

## ELECTION 2011 MANIFESTO ANALYSIS

### Introduction

During February, March and April 2011 Early Years – the organisation for young children met with key policy, departmental and advisory representatives covering the main political parties in Northern Ireland and undertook a variety of policy and advocacy events and activities, such as area hustings events. The purpose of these activities was to make sure that the main issues affecting the sector and our members were heard at the highest levels of decision making and to try to influence each party in the development of their own election manifesto commitments to include a focus on the early years sector.

The Early Years Manifesto outlines the key issues for the early years sector in Northern Ireland and emphasises to our politicians the critical need for major investment in our young children.

The manifesto proposes a number of next steps:

- An Early Education and Care Act for Northern Ireland that would provide a legislative basis for the financing, supervision and coordination of all education and care services for young children
- Increase/ realign the percentage of the Education budget spent on young children's pre-primary education
- Roll out of the programme for two year olds incrementally across Northern Ireland allowing Statutory Nurseries, Private Day Care, Sure Start services, community based playgroups and child minders to deliver the programme
- Parents to be allowed to pay for wrap around child care
- A training, qualifications and professional development strategy for the **entire workforce** working with this age group recognising the experience many staff will bring with them
- A 0-6 strategy aligned with other key policies and strategies such as the need for enhanced parental leave entitlement; the relationship with the Child Care; Play and Leisure; and Cohesion, Sharing and Integration strategies
- Deal with as a pressing issue and outline in a clear manner how services for children aged 3+ can be delivered in an equitable and accessible fashion
- A single funding formulae for this age group
- Equitable provision for children with SEN

All of the main political parties in Northern Ireland released their own 2011 Assembly Election Manifesto documents, outlining the main issues and priorities for each over the next four years, in April. This document outlines the main points contained in each of relevance to the organisation and then, in Appendix 1, attempts to chart where each make either direct or indirect reference to calls as included in the Early Years Manifesto document.

## **DUP Manifesto 2011<sup>1</sup>**

In the opening message from the Party Leader the DUP Manifesto document states "We want to deliver efficient high quality public services in key areas such as health and education. We will use the new justice powers to fight crime, and will seek to help hard-pressed individuals and families in these challenging economic times."

The document, within the 'Prioritising Our Economy' section, contains a specific sub-section on 'Childcare'<sup>2</sup> including the following provisions:

- work towards ensuring affordable childcare Province-wide from 8am to 6pm from Monday to Friday
- make greater use of the schools estate for childcare aiming for schools to be able to use childcare tax credits, and ensuring varied use of time including breakfast clubs, homework clubs, sport and vocational and skills training
- provide start-up grants and enhanced support for childminders
- simplify the standardised system of registering and inspecting childminders - lengthy delays are a disincentive to people registering
- support additional specialist childcare for children with disabilities
- establish a lead department for childcare providing greater accountability
- integrate the Childcare and Early Years strategies

Early intervention is a continuing theme of the document. The manifesto contains an express section on Early Intervention which, in calling for early intervention to be at the heart of departmental strategies, states "*Early intervention measures have been shown to improve mental and physical health, educational attainment and employment opportunities, and prevent criminal behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse and teenage pregnancy. We believe savings resulting from greater sharing across Government and the public sector could be reinvested back into early intervention measures for local communities.*"<sup>3</sup>

Other provisions of note within the document are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dup.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> DUP Manifesto, page 11.

<sup>3</sup> DUP Manifesto, page 18.

- Legislate to implement a Special Educational Needs strategy.
- Assist unemployed teachers to take training modules permitting them to attain experience in the preschool sector or similarly in reading recovery schemes until they obtain a teaching post.
- Ensure access to youth services particularly for disadvantaged young people.
- Enhance spending on foundation years provision
- Introduce a Foundation Years Bill.
- Integrate and implement the Childcare and Early Years strategies
- Identify and disseminate best practice to promote quality across the entire early years workforce
- Improve the delivery of early years services through enhancing the qualifications of staff
- Continue the one year funded preschool provision available to all children, and work towards delivering universal affordable childcare
- Strategic approach to co-ordinated provision of family and parent support services
- Invest in proven projects, particularly in the prenatal to three years age range
- Focus on social and emotional development and parenting programmes.

### **Sinn Féin Assembly Election Manifesto 2011<sup>4</sup>**

In the opening sections of the manifesto the document focuses on the party's successes over the previous four years electorally and in government and highlights a commitment of £100 million over the next four years to be targeted at the most vulnerable in our society.

