well as an all-Ireland Tourism company. In government we delivered North/South co-operation from EU programmes to Agriculture.

In the next Assembly, we want to expand and develop North/South co-operation across all Departments and areas of work.

SDLP Goals for all-Ireland development:

Energy and infrastructure

- Create a new all-Ireland transport & infrastructure body to produce a strategic development framework for the island network air and sea-ports and economic corridors and co-ordinating key projects such as the construction of the "TENS" (Trans-European Networks).
- Accelerate the opening of an all-Ireland energy market to increase competition and reduce energy prices.
- Actively encourage Ofreg NI and the regulator in the South, to work together to develop a new all-Ireland energy planning framework.
- Continue to advocate recognition of Ireland, North and South, as a European Energy Zone, to assist us in reducing costs, meeting targets and improving planning.
- Expand the of gas network on a North-South and East-West basis.

Economy & Skills

- Agree an all-Ireland marketing co-operation and investment strategy.
- Create a new all-Ireland Research Alliance, based on the successful Georgia Research Alliance, to work with colleges and other institutions to operate a 'mix and match' service with businesses, maximising the economic potential of new research as quickly as possible.
- Remove all cross-border trading impediments, e.g. reducing bureaucracy associated with livestock sales.
- Establish a North-South Further & Higher Education body to encourage collaboration in policy, teaching, research, evaluation, recognition of qualifications and models of excellence.
- Commission the economic research bodies North and South to work together to produce proposals for further all-Ireland co-operation and development in social and economic policy.

Policing and Justice

- Create an All-Ireland Criminal Assets Bureau, modelled on the Criminal Assets Bureau in the South, to deprive criminals of their wrongful gains without fear or favour throughout the island.
- Establish an all-Ireland Law Commission to research and promote harmonisation of laws.
- Develop a new police training college for Derry, training PSNI and Garda Síochána recruits together.
- Advance North/South police personnel exchanges in the agreed areas: serious crime, change management, drugs, community policing, ethical standards, criminal assets, training, immigration, traffic, personnel, fingerprinting and IT.
- Create an all-Ireland Sex Offenders register.

Health, Social Policy and Environment

- Agree All-Ireland free travel scheme for pensioners through mutual recognition of pensioner identification, to boost tourism as well as improving cohesion of rights and benefits, island-wide.
- Comprehensive all-Ireland research on anti-poverty strategies.
- Advance all-Ireland co-operation in health to maximise opportunities for investment in specialist services and equipment which

would be otherwise unaffordable in either jurisdiction.

- Develop a waste management strategy on the basis of North-South and East-West co-operation, to move away from landfill and maximise opportunities to 'reduce, re-use and recycle'.
- Create an all-Ireland Public Safety Body to build on the successful collaboration on road safety advertising and education initiatives to work systematically to bring down the incidence of injury and fatalities arising from accidents in the home, at work and on the roads.

Food and Agriculture

- Establish a new All-Ireland Food Marketing Body to improve branding of local produce and conduct a vigorous international marketing campaign capitalising on the green, clean image of Ireland
- Complete an All-Ireland Animal Health Strategy – centred on the development of an effective contingency plan, with greater control of restricted herds and improved monitoring.
- Develop an all-Ireland position on reform of the Common Fisheries Policy to secure the future of Irish fishing.
- Develop and promote an all-Ireland agenda for agricultural and rural development.

Equality, community relations and rights

- Work to agree an all-Ireland Charter of Rights, to guarantee the highest standards of human rights throughout the island.
- All-Ireland action on tackling racism.
- The development of an all-Ireland victim-centred mechanism for truth and remembrance.
- Development of common effective incitement to hatred laws, North and South.
- Action to promote community relations and reconciliation, North and South.

Culture and Irish Language

- Develop all-Ireland arts, culture and leisure strategies.
- Secure all-Ireland coverage of RTE television & TG4.
- Increase all-Ireland funding for Irish-medium television.

Reshaping government, rebuilding public services

Securing major investment in public services is a key priority for the SDLP. We believe that a decentralised model of modern, efficient services, is essential in the task of creating jobs and combating poverty. The SDLP was first to resolve that, given 30 years of under-investment, a gradualist approach would not be sufficient. We are committed to developing new and imaginative models for investing in public services, to allow the step-change in quality needed to galvanise our economy. Only the SDLP has a proven record of using sound management of public funds to increase investment in front-line services.

Reshaping government will be central to improving services. For many of our people, government has been remote and unresponsive, disconnected from the challenges of every-day life. The SDLP will bring government closer to the people we serve. We pioneered political partnership and partnership government. We promoted the notion of social partnership that led to the Civic Forum. Under SDLP Ministers, we saw the creation of properly funded Local Strategy Partnerships.

Now we want to change the face of government, widening and deepening partnerships with unions, business and voluntary organisations, not just as consultees, but as real partners agreeing the multi-annual framework for government action and social progress. We must create a new approach that challenges the coalition of inertia: reducing bureaucracy, driving out inefficiency and delivering better services, more effectively.

We want to use the leverage of government as a catalyst for accelerating change in the community, partnering social economy enterprises, to help them become self-sustaining and deliver opportunity and prosperity.

In government, the SDLP Ministers demonstrated the leadership needed to reshape government, reform public services and raise investment levels.

While Ministers from other parties adopted the plans and priorities of direct rulers and unelected civil servants, SDLP Ministers charted a new course. In the face of opposition from others, SDLP Ministers created the Executive Programme Funds and inspired and secured the Reinvest and Reform Initiative, establishing a mechanism for investment on an unprecedented scale.

We led the way in reshaping government, harnessing the expertise of key groups to make government strategies more effective and better informed. The Children's Forum for example, included voluntary groups working with government on an ongoing basis. We further proposed the Review of Public Administration to make government more responsive and more efficient.

“As Minister of Finance, Mark Durkan has been one of the unqualified successes of the Executive”

M Hayes, Irish Independent

Reshaping Government - SDLP goals:

Realise New Partnerships

- Strengthen partnership, working with unions, business and the voluntary sector on a new basis of real social partnership to agree a 5-year programme for government.
- Widen partnership by broadening membership of the Strategic Investment Board, to include unions and voluntary sector groups, adjusting its dynamic and operation, so that the social partners are involved not only in policy development, but also in decisions regarding the most cost-effective methods of implementation.
- Many strategic decisions will involve long-term financial commitments. Through the new social compact outlined, we believe those decisions can be more credible, more durable and more effective in meeting public needs.
- Deepen partnership by creating opportunities for local ownership and delivery of public services. This could be done, for example, by enabling LSPs to bid for delivery of centrally-funded government programmes. In this way we can bring government services closer to the public, a key aim of the Review Public Administration.
- Use the Review of Public Administration to restructure government to make government more responsive, more accountable, decentralised, efficient and transparent and to better release the talent and potential of those in public sector employment.

“a radical new agenda for real social partnership”

- Spend less on bureaucracy, more on public services:
- Reduce the cost of government bureaucracy to redirect more money into front-line services and infrastructure - nurses, school-books, roads etc.
 - Impose a 1% per year curb on government departments' administrative running costs.
 - Establish a "Cost of Government Committee" for a 5 year period - a new cross-party group of Assembly Members and external partners, modelled on the successful Public Accounts Committee, to establish deadlines and targets to cut administrative costs further.
 - Establish a cross-party Assembly "Performance Committee" including the social partners, also modelled on the Public Accounts Committee. Reporting publicly, this body will deliver new standards of accountability, examining the performance of government, not just in financial terms but in terms of effectiveness in meeting goals set, reducing poverty, or improving health for example.
 - These Committees would be empowered to 'flag' an issue or budget line for a number of years to ensure change is implemented and maintained.
- Decentralise government functions and agencies including at least 2000 jobs to towns across the North within 5 years, targeting areas of highest unemployment in the systematic promotion of balanced regional development.
- Use the leverage of government spending to achieve equality and environmental targets through the criteria for awarding government contracts.
- Create a fair Rates system based on ability to pay, ending the current injustice and protecting those on lower incomes such as pensioners.

Rebuilding public services

Job creation is being held back by under-investment in roads, infrastructure, hospitals, schools etc. Quality services are central to a thriving modern economy. We can reverse 30 years of decline by decisive actions to reshape government and reinvest in services, investing for change and changing for investment. The SDLP will invest in your future guided by the twin ethics of quality and equality. SDLP Goals:

- Use the reconfigured Strategic Investment Board (see above) to increase professional expertise to ensure that all public-led investment projects are funded as efficiently as possible and that competitive dividends are generated from public spending. The SIB can thus deliver financing solutions to meet Assembly priorities. Continuous availability of such expertise will be more cost-effective than a series of project-specific consultants' reports.
- Release under-utilised public land and assets for community and economic use and secure further release of military bases. Funds generated could then be re-deployed into front-line services and to help community and voluntary groups become self-sustaining.
- Deploy the new borrowing power, negotiated under RRI, to achieve a step-change in the quality of infrastructure and public services necessary to regenerate our economy; and establish new 'not-for-profit' models for investing in public services. This would involve management, unions and users putting the new borrowing power to good use allowing greater investment in an efficient, affordable and accountable manner.
- Commission the economic research bodies North and South to work together to produce proposals for further all-Ireland co-operation and development in social and economic policy.
- Increase fiscal discretion: In our dealings with Westminster we will press for the power to adjust the fiscal regime to tackle local difficulties such as the impact of the aggregates tax or the climate change levy.
- Recognise the Community and Voluntary Sector as valued service providers: These sectors play vital roles in the delivery of public services: from economic development to education, caring, and beyond. The DUP Minister for Social Development failed to bring forward a funding strategy during devolution. The SDLP will work to ensure that services currently dependent on EU funds, that reflect the priorities agreed by social partners, are in future supported by new mainstream expenditure. This would allow them to plan for the longer term, making better use of their funds, increasing sustainability and building stronger communities. The EPFs, which were designed partly in anticipation of EU funding being reduced, must be grown to meet needs identified.
- Pool all air-miles acquired through civil service travel and redistribute to charities.

