

# Political Parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly - The Democratic Unionist Party

## KEY:

PG: Paul Givan

PG: Well, I'm Paul Givan. I represent the Constituency of Lagan Valley for the Democratic Unionist Party.

*What does your Party stand for?*

First and foremost, we're a pro-Union party. We value and cherish the links with the rest of the United Kingdom and believe Northern Ireland is an integral part of the Kingdom. We are very much a devolutionist party, so we want to have Northern Ireland running its own affairs, taking decisions through locally elected politicians on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland.

*How has your Party changed in the last 20 years?*

Well, over the past 20 years, we went from a party where we were very much in opposition. We campaigned against the Belfast Agreement in 1998 and in subsequent elections to that we were the smaller of the Unionist parties and we wanted fundamental change. So as a Party, we moved from opposition to now being the predominant party of government, trying to manage through the Executive important decisions and being a responsible party of government.

*Do you think the Assembly and Executive are effective?*

The Executive, which represents all of our government parties, I appreciate could be more speedy in its decision making process, but that in itself is a result of the mandatory coalition system that exists. In Northern Ireland, we've got five political parties that make up our government and that presents its own unique challenges that many other democracies don't have to face.

*What challenges face your Party moving forward?*

As the party of government and through the mandatory coalition system, there are decisions that we would want to take that we're not able to achieve and that can present frustration. And you go to the electorate and the public with a very clear policy position but you need to achieve consensus with other parties to make that a reality.

### *Corporation Tax*

We would like to see a reduction in Corporation Tax because we believe it would give us a competitive advantage where new jobs can be created. And that is one of our key reasons for being in government, is to create new jobs, particularly for our young people who are coming out of university and are struggling to get those highly paid jobs that we would want them to be in.

### *Voting at 16*

Currently, the Party's position is that we believe that 18 is the age to vote. We believe that would be the most appropriate age, but I certainly appreciate young people do want to have that right to vote at 16. Because there are a number of important issues that they can legally do at the age of 16 and why not being able to vote is one of those. So certainly, I'm open to that conversation but as things stand, 18 is the age that our Party position is that that's when you should have the right to vote.

### *Academic Selection*

Academic selection is something that we have retained in law and for those parents who want to use that, then the law protects them to do that and it allows schools to use academic selection as a criteria for them to choose young people coming into secondary education.

### *Student Fees*

When we witnessed the reaction in the rest of the United Kingdom when those fees went up to nine and a half thousand pounds, because of devolution we took action and we have capped that so people aren't paying the nine and a half thousand pounds. It's just over three thousand pounds that people are paying. So tuition fees are something that I'm proud that we've taken action on and whilst there's pressure to have it increased, we're clear in our position that people should be allowed to get into further education and it shouldn't matter the background that you come from. And if you're not as well off as others, that should not prevent you from going to university, which is what our fear would be if we were in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.