The manifesto states<sup>5</sup> that the party believes that:

- economic recovery requires a radical reshaping of how government, the private and public sectors have traditionally operated, in order to best serve the needs of citizens;
- local and all-Ireland political institutions need to deliver social and economic change; and
- it is critical that they continue to ensure frontline public services and address social needs.

The document also states that the party will work to strengthen the public, private, voluntary/community sectors and trade union movement, to fight cuts and protect frontline public services.

Other provisions of note for the organisation include:

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/20533>

<sup>5</sup> Sinn Féin Assembly Manifesto, page 9.

- Ensuring that people with disabilities attain their full rights as citizens
- Full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Reviewing the distribution of care services across trusts to ensure that the most vulnerable are not the victims of any cuts
- Cut back on bureaucracy and ensure that more resources are put into frontline services
- Raise standards and ensure that all children are given an equal chance in our system
- Implement the newly-developed childcare strategy to assist parents accessing employment and to address poverty
- Ensure appropriate resources and targeted support, for the development of the community and voluntary sector, particularly through targeting public resources on the basis of greatest objective need

### **Alliance Party Manifesto Assembly Election 2011<sup>6</sup>**

At 148 pages, the Alliance Party manifesto is the most detailed of the five documents reviewed. Here also, early intervention is a recurring theme throughout the document.

Under the relevant section entitled 'early years' the document emphasises that equal access to high quality provision is important to support the educational and social development of children. The first three years of a child's life are critical in determining how well they do in terms of health, education and even future employment. The document further states that:

*"It is vital that household income and geography are not factors in the quality of provision afforded to a child; all children should be provided with the best possible start in life. Investment in early years is critical to ensure that educational, social, emotional and cognitive development of our future generations."<sup>7</sup>*

This section also outlines that the party:

- Supports a rebalancing of the education budget, towards early and primary education
- Calls for the development of a comprehensive Early Years strategy
- Will work for the introduction of an Early Education and Care Bill
- Supports continued funding and role out of SureStart services
- Will introduce learning communities
- Supports flexibility within the system to enable families to avail of full-time 'wrap around' provision through top-up funding and /or better collaborative provision

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.allianceparty.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Alliance Party Manifesto, page 68.

- Is committed to piloting programmes of intensive family support services for those most vulnerable children and their families.

The document highlights the importance of working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector in that organisations can often provide targeted solutions to local issues more effectively than statutory interventions and people in disadvantaged and marginalised communities are more likely to engage with a voluntary or community organisation.

Further provisions/commitments of relevance in the Alliance Party manifesto include:

- Invest in early years' education and childcare to support child development
- Support early intervention and prevention for families and young people at risk
- Work to address poor levels of literacy and numeracy
- Introduce an early intervention and prevention strategy to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training
- Work to ensure that the changes to Special Educational Needs (SEN) takes account of the concerns of parents.
- Place a greater emphasis on child health.
- The incorporation into UK domestic law of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Support the full implementation of the child poverty strategy

### **Ulster Unionist Party Manifesto 2011<sup>8</sup>**

In the Leader's Introduction the manifesto highlights that it is time to take the focus off the processes of government and concentrate on outcomes including a system that cherishes every child.

The Early Years section<sup>9</sup> of the document states "*The Ulster Unionist Party wants the next Programme for Government to prioritise Early Intervention as a main policy pillar for fighting educational underachievement, poverty and cycles of deprivation.*"

This section further outlines that the party is committed to:

- Pre-school education as a universal entitlement
- Introduce a cross-cutting Early Years Strategy for all children 0-6. offering integrated support for children, families and communities on issues relating to parenting skills, education, health and justice
- A cross-Departmental Early Years Fund to help finance the Early Years Strategy
- Equitable provision for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.uup.org/index.php/jo-anne-dobson/item/389-campaign-story-3.html>

<sup>9</sup> UUP Manifesto 2011, page 14.

Within the 'Employment and Learning' section of the Manifesto<sup>10</sup> the document acknowledges that many people who find it difficult to get employment have problems that can be sourced to upbringing, social background, a poor primary education and consequent lack of personal confidence at secondary level. The document states that it is essential therefore to put in place an overarching strategy, with the Departments of Education, Employment and Learning and Social Development working together, for ensuring that no one is left behind at any level of the educational system.