Laying the foundations for growth

Continued investment in quality infrastructure is necessary to unleash the economic potential of all parts of the North, particularly in rural areas. Transport and communications networks link our communities and are a lifeline for balanced and sustainable regional development, job creation and social inclusion.

While many call for investment in infrastructure, the SDLP is the party with the strategy to deliver it. With concerns being raised about cost-control, efficiency and output of the National Development Plan in the South, this is one of the first areas where the value of our proposals for real partnership government and a reformed Strategic Investment Board will be proven. Once capital projects are identified, the reformed SIB will identify the best funding solutions and the most efficient way to deliver projects on budget, on time. The SIB will also be a ready fit with the proposed infrastructure body in the South, enabling greater efficiency and collaboration for island-wide strategic planning.

Membership of the European Union has major implications for economic growth; the decision of the EU to prioritise investment in roads and infrastructure across member states has been pivotal in regenerating weaker economies and brings long-term benefits to our economy as well as immediate benefits in project-related jobs created. We will work with the European Union to develop the Irish sections of the Trans-European Networks in Transport, Energy and Telecommunications.

Already the SDLP has proven its commitment in government, delivering dedicated additional resources for infrastructure, through the Executive Programme Funds and driving the creation of the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative.

Meanwhile, the DUP Minister responsible, Peter Robinson, opposed the RRI, yet published a Regional Transportation Strategy based on the funds he hoped it would generate! He called for investment in the Water Service, yet ducked the issue, commissioning proposals which he never shared with colleagues and left to be published by direct rule Ministers!

SDLP Finance Minister Mark Durkan identified and secured the resources to deliver fully free public travel for pensioners, whereas the DUP Minister had proposed a half-funded travel scheme that would have required local Councils to fund the other half out of rates.

Road and Rail

The **Road and Rail Network** is woefully inadequate, slow and in need of radical overhaul. The Regional Transportation Strategy was excessively Belfast and eastern focused and should be expanded to address needs across the North. Investment must be co-ordinated with economic development initiatives to regenerate small towns and reverse rural drift. SDLP Goals:

- Create a new all-Ireland transport & infrastructure body to produce a strategic development framework for the island network air and sea-ports and economic corridors and co-ordinating key projects such as the construction of the "TENS (Trans-European Networks).
- Urgently secure funding to upgrade key "TENS" (Trans-European Networks) routes

including the Derry-Belfast road, the Dublin-Derry national primary road and other major routes in the South-West and South-East, where there is no rail service

- Consolidate and modernise the rail network, including the Derry-Belfast line - A major capital investment proposal on which the expertise of the sib weill be required.

Public Transport

Public Transport is the critical link connecting people to jobs and amenities, essential to tackle social exclusion. The SDLP believes a first class integrated system in public ownership will be a major force for economic growth. It must be a central component of plans to ease congestion through reducing reliance on cars. SDLP Goals:

- Expand Rural Transport initiatives, particularly 'demand responsive' services such as community taxis and 'rural rover' bus services. Improved co-operation between government departments is required for success.
- Invest in public transport, particularly enhanced **quality bus services**, with new vehicles and modern information systems to encourage use.
- Extend initiatives to improve access to public transport for people with disabilities.
- Agree all-Ireland scheme for free travel for pensioners, through mutual recognition of pensioners' identification, to boost tourism as well as improving cohesion of rights and benefits island-wide.
- Extend the children's half-price travel scheme to 16-18 year-olds in full-time education.

Laying the foundations for growth

Balanced regional development

Balanced regional development across the North requires targeted strategies to counter decades of uneven growth. SDLP Goals:

- **Decentralise government functions and agencies** including at least 2000 jobs to towns across the North within 5 years, targeting areas of high unemployment, to enable regional towns and rural areas to derive benefits from government-led investment and help to stimulate private development. Decentralisation will also be key to addressing traffic congestion in the greater Belfast area.
- **Target areas of under-developed infrastructure** for enhanced support.
- **Work with business to extend the broadband network** to more towns and villages, e.g. ensuring that as the gas pipeline is being laid, the opportunity is taken to increase broadband access.

Planning

A strategic, co-ordinated, design-led system is required as a basis for economic growth and social development. SDLP Goals:

- **High quality, mixed use development** to create more profitable businesses and safer streets.
- **Co-ordinated infrastructure planning** for brownfield sites including investment in transportation, power, sewerage and amenities so that sites are equipped and ready for rapid regeneration.
- **Fullest possible development of ports** as economic drivers in Derry, Warrenpoint, Larne as well as Belfast.
- **Wholesale reform of the planning system** is required, to strengthen and clarify the policy framework within which decisions are taken, to minimise delays and disputes, to improve public input and to rectify the unfair disadvantage to third parties at appeal stage.

Energy

Energy costs are a high for consumers and a significant handicap to business in the North: SDLP Goals:

- Build on the successful refinancing of Moyle inter-connector, promoting policy of **'not-for-profit' ownership of major energy infrastructure**, thereby passing through any cost savings directly to the consumer.
- Accelerate opening of **all-Ireland energy market** to increase competition and reduce energy prices.
- **Extend the gas network** on a North-South and East-West basis so that more and more consumers can benefit from an alternative energy supply.

- Actively encourage Ofreg NI and the regulator in the South, to work together to develop a new **all-Ireland energy planning** framework, including all-Ireland sustainable energy plan.
- **Promote renewable energy sources** including biomass, wind-power and hydro-electric power, particularly in areas beyond the reach of the natural gas network so that all areas benefit from enhanced competition and choice [see also section on 'Safeguarding Natural Resources'].
- Insist that **all major investment projects** under the Strategic Investment Programme, in areas not covered by gas, factor in a **consideration of renewable energy** supplies; as well helping to meet environmental aims including Kyoto targets, this could help create local jobs, e.g. in willow production.
- Continue to advocate recognition of **Ireland, North and South**, as a **European Energy Zone**, to assist us in reducing costs, meeting targets and improving planning.

Water

Good health depends on clean water and, as an essential public service, it should be managed with public benefit the priority, not share-holders' dividends. SDLP Goals:

- **"AGAINST PRIVATISATION; AGAINST DOMESTIC METERING; AGAINST CHARGES."**
- Modernise **water service**, improve water **quality and reform** system before increased costs are contemplated.
- Modernise the **sewerage system** which is preventing development in some areas; provide some new and upgraded waste water treatment systems for smaller towns and villages to meet modern environmental and EU standards.
- **Modernise and streamline the public procurement** process for major capital and structural maintenance contracts to ensure more accountability and transparency, resulting in a better deal for the public. The near 40% water leakage problem must be tackled with purpose and determination by Water Service Management.
- Restore the transparent **link between rates and water**, for which the Barnett formula does not make provision.
- Explore, with the Strategic Investment Board, options for injecting **major capital investment** to upgrade the water and sewerage system in the interests of public health.

Developing skills and supporting workers

Investment in quality higher and further education and training is an investment in our most precious asset - people.

Education and lifelong learning are of benefit in themselves, helping to develop the human personality and equipping the learner with all the knowledge and skills to have a fulfilling life in an increasingly complex world. However, giving people the opportunity to acquire skills is not just an acknowledgement of their rights - it is invaluable to the economy. We simply cannot afford the waste of human potential evidenced by long-term unemployment figures and high levels of literacy and numeracy difficulties. While we benefit from having a highly skilled workforce, there is increasing pressure from global competitors. The decisions we take now will shape our economy for decades to come.

The SDLP is committed to building a high-skill, high-wage, flexible economy, based on social justice. We want to remove the barriers to opportunity, nurture individual talent and empower people for the future.

A Proven Track Record

SDLP Ministers showed leadership in government, introducing innovative measures to support workers and enhance learning opportunities for all:

- £14 million secured for pilot schemes to tackle unemployment.
- New legislation on flexible working introduced to support parents.
- Essential Skills Strategy launched, to tackle literacy and numeracy difficulties among adults.
- 2001 - £65 million funding package secured for student support, abolishing FE tuition fees, reintroducing grants and reducing the numbers of HE students liable for fees.
- 2002 - Further funding secured: grants increased from £1,500 to £2,000 and the parental income threshold increased from £15,000 to £20,000 entitling 3000 more students to grants.
- £80 million delivered to update the physical infrastructure of FE colleges.
- £90 million secured for Research & Development and
- Funding provided for Employers for Childcare, which promotes better childcare facilities to help parents to work if they wish.

An Agenda for Change

Promoting Employability and Tackling Unemployment

- Build on the work of the **Taskforce**, introducing further innovative measures to help people overcome the barriers to employment.
- Develop **high quality, affordable childcare schemes** in partnership with the community & voluntary sector, the commercial child-minding sector and employers, particularly for lone parents and those on low incomes. This could enhance sustainability in the community sector while meeting the urgent needs of parents, particularly those who cannot afford to work due to childcare costs.
- Develop a **rights awareness** programme for migrant workers.

