

## Political Parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly – The Ulster Unionist Party

### KEY:

SO: Sandra Overend

SO: I'm Sandra Overend, I am a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, and I represent the constituency of Mid Ulster.

*What does your Party stand for?*

Well, the Ulster Unionist Party is a Party of the Union. We believe in... that Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom. We're a Party of law and order. And we're very proud of the history of the Ulster Unionist Party and the integral part that, the leading role, that it played in bringing forward the Peace Process back in 1998.

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

Well, Northern Ireland has changed a lot over the past 20 years. And the Party internally has changed a lot. And we have a new generation of elected representatives now. But our principles remain the same, and that Northern Ireland remains a part of the United Kingdom. We want Northern Ireland to flourish.

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

The current Assembly and Executive is really very dysfunctional. Back in '98, whenever we ... we've helped to bring forward the Belfast Agreement..it was built in a certain way to build trust. And, unfortunately, I don't think that trust has been built. And the current dysfunctionality of the Assembly and how Welfare Reform threatens the future of this place, it really isn't where we wanted to see the Assembly to go.

*What challenges face your Party moving forward?*

We're moving forward, but we also face the challenges of increasing female representation and getting young people involved in politics. And those are some of the challenges that we face. We are making strides and improving that. And we have a number of young councillors in lots of different areas across Northern Ireland. But we need to improve on that. And we need to encourage more people to get involved in politics and see how it affects their daily lives.

### *Corporation Tax*

Well, the Ulster Unionist Party was quite instrumental in bringing that discussion forward back when Sir Reg Empey was here in the Northern Ireland Assembly. We support the devolution of Corporation Tax; it has the potential of creating thirty to forty thousand jobs here in Northern Ireland. And it's a sad fact that the current Welfare Reform stalemate puts a threat on the potential devolution of Corporation Tax.

### *Voting at 16*

Well, in recent times the Ulster Unionist Party has supported motions on the floor of the Assembly to lower the voting age to 16. Our young people can leave home and join the army and have those sort of responsibilities. So, why not let them vote at the age of 16?

### *Academic Selection*

The Ulster Unionist Party believes that there should be a moratorium on academic selection so that a resolution can be brought into place. And discussions can... sensible discussions can be formed together. Whether that, you know, changes can be made to that, and whether academic selection happens at the age of 14, you know, that is a possibility and something that should be looked at seriously.

### *Student Fees*

The Ulster Unionist Party is very committed to ensuring that student rates in Northern Ireland remain at a reasonable rate. We have been very proud of the fact that Northern Ireland is the region within the United Kingdom which has been very successful at reaching out to those of the lower socioeconomic levels.