*"A rounded education is one of the most important things that a government can provide a child; and it is best provided under the framework of a costed, joined-up strategy covering the years from nursery to first employment."*<sup>11</sup>

Other notable sections of the manifesto document include:

- Understanding of the value of education among families and communities
- School and community led Area Based Planning and Area Learning Communities
- An overarching strategy for urban regeneration and community and voluntary sector development
- Ensuring the implementation of a Childcare Strategy for Northern Ireland – making the workplace more accessible
- Supporting strategies which promote enrolment in STEM subjects
- Ensuring that preventative work which educates our children and young people about safe and healthy relationships is promoted and properly resourced.

## **SDLP Manifesto 2011<sup>12</sup>**

The party sets out at the forefront of the manifesto document that the SDLP will unite people and build prosperity. Included prominently amongst the ways in which this will be achieved is 'investing in our young people, our schools, teachers, apprentices and universities'.

In the 'Building Prosperity through Educational Excellence' section the document also highlights that early investment in educational excellence can achieve both social justice and long-term economic growth for society and states:

*"Our top priority is to secure better investment in and provision for nursery and primary school children, the stage at which vulnerable children start falling behind."*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> UUP Manifesto 2011, page 30.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.sinnfein.ie/contents/20533>

<sup>13</sup> SDLP Manifesto 2011, page 12.

Under specific provisions relating to 'Affordable, Quality Childcare'<sup>14</sup> the document outlines that the party want to implement an affordable, comprehensive childcare strategy which seeks to expand the availability of childcare places right across the North and, as a first priority, to assign a lead department and minister for childcare policy. This section continues that a robust and well-resourced strategy for affordable, quality childcare for children aged 0-14 would be developed with other government departments, parents and childcare agencies in the community, voluntary, private and statutory sectors and to make it succeed, flexible working policies for mothers and fathers must be inseparable from good childcare policies.

The document sets out a number of other relevant commitments and priorities including:

- Making sure the forthcoming literacy and numeracy strategy initiates the type of research and cross-departmental approach needed to tackle the root causes of educational underachievement
- Fundamentally reconstructing the Budget to make sure the financial balance is tipped in favour of children's issues
- Ensuring the full implementation of an integrated, long-term 0-6 years strategy with cross-departmental responsibility, recognising early childhood care and education as a right for all children and addressing early years provision in rural areas
- Supporting ethnic minority children
- Placing a robust focus on attainment in STEM
- A policy adopted for children with special educational needs as a priority
- Placing a firm emphasis on a childcare strategy, tackling the huge financial burden of childcare costs and delivering our economic strategy that directs more good quality jobs and training to the most deprived areas.

## **Conclusion**

As can be seen from the above and the information contained in Appendix 1 below, It is extremely encouraging that each of these key political documents all include reference to issues voiced as of relevance to the organisation in general and those outlined specifically in the Early Years 2011 Manifesto.

However, even though it is very positive to see the type of coverage issues affecting our sector has received in published Party Manifesto documents, we are very aware that it is the actions of our next Assembly and Executive after the elections which will really count. Therefore is vital following May 5 to effectively make contact with our new MLAs and Councillors to continue ensuring that the voices of our young children and those who care for them are heard at the highest levels of decision making.

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<sup>14</sup> SDLP Manifesto 2011, page 17.

## APPENDIX 1: Early Years Manifesto calls and Party Assembly Election Manifestos

<b>Key:</b>	Direct Reference =	<i>JJ</i>	Indirect Reference =	<i>J</i>
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Early Years Manifesto Call	DUP	Sinn Féin	Alliance	UUP	SDLP
Early Education & Care Act / Bill	<i>J</i>		<i>JJ</i>		
Increase / realign budget % spent on pre-primary education.	<i>J</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>JJ</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>JJ</i>
Roll out of Programme for 2YO.			<i>JJ</i>		
Parents allowed to pay for wrap around childcare.	<i>J</i>		<i>JJ</i>		
Training / qualifications / professional development for workforce.	<i>J</i>	<i>J</i>		<i>J</i>	
Enhanced / better aligned 0-6 Strategy.	<i>JJ</i>		<i>J</i>	<i>JJ</i>	<i>JJ</i>
Accessible / equitable services for children aged 3+.	<i>J</i>				
Single funding formulae.					
Equitable provision for children with SEN.	<i>JJ</i>	<i>J</i>	<i>JJ</i>	<i>JJ</i>	<i>JJ</i>