Adult Literacy & Numeracy

Education & training are power: we are committed to righting the wrong represented by the fact that one adult in four has difficulty with literacy and numeracy skills. SDLP Goals:

- Work to reduce stigma and encourage those with **literacy** difficulties back into education.
- Implement the **Essential Skills Strategy** in full.

Student Support

Finance should not be a barrier to attaining a third level education: the SDLP is committed to widening access, targeting social need and promoting inclusion for students and their families. SDLP Goals:

- Secure additional **financial support** to widen access to education, targeting families on **lower incomes**.
- Dedicate specific extra funding for **mature students**, students with **disabilities** & students with **dependants**.

Developing skills and supporting workers

- **Rule out top-up fees** for NI Universities and Colleges.

Further Education

For decades Further Education was the 'poor relation' of the sector: the SDLP is committed to enhancing recognition of FE to create parity of esteem between academic and vocational training. FE colleges must be engines for economic development and social inclusion, particularly at a local level.

- The FE Review must deliver high **quality vocational and technical training** for students, giving them access to jobs in a changing economy.
- Stronger **links** should be established with **Colleges throughout Ireland**, whose successful experience of redevelopment can inform our process.
- **Partnerships** among Colleges, businesses, community and voluntary sector groups should be established or enhanced to promote social inclusion and economic development.

Higher Education

The SDLP is committed to increasing funding for Research & Development as a means of meeting the demands of the 'knowledge society' and local and global economies.

The partnerships behind the Science Park and Incubation Units are examples of important successes in this field. SDLP Goals:

- Increase resources by encouraging **links with business** for R & D.
- Promote greater **accountability** in Higher Education institutions in terms of planning, development, policy, equity of access and transparency, in the context of respect for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.
- Encourage the full **co-operation of DEL with the OECD review** of the Republic's Further & Higher Education System.

- Establish a new **All-Ireland Research Alliance** based on the Georgia Research Alliance to work with colleges and other institutions to operate a 'mix and match' service with businesses, maximising the economic potential of new research as quickly as possible.
- Encourage the higher education system and business to participate in the **European Research Area** and in the **European Research Framework Programme**. Increased investment in technology is crucial for our economic future.

Widening horizons

To increase opportunities locally, we must forge partnerships that will allow local workers to travel, expanding their skills and bringing home new competencies.

- Establish a **North-South Further & Higher Education body** to encourage collaboration in policy, teaching, research, evaluation, recognition of qualifications and models of excellence.

Community Based Education & Training

- The community sector must be acknowledged as a valuable service provider and granted **mainstream funding on a multi-annual basis** to promote long-term planning and sustainability. [See section on Reshaping Government]
- A comprehensive **database of all training provision** should be compiled and made available to local training and employment agencies, schools and colleges.

"It is clear that local students enjoy a greater level of support than their counterparts in Britain, many of whom have to repay much more in graduate contributions and receive smaller bursaries."

NUS-USI

Creating jobs, growing the economy

The SDLP is committed to creating well-paid and sustainable jobs to generate opportunities in all parts of the North and for people from all backgrounds. Our economic strategy is designed to create prosperity, tackle poverty and promote social inclusion.

Progress has been made since the Agreement, with more people in employee jobs than ever on record, although we are still heavily reliant on public sector employment. A new approach is required to encourage enterprise, to increase the number of local business start-ups in the North and to promote growth in existing small businesses. We commend the work of local Enterprise agencies in this task and will work with Enterprise NI to increase business start-ups. Continued efforts are required to balance the competitive disadvantage in the North due to higher corporation tax and fuel costs than in the South. Businesses have also faced rapid increases in insurance costs over recent years.

Membership of the European Union has been extremely beneficial for our economy. As part of the single market, there are greater opportunities for business. It has helped to develop North-South trade, and made inward investment in our region more attractive to North-American investors. Most areas of economic policy include a significant European dimension. We will ensure that NI plays a full part in, and gets the maximum benefit from, the implementation of the European Employment Strategy. The European Union has set itself the objective of becoming the most competitive and knowledge-based economy in the world by 2010. The SDLP will make sure that, along with the Republic and other peripheral regions of Europe, EU economic policy takes into account our interests.

A proven track record

The SDLP has led on job creation for decades, bringing investment to towns across the North, bringing back jobs from the USA rather than funds for party coffers.

In government we delivered enhanced funding for the vital infrastructure upgrade required to regenerate the economy. We further secured an initiative to enable employers to recruit from the long-term unemployed.

SDLP Goals

- Create a new "Enterprise Growth Fund" comprising a loan fund and equity fund to work together to **increase the number of business start-ups and promote social economy enterprises**. The Fund should build on the successful Enterprise Ireland model.
- Introduce special measures to enable those with sound business ideas from **low-income backgrounds**, to become self-employed.
- **Support business growth**, through seeking new tax relief and rate relief on an offset basis against spending on Research & Development, training and marketing.
- **Delay plans to end industrial de-rating**. Develop instead a menu of reliefs and exemptions (i) to protect vulnerable sectors and encourage developing ones (ii) to assist businesses - services or industrial - in areas of high unemployment/ social deprivation and (iii) to offset excessive energy costs and overheads resulting from some regulatory requirements e.g. spatial specifications.
- Review public assets to **release land for community and commercial purposes**. Redevelop former military sites to generate economic and social benefits for the whole community.
- Facilitate development of clusters of high-skill, high-wage companies that can derive mutual economic benefit from **co-operation and networking**.
- Introduce a new **business development approach** to equip local firms to compete successfully for contracts arising from the

strategic investment programme - working in co-operation to derive economic virtue from public necessity!

- **Increase resources for, and widen access to, the new “integrated development fund”** (a new EPF to enable areas of particular economic need to bid for funds & a product of an SDLP proposal) so that areas with similar needs can place joint bids, e.g. rural areas, or coastal towns and resorts.
- Run a promotional campaign to **encourage businesses to operate in Euro** as well as Sterling and **encourage government departments** to make arrangements to **make and accept payments in Euro**.
- Extend the ‘Aspire’ **micro-loan initiative** across the North.
- Create a new **All-Ireland Research Alliance**, based on the successful Georgia Research Alliance, to work with colleges and other institutions to operate a ‘mix and match’ service with businesses, maximising the economic potential of new research as quickly as possible.
- Agree an **all-Ireland marketing co-operation and investment strategy**.
- Target **investment in high-unemployment areas**.
- **Work to reduce energy costs** including accelerating the opening of all-Ireland energy market. [see section on ‘Laying Foundations for Growth’]
- **Support the Tourism industry** as a key growth sector for development. In addition to the transportation upgrade referred to earlier, improvements are required in access routes to the North as well as staff training and marketing; a comprehensive inter-departmental development strategy is required for the industry.

Beyond the remit of the Assembly, we will:

- Campaign for entry to the **Euro**.
- Continue to press for a **£5 minimum wage**.
- Campaign for fiscal discretion to tackle disadvantage arising from particular local conditions e.g. **Aggregates Tax**.
- Work to secure a **European Commission investigation into competition in the insurance market** and, if less than satisfactory, explore new mechanisms whereby government can ensure increased competition.



Promoting the rural economy

The SDLP has a proven track record of working to redress the decline in farm incomes over recent years and the resulting impact on rural communities generally. We are committed to regenerating the rural economy and sustaining farming communities.

This requires new interventions to support farmers in their bid to innovate, diversify or add a competitive edge to their high quality produce, enabling them to succeed in today's marketplace. As outlined earlier, our plans for public services are centred on an understanding of the needs of our dispersed rural population.



A proven track record:

In government, the SDLP Ministers led the way in promoting the rural economy;

- Agriculture & Rural Development budget increased by nearly 10%;
- Milk quota allocated on a targeted basis to smaller dairy producers;
- 24,000 new training places created for farmers;
- Foot and Mouth Disease curbed by swift and decisive action;
- Funding provided for Rural Support Network telephone helpline; and
- Initiated preparation of all-Ireland animal health strategies with Dublin government.

An Agenda for Change

A Fair Deal for Farmers

- Entry to the **Euro-zone** – as referred to above, this a key priority in raising farm incomes.
- Establish a new **All-Ireland Food Marketing Body** to improve branding of local produce and conduct a vigorous international marketing campaign capitalising on the green, clean image of Ireland.
- Removal of all **cross-border trading impediments**.
- Protect farmers and rural interests in **CAP Reform**; we believe that the structure of NI agriculture can make CAP reform advantageous to the vast majority of farmers.
- Investigate merits of a **hybrid system** to protect vulnerable sectors from perceived dangers of full **de-coupling**.
- Support sales direct from producer to consumer at **town markets**.
- Encourage growth in **co-operatives** to secure better selling power for producers supplying large multiples.
- Secure low-incidence **BSE status**.
- Work to develop an **all-Ireland position on reform of the Common Fisheries Policy** to secure the future of Irish fishing.
- Oppose the development of **GM crops** on the grounds of inadequate reassurance on the implications for health and the impact of long-term transfer of modified genes.

