

AUT Newsletter

Produced by Belfast Association of University Teachers General Election Special May 2001

HE Policies of the NI Political Parties

In the run up to the General Election we believe that Higher Education issues should be in the minds of university staff and students and their families. The AUT wrote to the Northern Ireland political parties sending them the AUT Election Manifesto and inviting them to comment on it and on the need to make the salaries of university teaching and support staff comparable to other professions employing high quality graduates. They were also invited to address the following local issues:

- The need to provide sufficient Higher Education places within the province for NI domiciled students.
- How we can maintain the full spectrum of subjects within the NI universities given the present funding methodologies.
- How we can maintain UK-wide and international standards in a devolved funding system.
- Any further involvements with local businesses and further widening of access that they want to encourage and how they can be funded.

Although the parties could reply as extensively as they wished, we asked for a statement of at most 250 words for us to publish. We publish below these various statements in the order in which they arrived. The views expressed are those of the individual parties and not necessarily those of AUT.

UUP

The UUP is fully committed to developing *all* the areas of the Department of HFETE's responsibilities. NI's universities need to retain or attain world class excellence in as many fields as possible. FE should not be the cinderella service. Adult illiteracy needs to be tackled. We have used our Chairmanship of the Assembly Committee to push forward in all these areas.

We would support the AUT's UK-wide campaign to raise the resources (per capita) going into HE and also to restore the real and relative level of staff pay.

There are to be 5400 extra places during 1999-2004. This will go some way (though not completely) to close the Dearing "gap". We would defend the traditional idea of the "university" with a wide range of subject areas. Current proposals to make the QAA less onerous should be considered. Whilst NI probably should not divorce itself from the RAE it could usefully introduce an element of research funding for strategic and regional needs. Anything which promotes fruitful interaction between HE and business should be promoted. The UUP is very concerned to see wider social access to HE (though not at the cost of diluting standards or genuine meritocracy). The local universities could maybe examine the university-school partnerships established in, for example, Bristol and the Glasgow area.

On a personal note, as a former lecturer (still an AUT member) I welcome your interest in Party positions and I want to reiterate my commitment to HE.

Esmond Birnie

Alliance

Our current policy on training and employment is published on the Alliance Party website at http://www.allianceparty.org/html/training_employment.html This contains some reference to third level education but does not address the issues you have listed in your letter.

Alliance supports the AUT recommendations and its goals.

Alliance particularly supports recommendation 5 as we believe that all students should have equal access to funding across the UK and from whatever their socio-economic background.

Alliance continues to press for the abolition of tuition fees.

Alliance recognises the importance of higher education in the economic and social life of Northern Ireland and acknowledges the role that increased co-operation between the three universities can play in the peace process.

Alliance supports the development of greater co-operation with GB and the Republic of Ireland.

Alliance supports increased provision of university places for selected subjects and wishes to see diversity of subjects continue.

Alliance campaigned for tax varying powers in the Assembly so that extra funding would be made available for public services including education. In the absence of sufficient government funding, private funding should be obtained where possible particularly to ensure investment in research and development.

Widening of access is addressed in Minister Farren's recent recommendations and these measures must be reviewed and evaluated frequently. Greater access can also be achieved through an increased provision of virtual and distance learning and by increased co-operation with FE colleges for example by the delivery of foundation degrees.

Jayne Dunlop

The Other Parties

We wrote to all the political parties in the NI assembly. If they missed our deadline, we sent them a reminder. We have waited 10 days from our original deadline before going to press. You can draw your own conclusions about the parties which have not responded.

Paul Hudson