Investing in the Future

- Support farmers wishing to explore **organic farming** and other means of **diversifying** their business or adding value to their produce.
- **Reform planning policy** to enable development of rural businesses such as agri-tourism on farms. [See section on 'Natural Resources']

Promoting the rural economy

- **Reduce bureaucracy** - as outlined in 'Reshaping Government' section – to deploy maximum resources in assisting farmers directly.
- **Promote better use of ICT**; progress has been made but more can be done to reduce paperwork.
- **Continue increasing training opportunities** for farmers, tailored to needs and peer-group centred.
- **Complete the All-Ireland Animal Health Strategy** – centred on the development of an effective contingency plan, with greater control of restricted herds and improved monitoring.
- **Promote an early retirement scheme** and implement the **new entrant** scheme.
- **Develop an all-Ireland agenda** for agricultural and rural development.
- Recognise and incentivise the role of the **farmer as custodian of the land**; explore the role for farmers in increasing our supply of renewable energy through biomass. [see also 'Natural Resources' section]
- **Make post offices a rural hub** offering internet access and providing tourist information, transportation and public services information and e-government services.
- **Secure effective implementation of 'rural-proofing'** – designed so that all key government policies are checked for their impact on rural communities.
- Work with business to extend **broadband** services to rural areas.
- Provide continuing support for **'Women in Agriculture'** groups.
- **Increase resources for, and widen access to, the new "Integrated Development Fund"** (a new EPF to enable areas of particular economic need to bid for funds & a product of an SDLP proposal) so that areas with similar needs can place joint bids, e.g. rural areas, or coastal towns and resorts.

Protecting Rural Communities

- Develop a new cross-cutting **Rural White Paper** to promote economic regeneration and social inclusion and strengthen the fabric of rural society.
- Increase funds for **rural community and voluntary organisations** to support vital work being done by Rural Community Network.

"Mrs Rodgers saved the island from a catastrophe when foot-and-mouth disease broke out last year. This industry is going through financial hell at the moment and we need people who know what is going on to make important decisions."

John Gilliland President of the Ulster Farmers' Union, Oct 2002

Safeguarding natural resources

Since its formation the SDLP has been committed to the principle of 'sustainable development' - meeting the needs of today's society while protecting resources for future generations.

Our environment remains under serious threat from pollution and waste; in recent months three beaches have lost their blue flag status due to sewage pollution. Radioactive waste is still being pumped into the Irish Sea from Sellafield. We must take significant action to meet European environmental standards or else face costly fines.

The distinctive countryside is one of Northern Ireland's most precious assets, both socially and economically in terms of our developing tourism market.

The SDLP has campaigned on the dangers of Sellafield for decades and opposes reliance on nuclear power. We welcome the early closure of the Calder Hall Magnox Reactor which was due to remain open until 2006 and we will continue working to protect our marine and coastal environment from the threat posed. We are dedicated to upholding environmental rights including good quality air, clean waters and thriving animal and plant life.

SDLP Action on the Environment:

- South Down MP, Eddie McGrady, spear-headed a campaign for the end of nuclear reprocessing at Sellafield and the implementation of plans for decommissioning the entire site leading to closure.
- SDLP Finance & Personnel Ministers have increased investment in public transport to promote social inclusion and reduce reliance on cars
- As Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mark Durkan ensured that since April 2001 8% of the total electricity supply for government offices has come from renewable energy sources, surpassing the target of 5%.
- SDLP organised 3 Sustainable Development seminars in 2002-3 in partnership with representative Groups including World Wildlife Fund, Friends of the Earth, RSPB etc.

SDLP Goals:

Waste Management

Urgently address the waste issue to meet 2005 EU directive:

- Develop a **waste management strategy** on the basis of North-South and East-West co-operation, to move away from landfill and maximise opportunities to 'reduce, re-use and recycle'.
- Establish **recycling targets** and ensure widespread access to recycling facilities, introducing best practice including kerbside recycling schemes and additional domestic bins.
- Support **development of markets** for recycled goods e.g. glass, recycled paper; build on progress in procurement review [see 'Reshaping Government' section] to extend government reliance on recycled products.
- Legislate for a **tax on plastic bags**.
- Examine the health and environmental impact of **energy recovery methods** including pyrolysis and gasification as an option of last resort and ensuring that the means chosen for residual waste disposal does not undermine efforts to promote recycling as a longer-term sustainable solution.

Pollution

- Campaign for the immediate cessation of **reprocessing and Mox production at Sellafield** and the development of a decommissioning plan for the plant leading to the earliest possible closure.
- **Oppose the establishment of the new Committee on Radioactive Waste Management** which is examining sites in Britain for the disposal of the world's reprocessed waste.

Safeguarding natural resources

- **Establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency** to monitor standards and improve government and private sector accountability.
- **Work to reduce emissions levels** to meet Kyoto and EU standards.
- **Introduce a Marine Act** to address issues of pollution and habitat protection and provide for enhanced research into marine life.
- **Increase penalties:** polluters should be required to pay not just for damage done, but for restoration of the habitat to its prior condition.

Sustainable Development

- **Establish a time-bound Sustainable Development forum**, including representatives from voluntary bodies and all departments and relevant agencies, to drive the SD agenda, propose new initiatives and disseminate key findings.
- **Introduce Sustainable Development Headline Indicators** to judge performance in meeting targets, e.g. development of an 'Ecological footprint' for Northern Ireland: a way of presenting an overall assessment of the impact of our lifestyle and economy on natural resources and the environment. This would inform policy and help advance the cause of a fairer, shared world.

Renewable Energy

- **Develop an all-Ireland sustainable energy plan** and promote renewable energy sources including biomass, wind-power and hydro-electric power, [see also 'foundations for growth' section].
- **Insist that all major investment projects** under the Strategic Investment Programme, in areas not covered by gas, **factor in a consideration of renewable energy** supplies; as well helping to meet environmental aims including Kyoto targets, this could help create local jobs, e.g. in willow production.

Planning

- Planning policy must balance respect for the environment with the needs of communities living on the land; [see also section on regional development]
- **Wholesale reform of the planning system** is required, to strengthen and clarify the policy framework within which decisions are made, to improve public input, to minimise delays and disputes and to rectify the unfair disadvantage to third parties at appeal stage. The system must not unduly inhibit the diversification and development of rural businesses.
- **Enforcement** of planning decisions must be improved and penalties increased.

GM Foods

- **Oppose the development of GM crops** on the grounds of inadequate reassurance on the implications for health and the impact of long-term transfer of modified genes.



Investing in education - maximising potential

The SDLP views high quality education as a human right. Moreover, a well-resourced education system is a powerful tool in tackling poverty, creating equality of opportunity and enhancing social cohesion. The system should enable every student to maximise his or her potential, in academic, vocational and creative terms. Schools should be a hub of the community and must be resourced to help prepare young people to play an active role in society as citizens with rights and responsibilities, equipped with the skills necessary to find work, contribute to the economy and live as independently as possible.

Our education system produces some of the best results in Europe for many of our children but a significant number of students still leave school with few or no qualifications. We believe that through reform it is possible to remove present inequalities, maintain and enhance the highest standards of the present and offer greater opportunities to all children.



A proven track record:

Under SDLP Finance Ministers, the Education budget was increased by over 13% during devolution. Our priority now is to increase the opportunities available to all children.

SDLP Ministers drove the creation of the Children's Fund, to tackle poverty & disadvantage and introduced legislation to establish a Children's Commissioner with world-leading powers.

The SDLP has been campaigning to end the Eleven Plus and academic selection since the 1970s

SDLP Goals:

Every child has the right to equality of opportunity in education. The SDLP is committed to enhancing educational standards across all areas.

- We want to end the eleven plus and academic selection for post-primary education.

Children should not be stigmatised by rejection or have life-chances inhibited unnecessarily.

- We want to introduce **all-ability, co-educational education** based on parental choice of sector (controlled, maintained, integrated or Irish language)
- From age 14, all children should be **guaranteed access to a wide choice of subject areas and experiences** catering for all interests and abilities to increase opportunities and help ensure parity of esteem for all types of subjects and learning.
- **Greater co-operation is required between schools** to offer wider choices to all students and improve access to resources; the SDLP will support the creation of **voluntary networks of schools** to create the environment within which this can happen.
- Co-operation will **help preserve our rural schools**, an important part of the fabric of rural communities.
- 'A' Levels should be replaced with a **broader post-16 curriculum** to widen career options for young adults.
- Every effort must be made to enable **children with a disability** to choose to attend **mainstream schools**; extra teacher-training and classroom support must be available to make this work in the interests of child, teacher and class-mates.
- **New legislation** is required to ensure **full rights for children with special educational needs**. We want to **increase funding** in response to growing demand and recognise the diversity of needs in the sector. There is

a need for improved provision for children with autism spectrum disorders including the implementation of the Taskforce recommendations and measures to increase choice in respect of programmes and approaches. [see also equality section]

- **Services for young adults** with learning disabilities (post 19) are very limited and **require investment**, linking health and employment to training provision and making better use of existing facilities

High quality experiences of education are vital to a child's development; moreover, investment in education can generate huge returns over decades, through reduced poverty, better health and less crime – lifetime benefits for the child and long-term benefits for society.

- The SDLP wants to **invest more in early years learning** and family support, acknowledging community (as well as statutory) groups as valued service providers and enabling them to invest in training and future development.
- We are disappointed at the department's decision to halt extension of the early years **"enriched curriculum"** pilot schemes for under 6s, and are committed to extending them across the North.
- **In a global economy, modern language learning** needs to start earlier – we want to explore the possibility of introducing languages at primary school.
- A more **equitable funding formula** is required which will allow access for all children to a well-resourced learning environment.
- The Social Inclusion Fund should be extended with resources set aside for applications from **schools in areas of social need**. In this way we can deliver equal opportunities through tackling disadvantage and under-performance. [see also 'Combating Poverty' section]

- The SDLP has been involved in and supportive of **the Young Enterprise Fund**; we want to **enhance funding** to strengthen links between schools and businesses. We further want to improve links with public and voluntary bodies, working with them and with schools to devise and implement **an active citizens programme**, to run alongside the citizenship curriculum. This would build on the success of existing environmental and other schemes, to promote social responsibility, participation and the beneficial use of leisure time among young people.

Teachers can't deliver better opportunities without support.

- In view of the very significant increase in the workload of all teachers, we want to see greater attention given to **health and well-being issues** amongst the teaching profession. In particular, we support the implementation of recommendations arising from the recent BDO study (2002).
- **Change must be managed in partnership** with teachers, parents and governors. Closer relationships between schools and parents are essential.



Advancing good health for all

The SDLP is committed to the development of a high quality, well-managed health service, free at the point of use and with a consistent excellence of service provided to all who avail of it. As outlined elsewhere, we believe this is essential to the creation of equal opportunities and higher standards of living for all.

Blighted by bureaucracy, weakened by under-staffing, undermined by a lack of strategy, our health service and its workers have strained to cope with demand. Waiting lists reached a peak in 2002, which must be tackled through comprehensive action, including restructuring and refocusing as well as enhancing resources.

Health statistics for the region remain well below the European average, with high rates of cancer, heart disease and mental health problems. Unacceptable levels of inequality between different social groups highlight the link between health, poverty and education.

90% of care is delivered at primary care level – that is why the SDLP wants to see a primary-care led service structured on a 'bottom-up' basis to identify and respond to local needs, while ensuring consistent standards of quality care across the North. A well-resourced primary care service can reduce the strain on acute services through effective early intervention, greater resources for home-based care and increased emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention.



Leading the way on health, SDLP Finance Ministers pumped a massive 37% funding increase £687 million more into the service and, through the Reinvestment and Reform package, enabled the new Cancer Centre to go ahead. However, this could not compensate for the structural and accountability problems that the current and previous Health Ministers have done little to address.

The SDLP has also worked to ensure that decisions are taken in partnership with the community: we ensured that Carers were included on the Civic Forum and we fought to have community representatives involved in Local Health and Social Care Groups.

SDLP Goals

Increased Investment

- We are committed to passing on every penny of health spending increases made available by the UK government, directly to health and care – we did this and more last time round. We acknowledge however, that resources alone will not solve the problem: funds must be targeted at areas of greatest need and managed effectively.

Structural reform

- Current health structures (Boards, Trusts etc.) are inappropriate for our small population. We want to see urgent action to reduce bureaucracy and deliver enhanced resources to front-line services.

Improved audit & accountability

- When SDLP Finance Ministers secured additional resources to tackle waiting lists, the Health Minister did not know if funds were used to that end! This lack of financial accountability must be addressed and a proper audit trail made available.

A 'primary-care led' service

- We welcomed the creation of Local Health and Social Care Groups and will work towards new legislation to see that they have the funds and the powers necessary to meet the needs of the local community. GPs and PAMs (Professions Allied to Medicine) must be fully involved on a partnership basis and Councillors should be represented.

Better rural access to services

- For too long our dispersed rural population suffered under a delivery-model designed

for the more urban-centred population of GB. We want to see principles of equality and rural-proofing deliver local hospitals across the North equipped to meet every-day needs and stabilise life-threatening conditions.

Major investment in acute hospital services for Tyrone

- The SDLP were the first to point out the 'gap in the map' of acute services in the county of Tyrone when the current proposals were published. The SDLP believe the current proposals create a deficit in acute hospital services in Tyrone. We will work to secure major investment in an acute hospital in Omagh to meet the needs of the people of Tyrone. This will include full A&E facilities, ENT and renal dialysis services.

Ending the post-code lottery

- Addressing local needs must be compatible with creating uniformly high standards of care; it is unacceptable that some medicines are available in some areas and not in others.

Improved Strategic Planning

- The SDLP will support the introduction of "Service Frameworks" to deliver co-ordinated strategies and ensure best practice in the treatment of Coronary Heart Disease, Cancer, Older People & Neo-natal Care. The Diabetes Taskforce Report recommendations should also be implemented.

Addressing staff shortages

- The short-term solution of overseas recruitment is inadequate, uneconomical and unfair to developing countries trying to build up their own services; the solution is a rational strategy to increase the number of staff in priority areas. Past employment practices are no longer acceptable; the SDLP will work to encourage modern, flexible work practices to encourage, for example, parents of young children back to the NHS.

Nursing and Personal Care for the Elderly

- SDLP Finance Minister Mark Durkan secured the funds to introduce free nursing care; the SDLP remains supportive of the Royal Commission proposals on free personal care and will continue to work towards this goal.

All-Ireland co-operation

- All-Ireland co-operation should be explored to maximise opportunities for investment in

specialist services and equipment which would be otherwise unaffordable in either jurisdiction.

Meeting Mental Health needs

- Services have been under-resourced and neglected, even relative to other areas of medicine. Investment is required to offer support and early intervention in the community, improve the capacity and quality of hospital and residential care and address the worryingly high suicide rate, particularly among young men.

Tackling Drug Addiction

- It is a major problem facing our young people and must be urgently addressed – the SDLP supports the aims & objectives of the Drugs & Alcohol campaign. Two years after its publication, failure to implement it amounts to gross irresponsibility. Given the connection between drugs, crime and unemployment, this should be seen as an investment as well as a public obligation.

Promoting a positive health agenda

- We must shift the focus of health strategy further towards preventative approaches. SDLP will support initiatives to promote a healthy lifestyle, to reduce smoking, increase physical activity and improve diet. Health Promotion must be a central part of the anti-poverty strategy.

Tackling bed-blocking and supporting independent living

- Freeing the 10-15% of beds currently 'blocked' by those awaiting care packages or housing adaptations would significantly impact on waiting lists. SDLP will support action to provide the required care management staff and occupational therapists and to invest in community care.

Supporting Carers

- Out of care and devotion, unpaid carers subsidise health and social services, often suffering financial hardship as a result and imperilling their own health. The Valuing Carers Strategy must be implemented to enhance support.

Information & Communications Technology

- ICT must be better used to link patient records, reduce bureaucracy, insure against loss of notes and enable home-based care.

Housing - ensuring a supply of warm, affordable homes

Since its formation, the SDLP has campaigned for adequate housing as a fundamental human right. Housing quality has improved over recent decades, but there remain significant numbers of families in temporary and unsuitable accommodation. Serious shortages are apparent as public housing is being sold faster than it is being built and house prices are continuing to rise at a dramatic rate. Existing and previous Ministers have failed to tackle these issues: in fact at the end of September 2003, the figure for 'new builds' started was 246 out of a targeted 1500 for the year.

The SDLP led on housing in the Assembly, raising the profile of the homelessness issue and promoting measures on affordability and warm homes. SDLP Finance Minister Mark Durkan secured additional funding to ease hardship amongst the homeless during winter months.

With your support we can take the next steps to eradicate homelessness and end fuel poverty.

SDLP Goals:

Meeting Public Sector demand

- The 'new build' figures represent a gross failure of delivery that we intend to overcome through realignment of responsibility and new interventions on planning and new build. We want new-build to be public sector-led, the Housing Executive to assume responsibility for ensuring supply and the operation of Housing Associations to be reviewed.

Tackling Homelessness

- The SDLP called for the Homelessness strategy recently produced by the Housing Executive. We remain of the view that its publication should be a statutory obligation on the Executive and will press for its full implementation. We wish to see a comprehensive approach linking accommodation to social support to break the cycle leading to homelessness and address educational, financial and wider issues.

Better planning and co-operation between public and private sector

- It is required to achieve plan-led development producing high quality, mixed use developments with water, sewerage, energy, communications and transport networks in place in good time.

Improving quality

- Use planning powers more effectively to impose punitive measures on builders seeking planning permission where they have not finished existing developments.

Eradicating fuel poverty

- SDLP will prioritise allocation of funding to enable the Housing Executive to complete the replacement of all solid fuel and Economy 7 heating systems with oil or gas heating. This is not just a social justice imperative but a sound economic investment. People in warm homes are healthier, place less strain on the health service and take fewer days off work through ill-health. In addition, jobs are created installing systems and energy efficiency measures. The success of community-based initiatives like the Armagh and Dungannon Health Action Zone should be replicated. [see Fuel Poverty section, pg 29].

Affordability

- The supply of new houses must be increased and measures must be introduced to reduce speculative purchasing and avoid house prices spiralling out of control. The Co-ownership Scheme is not only successful but is in a position to make a multi-million pound return back to the department each year. It makes practical and economic sense to develop the scheme further to address affordability.

Addressing Anti-social behaviour

- An inter-agency strategy is required to tackle this problem at its roots. Problem tenants need to be prevented from offending rather than simply re-located to create problems for other families. [See also Sports and Leisure section and Policing section]

Private Rented Sector

- The private rented sector licensing scheme proposed in the new Housing Order is inadequate. An improved mandatory scheme is required to raise standards and accountability, to tackle anti-social behaviour and protect the rights of those living nearby. Failure of landlords to co-operate with statutory agencies and local Councils should result in licences being revoked.

Adequate Finance

- We will work to secure adequate finance each year to deliver the Supporting People Fund.

Promoting culture, arts and leisure

The SDLP recognises access to cultural and leisure activities as a social right, capable of enriching our lives, promoting debate and strengthening communities. We want to cherish and develop all the diverse aspects of our national cultures, island-wide.

In addition to its social value, we believe that our rich cultural heritage leaves us uniquely well placed to develop our creative industries. The Department needs to become more pro-active and to communicate better with the public. The 'Unlocking Creativity' strategy is an excellent initiative, however its implementation has lacked impact; greater zeal is required to deliver on its potential.

The SDLP has played a leading role on promoting Irish-language, Culture and Leisure issues, recently securing the inclusion of broadcast coverage issues on the agenda for political negotiations. We further ensured that the availability of health and safety resources was extended beyond soccer grounds to all sports grounds, enabling GAA and other sports to benefit.

SDLP Goals:

- Develop all-island arts, culture and leisure strategies.

Cultural Heritage & Irish Language

- Enact a new "Irish Language Act" in the Assembly to give full legal recognition to Irish and create parity of esteem between Irish and English. We want to extend opportunities to deal with public bodies through Irish
- Ensure recognition of **Irish in the Bill of Rights**.
- Secure enhanced regional autonomy for BBC Northern Ireland to facilitate development of **local writing and production**, including Irish language and Ulster-Scots productions.
- Develop a cultural heritage **programme in schools**.
- Establish a **Resource Unit** in the Dept of Education, for **Irish** as a subject in English-medium schools.
- Secure **increased funding to Foras na Gaeilge** to enable Irish language organisations to implement agreed plans.
- Establish a **Cultural and Historical Archive**.
- Ensure **all-island coverage of RTE television & TG4** and increased **funding for Irish medium** television.

Beyond the remit of the Assembly, we will press the British government to require additional Irish language broadcasting by the BBC.

Arts

For Arts to be accessible to and integrated within all groups in society, it must be connected to the community. Goals:

- Develop a cross-departmental strategy linking all relevant agencies in the development and promotion of **community arts**.
- Establish a **Northern Ireland Theatre Company**.
- Maximise the economic viability of the **local film industry**.

Sport and Leisure Activities

Sport and physical activities have a major contribution to make in terms of health, well-being and social inclusion; moreover, they have a proven role to play in promoting self-esteem, reducing crime and promoting better educational attainment. With an ageing population and spiralling rates of preventable illness, sport and leisure policy and provision require new strategy and greater investment.

SDLP Goals:

- Recognise and treat sport as a central element in **cultural development** and a significant sector of the economy.
- Devise and resource a new sport and **physical activity strategy** to provide for quality, accessible leisure facilities for all communities and **linked to the broader strategy to promote a healthy lifestyle**, tackle obesity and reduce preventable disease.
- **Invest in community sport**, targeting under-represented groups to promote social inclusion; currently those from low-income backgrounds are much less likely to participate in physical activities.
- **Promote a 2-hour weekly minimum time allocation** on the school curriculum for sport and physical activity, supported by creative strategies to cater for varying interests and aptitudes and encourage sustained healthy lifestyle choices.
- Allocate funds to **implement the strategic development plans** drawn up for **Gaelic football and rugby**, on a proportionate level with soccer. Gaelic sports and rugby benefit from major voluntary input but should, in addition, receive parity of recognition from government.
- Support creation of an **all-Ireland soccer team**.
- Invest in the creation of opportunities for talented young athletes to excel; sporting excellence is a matter of societal pride and there is a need for a **stadium of international standard and an Olympic-size pool**. The stadium should have revenue-streams built in, to ensure year-round use.
- Expand and develop leisure schemes developed by the Probation Board and others as a means of targeting and reducing **anti-social/anti-community behaviour**.

Safer streets - justice, policing and community partnership

The SDLP is on the Policing Board and the District Policing Partnerships because we are committed to delivering Patten and protection against crime. Already we have got more change in the last two years than in the previous eighty put together, including:

- District Policing Partnerships to ensure community safety in your area.
- A new Police Ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, to investigate human rights abuse.
- Higher recruitment, on a 50/50 basis, than Patten recommended, accelerating the transition to a representative police service.
- Special Branch being replaced with new accountable intelligence gathering structures, described by the Oversight Commissioner American Tom Constantine as "meeting the best practice requirements of any police force in the world."
- New neutral name and badge for the police service. The Union flag no longer flies.
- New policing legislation – promised to us before we joined the Policing Board – to ensure proper accountability.
- A new Chief Constable - Hugh Orde. – who investigated security force collusion with loyalists.

None of this would have happened if the SDLP had not joined the Policing Board. All of this is after only two years of a ten year programme of change. We now set out the next steps for delivering change and community safety.

The SDLP has also forced the British Government to face up to its responsibilities for delivering the Agreement's commitments on criminal justice. During the Hillsborough negotiations we won detailed commitments for far-reaching criminal justice change. They include a new duty on the Director of Public Prosecutions to refer all possible cases of police wrongdoing to the Police Ombudsman for investigation. This is a critical safeguard to ensure that a blind eye is never turned to police wrongdoing.

Delivery of this legislation helps to pave the way to devolution of justice and policing. Having succeeded in working together on the Policing Board, the SDLP believes that we can tackle these issues together in the Executive.



"The PSNI is now subject to more accountability than any other police agency I'm aware of"

American Patten Commission member, Kathy O'Toole, Irish News, Wednesday 5 November 2003

On District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships the SDLP will:

- Work for **local policing strategies** to reflect community needs, including more officers on patrol, faster response times, better clear-up rates and dedicated crime units in areas of acute need.
- Ensure that every police district has a strategy to deal with **sectarian crime** and for the protection of vulnerable groups, especially the elderly.
- Develop multi-agency action teams to tackle **anti-social behaviour**.
- Ensure **good planning** to design out crime and build in safety.
- Seek the extension of the **Car-Crime Pilot Scheme** beyond West Belfast

On the Policing Board the SDLP will:

- Develop **all-Ireland police training** in the new police training college.
- Ensure the full implementation of the changes agreed by the Policing Board to ensure **accountable police intelligence gathering**.
- Ensure **North/South police personnel exchanges** in serious crime, change management, drugs, community policing, ethical standards, criminal assets, training, immigration, traffic, personnel, fingerprinting and IT.

Safer streets - justice, policing and community partnership

- **Ensure greater police efficiency.** We will get the police out from behind their desks and onto the streets.
- **Accelerate the review of police stations** and police assets to ensure best use of resources, to make policing **customer-service focused and accessible** to the community.
- **Seek an end to plastic bullets.** We will drive forward the Patten recommended work on an alternative and seek to order it by Summer 2004.

We will also:

- Ensure that the two governments honour the commitment given to us that if **Judge Cory** recommends **public inquiries** into the Finucane, Hamill or Nelson cases, they will be held.
- **Protect the 50/50 Patten quota.**
- Seek **additional funds for the Police Ombudsman** so that she can fund all her investigations of past collusion.

Car-Crime

- Lobby for mandatory display of **insurance disks** on cars, like in the South.
- Resource a **scrapping scheme for old cars** left on streets untaxed and uninsured.

Under-age Drinking

- Seek **enforcement of legislation** on licensees against under-age drinking, with more spot checks.
- Implement the Department's **Drug and Alcohol strategy** and the recommendations of its strategy "Reducing Alcohol Related Harm".
- Introduce a **proof-of-age** scheme.

In the negotiations on devolution of justice and policing, the SDLP will:

- Argue for **devolution** of justice and policing within **two years**.
- Ensure that there is **no reduction in the powers** of the Policing Board and the **Police Ombudsman**.
- **Vigorously oppose any move to put MI5 in the lead on intelligence gathering.** This work must stay with the police, so that it can be scrutinised by the Policing Board and Police Ombudsman.
- Seek a **single Department** to deal with both policing and justice issues. We are opposed to adding this onto OFM/DFM's already heavy responsibilities.
- Ensure **cross-community safeguards** so that there can be no return to the days of a unionist dominated Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Seek further **implementation bodies on policing and criminal justice**, including:
 - an **All-Ireland Criminal Assets Bureau**, modelled

on the Criminal Assets Bureau in the South, to deprive criminals of their wrongful gains without fear or favour throughout the island.

- an **All-Ireland Law Commission** to research and promote harmonization of laws throughout the island.

Public Safety

Public safety initiatives are spread across a number of government departments and agencies, which has resulted in fragmentation and a lack of effectiveness. The SDLP wants to tackle this issue in a co-ordinated way, to bring down the number of needless injuries and deaths. We believe that public safety strategy would be more effective if it encompassed the range of issues from safety at work, safety at home, to road safety etc.

In the past we have been told that it is too expensive to improve safety measures; in our view, too often government has put savings before safety.

SDLP Goals:

- Bring together various aspects of public safety under the responsibility of **one main government unit** in a dedicated effort to reduce accidents.
- Create an **all-Ireland Public Safety Body** to build on the successful collaboration on road safety advertising and education initiatives.
- Implement the strategies on Home Accident Prevention, Workplace Health, Road Safety and the Fire Cover review.

Emergency Services

- Increase resources to **improve ambulance response times** especially in rural areas.
- Build on the success of existing fire safety campaigns such as 'Ban the Pan' and 'Thumbs Up on Monday - Check your smoke alarm' with **North/South shared media campaigns**.
- Increase **North-South co-operation between the emergency services**, examining areas of mutual concern e.g. training.

Road Safety

- Develop a **holistic approach to road safety** involving education, enforcement and road improvements.
- Full implementation of the Northern Ireland **Road Safety Strategy** in order to reduce the number of fatalities on our roads.
- **Reduce acceptable blood alcohol levels** for driving, from 80mg/l to 50mg/l.
- Improve identification and **highlighting of accident black spots**.
- Increase **traffic calming measures** around schools, hospitals and residential areas.

Combating poverty, promoting equality and human rights

The SDLP is committed to promoting equality and protecting human rights. As the party of the civil rights movement, equality and human rights are not just slogans – they are part of our founding philosophy.

Now we want to take forward our work to ensure that the Agreement's promise on equality and human rights is delivered for all.



In government, all SDLP Ministers demonstrated their commitment to these principles. In particular, we proposed a Single Equality Bill to provide comprehensive protection against discrimination. We also devised specific strategies to promote the rights of disabled people, travellers and ethnic minorities.

We worked to protect human rights – especially of the most vulnerable. For example, in government, the SDLP brought forward legislation for a Children's Commissioner with world leading powers.

Since suspension, we have worked to restore credibility to the human rights agenda following the deeply damaging revelations of mishandling of the Holy Cross case by the Human Rights Commission. We have also sought consensus on a way forward for the Bill of Rights.

“The ‘Children are Unbeatable’ Campaign is using the SDLP policy document on physical punishment as an example of good practice appended to their recent briefing.”

SDLP goals:

Promoting Equality

- Introduce a **Single Equality Bill**, to harmonise protection against discrimination upwards and guarantee equality for all groups.
- **Outlaw discrimination in all land sales**, so that everybody has an equal chance to buy land.
- Impose **tougher penalties on persistent discriminators**, including exemplary damages.
- **Eliminate the differential in unemployment rates between the two main communities by 2011**. See further below.
- Oppose attempts to reduce the effectiveness of **fair employment monitoring**.
- **End discriminatory rules** restricting eligibility for **key civil service posts** to UK nationals only.
- Create a **new Equality Tribunal** to hear all discrimination complaints.
- Oppose proposals to put **Justice and Equality** into the one department. The SDLP will not give equality to the **securocrats**.
- Introduce **equal pay audits** to eliminate the gap between men and women's earnings. We will minimise the burden on business by timing these with fair employment reviews.
- Develop a **comprehensive gender equality strategy**, addressing in particular the issue of childcare.
- **Outlaw age discrimination**
- Implement the **Disability Rights Taskforce** report, so that people with disabilities enjoy comprehensive civil rights.
- Ensure **full rights** for children with **special educational needs** through new legislation.
- Ensure the delivery of the new **race equality strategy**.
- **Outlaw discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation**, ensure legal recognition for same sex partnerships and develop a joined up strategy for LGBT equality.

Combating poverty, promoting equality and human rights

- Ensure **proper accommodation for travellers** in line with the recent needs assessment.
- Fund groups involved in equality consultations and ensure the full development of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

Guaranteeing Human Rights

- **Develop a comprehensive and forward-looking Bill of Rights** for Northern Ireland by agreement between political parties and civic society.
- **Support adequate funding** for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission as well as **powers of inquiry**.
- Ensure that all steps necessary are taken to **restore credibility to the Human Rights Commission** following the Holy Cross debacle.
- Champion an **All-Ireland Charter of Rights**, to guarantee the highest standards of human rights protection throughout the island.
- Ensure that the **Children's Commissioner is properly resourced**.
- Develop the **Children's strategy**, to match the internationally praised southern strategy.

Combating Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion

Equality and human rights mean little if we do not also tackle poverty and promote social inclusion. Research showing that 37% of our children grow up in poverty serves as a reminder of the scale of the challenge ahead. **Our goals:**

- Bring forward an **anti-poverty strategy**, as a successor to New TSN and building on its principles of targeting those in greatest need. The strategy to have particular emphasis on children in poverty, disabled people, lone parents and on eliminating differentials between the two communities in poverty and unemployment.
- **Create a fund to target social need**, acting as a top-up fund for departments that skew resources to areas of greatest need.
- Create a **Committee of the Assembly to oversee the poverty strategy** and hold government to account.
- Link in with attempts by Government at **Westminster** to combat poverty.
- Extend the work of the **Taskforce on**

Employability and Long Term Unemployment to tackle unemployment blackspots.

- Give preference to **government contractors** that recruit from the **long-term unemployed**.
- **Eliminate the differential in unemployment** between the two communities by 2011.

Child Poverty

- Agree **target to reduce Child Poverty** as part of the **anti-poverty strategy and Children's Strategy**.
- **Extend the Social Inclusion Fund with resources set aside** for applications from **schools in areas of social need**. In this way we can deliver equal opportunities through tackling disadvantage and under-performance. [see also Education section]
- **Extend the children's half-price travel scheme** to 16-18 year-olds in full-time education.

Pensioner poverty & social inclusion

- Develop a **strategy for the social inclusion of the elderly** [see below].
- Increase the Social Inclusion Fund with **dedicated resources for pensioners**, to be accessible not just for government projects but also through community and voluntary sector bodies like Age Concern.
- Provide for **rates relief** for pensioners in greatest need.
- Co-ordinate a **new strategy to eradicate fuel poverty** (see below) including special measures for pensioners.
- Reduce age limit for free **TV licence**.
- Work to secure free personal care.
- Agree **all-Ireland scheme for free travel for pensioners**, through mutual recognition of pensioners' identification, to boost tourism as well as improving cohesion of rights and benefits island-wide.
- Establish a standing **pensioner forum** to communicate directly with government on an ongoing basis so that policy is better informed and pensioners' needs more effectively met.

Tackling Social Debt

- Co-operate with CAB, Credit Unions and others to put together the resources necessary to **protect people from loan sharks and assist those with social debt problems**.

- **Provide funding bodies with all available research and deprivation indicators** to ensure that resources are targeted at areas of need and promote consolidation of applications procedures to make resources more easily accessible.

Fuel poverty

We believe that tackling fuel poverty is not just a social justice imperative but a sound economic investment. People in warm homes are healthier, place less strain on the health service and take fewer days off work through ill-health. In addition, jobs are created installing systems and energy efficiency measures.

The current strategy is fragmented and does not effectively target those in greatest need. The Department for Social Development has responsibility yet lacks overall control of the various funds and schemes involved.

SDLP goals

- **Consolidate resources and authority within a coherent structure** so that strategy and planning can systematically target those in need. A government taskforce will not suffice – all relevant bodies and organisations need to be brought together including energy-suppliers, the regulatory authority, the Housing Executive, charitable organisations etc. The success of the ADHAZ scheme should be built upon in terms of effective targeting and successful partnership working.
- **Broaden the Warm Homes Scheme** beyond energy efficiency measures to allow installation of heating systems so that a single intervention ensures a warm home.
- Commission the Social Economy Agency to explore, in association with Age Concern, **new initiatives to reduce fuel costs for pensioners**, examining best practice elsewhere for potential application.
- Prioritise urgent allocation of funding to enable the Housing Executive to complete the **replacement of all solid fuel and Economy 7 heating systems** with oil or gas heating.
- Establish a **cross-party Assembly group on Fuel Poverty** to assess effectiveness of programmes and promote more co-ordinated government interventions.

Benefits

The SDLP is committed to using the limited leverage available under devolution to

improve the delivery and uptake of benefits. Negotiating with the Treasury, Mark Durkan delivered change to the operation of the Working Families Tax Credit so that parents living in the North and working in the South, now get higher levels of benefit.

SDLP goals

- **Simplify and streamline** benefit application and delivery.
- **Use technology better** to avoid endless form-filling.
- **Offer greater assistance** in completing forms to those applying for Disability Living Allowance or Incapacity Benefit.
- **Increase the number of independent doctors** to gather correct information at the outset of claims.
- **Decrease paperwork** so that appeals can be dealt with promptly.
- Improve the service to applicants so that, once in contact with the system, **all relevant benefits are identified** and processed as quickly as possible.
- **Appoint a senior member of staff** at each office to **take responsibility for Carers' needs** which are more complex than most, often involving benefits for dependants as well as benefits for carers themselves. Increased flexibility is required so that, for example, staff can make home visits to those unable to leave the house.
- **Invest in Citizens' Advice Bureau** to support their work addressing injustices and loopholes in the system, challenging government to perform and serve better

Tackling sectarianism, building a shared society

The SDLP is determined to build a shared and pluralist society where sectarianism and other forms of intolerance are effectively tackled.

We believe that we must work at the same time to beat sectarianism and build a shared society. Efforts to build a shared society will fail if we do not also take a firm stand against sectarianism. Equally, a vigorous approach to sectarianism is not enough to stop our communities drifting into greater segregation.

In government we commissioned a fundamental review of community relations policy, because we believe that current policies are ineffective.

We now bring forward our detailed proposals for the way ahead.

SDLP Goals

- A new **Sectarian and Hate Crimes Act** including:
 - A total **overhaul of our laws on incitement to hatred** to make them effective and also to tackle hatred on the internet.
 - Preventing bands that promote **hate language** or use **paramilitary symbols** from parading.
 - **Outlawing flags and graffiti** on public property, including **repeal** of laws requiring the flying of **union flags** from government buildings.
 - Requiring public authorities to agree a **common strategy for removal of flags** etc, including use of contractors backed by police and prosecutions.
 - **Outlawing sectarian chanting** at football matches.
 - **Tougher sentences** for crimes motivated by sectarianism.
 - A requirement on the police to **monitor sectarian offences**, like the US Federal Hate Crimes Statistics Act.
- A duty on every **District Council** to devise plans for promoting sharing and tackling sectarianism.
- A new **Good Relations Commission** to spearhead the drive for better relations and supervise District Councils.
- Bringing together political parties, churches, employers, trade unions and the community/voluntary sector to agree action **across society to promote sharing and combat sectarianism.**
- **Mainstreaming** good relations into community development work.
- Co-ordinated action in education for sharing and cross-community contact, involving schools, teacher training, curricular development and the Youth Service.
- Encouraging **mixed estates**. In particular, those guilty of sectarian harassment should be moved, not their victims.
- Ensuring **shared spaces**. Joined up efforts by the planning service and the police will be essential to ensure the creation and protection of shared spaces.
- **North/South common action on racism, incitement to hatred** law reform and to promote better **community relations** throughout Ireland.

Tackling sectarianism, promoting victims' rights

Vindicating the rights of victims

The SDLP believes that acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims of violence is vital to achieve true reconciliation.

In the current atmosphere of change, many victims feel their burden is a lonely one to carry and their struggle irrelevant to the society they live in. The SDLP view is that as a society we share the responsibility to address these needs and to extend support in practical and symbolic ways. We want to ensure that victims' needs are at the centre of progress towards truth and remembrance.



In government, we championed the rights of victims, especially through the victims strategy developed by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. While progress made has been substantial, we believe that more needs to be done to deliver on the Agreement's promise to victims. In particular, there is a need for further steps to acknowledge the individual and collective loss of victims, to vindicate their right to remember and to ensure their right to truth.

SDLP Goals

- **Implement the Victims Strategy** to provide all possible practical support to victims, their families and those bereaved.
- **Establish a Victims' and Survivors' Forum** to allow those injured or bereaved to have their story heard and their loss acknowledged.
- **In particular, to task the Victims' and Survivors' Forum with developing** a truth and remembrance mechanism for dealing with the past. The SDLP favours a truth and remembrance mechanism and is clear that the rights and interests of victims must be at its heart.
- **Create an interactive video-archive** as a memorial to those who died and an opportunity for victims and others to record a comment and view contributions.
- **Open a Register of Victims**, to which anyone could submit their name for inclusion and which would be held privately by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- **Appoint a Victims Commissioner** for a time-limited period, to raise the profile of victims needs and act as a key point of access providing comprehensive information about all relevant victims' and family services and funding sources as well as working with the Forum in making recommendations for the future development of policy.

"Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Membership of the European Union has been extremely beneficial for Northern Ireland. The SDLP is the only committed pro-EU party, working to promote Northern Ireland's interests in Europe with our sister parties in the Party of European Socialists, one of the biggest groupings in the Parliament.

The SDLP supports the enlargement of the EU. We recognise that the new EU will involve many changes. We will ensure that NI draws the maximum benefit from our membership of the EU. We will continue to advocate at all levels of the EU, policies that benefit our people.

The SDLP will ensure that Northern Ireland has a powerful voice when new EU policies are formulated.

The SDLP was the first party to call for membership of the European Economic Community as it was in the 1970s. John Hume MP MEP has used his membership of the European Parliament, since 1979, to deliver significant benefits for the North, playing a pivotal role in securing the "PEACE" funds, an unprecedented gesture of support from the EU to assist our transition away from conflict.

The SDLP also has nominees on the Committee of the Regions which represents the interests of local & regional governments across Europe in key debates including enlargement and the EU Constitution.

SDLP Goals

- We will campaign for entry to the Euro zone. In the meantime, we will work to promote the use of the Euro by businesses, individuals and public services.
- We look forward to the continuation of an EU-wide regional development policy after 2006. We will work to ensure that NI receives the most favourable treatment possible when the new EU regional policy rules are decided.
- We are committed to ensuring that CAP reform works in the interests of our farmers and rural communities. We believe that the structure of the local agriculture industry can make CAP reform advantageous to the vast majority of farmers. We will develop a new strategy for marketing and quality control.
- We will work to secure continuation of the Special EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme.
- We will support the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights by the EU.
- We will build on the achievements of agri-food industry to modernise and develop a top-class 21st century agri-food sector.
- We will work to develop an all-Ireland position on reform of the Common Fisheries Policy to secure the future of Irish fishing.
- We will work for the development of Trans-European Networks in Transport, Energy and Telecommunications. Ensuring that NI takes part in the TENs is essential for the future health of our economy.
- We will work for the completion and extension of Transport TENs so that all parts of the North are connected to them. In particular, the road and rail TENs must be extended West of the Bann.
- We welcome the recent designation by the EU of the Motorways of the Sea. We will work to ensure that NI ports take part in the western European Motorway of the Sea linking Ireland with Spain and France.
- We will also pursue the integration of NI into the Energy Trans-European Network linking Ireland, Britain and Continental Europe.
- We will ensure that NI is fully geared up for the demands of the information society and takes a full part in the development of the Telecommunications TENs.
- We will continue to develop strategies designed to enable our businesses to make the most of the opportunities provided by the new single market of 450 million people.
- We will seek to maximise use of the "outward & forward-looking region" measure to ensure that all sectors of our society keep abreast of international networks and technological development.
- Establish an Assembly Committee on European affairs.
- We will work to implement the decision of the Executive to establish a European Policy Forum (an SDLP initiative), representative of all sections of society and our economy, which will meet regularly with Ministers to develop a Northern Ireland Regional Strategy within the EU Framework.
- We will ensure that our Further and Higher Education systems participate fully in EU education and training programmes, thus broadening the horizons of our young people, and giving them marketable skills.

International affairs

The SDLP is the most internationally minded of the major parties in the North, committed to global co-operation as the only viable way to tackle major issues that cross state boundaries such as poverty, international trade and environmental protection. Since our formation the party has been a member of the 'Socialist International' and has campaigned against injustice and conflict across the world.

Through the untiring efforts of John Hume in particular, the SDLP leveraged international support in devising a framework leading to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and Good Friday Agreement - major steps in resolving our own deep-seated conflict. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to John Hume in 1998, is validation not only of his enormous contribution, but also the internationalist vision and credentials of the SDLP.

The SDLP view is that the momentum of globalisation must be harnessed to support democracy and eradicate poverty. The International Fund for Ireland, which has been a model for economic reconstruction in strife-torn areas of the world, was the brain-child of John Hume and the SDLP.

“30,000 children die every day from preventable poverty.”

(Report of the All-Party Group on International Development)

SDLP action on international issues:

- Party President and Nobel Peace Laureate, John Hume has been working to support the peace process between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers, visiting the area in February 2002 & April 2003
- SDLP was the first Irish party to support Aung San Suu Kyi & Burmese people's pro-democracy campaign; Carmel Hanna, former Minister, visited Burma in August 2003 to assist in devising a 'roadmap to democracy'
- Mark Durkan visited Malawi in January 2003 with 'Children in Cross-fire' profiling the poverty in the area.
- As International Secretary of the party, Cllr Margaret Ritchie has been working continuously with development agencies, addressing issues of debt and poverty in the developing world.
- Carmel Hanna established and chaired an All Party Assembly Group on International Development.
- In 2002 Cllr John Dallat, developed a Memorandum of Understanding between Coleraine Borough Council and officials in Zomba, Malawi promoting co-operation and fundraising.
- SDLP has been involved in the peace process in the Basque Country; former Junior Minister Denis Haughey has visited regularly since 1995, in 2001 as official guest of the Basque government.
- SDLP MPs voted against the war in Iraq in the House of Commons.

SDLP Goals:

The SDLP strongly opposed the war in Iraq and wants to see much greater UN involvement in the transfer of responsibility to a democratically elected government. We are calling for greater investment to rebuild infrastructure and an increase humanitarian aid.

We will continue to support the campaigns for the cancellation of developing world debt and the end of bonded labour and slavery.

The SDLP supports the creation of a Palestinian state and opposes all terrorism.

- Implementation of the recommendations from the Report of the All-Party Group on International Development including awareness raising and enhanced support for conflict resolution overseas.
- Promotion of Fair Trade goods and increased reliance on such products by public bodies.
- Fair treatment of asylum seekers, including an end to the use of prison accommodation for those awaiting hearings.
- Protection of rights of migrant workers – UK government should sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and the SDLP will promote union membership for all migrant workers.

In the international arena, we will:

- Play our part in harnessing the forces of globalisation to eliminate world poverty through fair trade, building a global framework for labour mobility & developing global environmental framework to tackle environmental issues
- Advocate withdrawal of support for regimes which flout human rights.
- Argue that support for democratic national governments is central to tackling social and economic problems
- Campaign for a successful WTO trade round that gives more opportunities to less developed countries.
- Champion the democratisation of global institutions including the UN, World Bank, IMF and WTO and strengthening of international capability to protect victims of aggression.
- We will be a consistent and persistent advocate of democracy, promoting human rights across the world.



sdlp...now more than ever



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