

Working Together for a Scotland of Opportunity

Introduction

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It is only fair that everyone has opportunity to rise as far as their talents can take them, and the talents of each of us should improve the lives of all.

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If social justice means anything, it means the opportunity for people to make the most of their lives. This must be our aim as we begin to debate ideas and think about policies that will build a stronger economy for Scotland, and a fairer society for all.

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More than ever, Scotland must invest in our greatest natural resource - our people. We must harness our nation's energy and talents so no-one is held back or left behind. We must give people real help now, so that we can have hope for the future.

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Our teachers need a government that listens to their concerns. Our families need a government that shares their aspirations. And our pupils need a government that cares about education.

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For us, education is not just important to enrich our people. For us, it is a means to an end. Scottish Labour has a passionate belief in the power of education, learning and development to transform not just people, but the world.

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To do that, we have to restore Scotland's reputation as having the best education system in the world for children, young people and adults throughout their life. It's not an easy task, and it won't happen overnight, but we are determined to set out on that course.

Labour delivered for the people of Scotland

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In improving the opportunities available to people in Scotland, Labour has a proud record in early years education and nursery places. We introduced universal nursery places for three and four year olds which is now taken up by almost all children in their pre-school years. We recognise that a focus on early years leads to improved educational attainment in later school years.

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Labour invested strongly in education and skills. We provided additional support for schools and employed nearly 2,000 more teachers. We also abolished up-front tuition fees and introduced bursaries for poorer students, encouraging more school pupils towards further study than ever before.

We also undertook the biggest school building programme in Scotland's history. In fact, we refurbished or built a new school every week.

5 When in government, we invested heavily in our college buildings, creating world-class facilities in the heart of Scotland's communities. New college buildings, which are purpose-built to provide modern high quality learning environment significantly improve application rates, reduce drop-out rates and send a clear message to all young people that society believes in them.

10 With Labour, resources were directed into tackling poverty and deprivation, supporting hard working families and lifting people from poverty. When we were in government, we led the world in tackling homelessness and we made significant progress towards ending fuel poverty by 2016. Across the UK, Labour's minimum wage, the new deal and tax credits provided support for families has lifted millions from poverty. Furthermore, when
15 in government, our investment in credit unions helped quadruple membership. We also invested in financial inclusion services and money advice.

20 We achieved our interim targets to quarter child poverty by 2005, on our way to end it in a generation, and we have significantly reduced pensioner poverty. We created jobs, regenerated cities and communities, and improved housing and facilities in our poorest communities.

25 Scottish Labour also channelled money into music, art and culture, recognising the right for all to experience and enjoy our national museums and galleries. Now everyone has the opportunity to explore Scottish and international culture with free entry into these venues throughout Scotland, resulting in an increase in visitor numbers by 20%.

30 **Scotland is now at risk**

Labour is proud of our record in Scotland, but we know that our success has been built on the learning and skills of our citizens; our greatest natural asset. We do not want this
35 success put at risk.

Across Scotland, the SNP are cutting school budgets, forcing teachers to buy basic classroom equipment such as paper and pencils with their own money, so that pupils don't lose out.

40 The SNP's manifesto pledge to reduce class sizes to 18 for younger children is also in tatters, a fifth of new teachers in Scotland are unemployed, class sizes are going up and not one new school building has been commissioned.

45 More than half of our teachers are due to retire, or leave the profession, in the next four years. Of the country's 35,000 primary and secondary teachers, 25,000 will either reach retirement age by 2013, or will leave for other reasons. While the number of Scottish

5 Government bureaucrats has increased by 600, the SNP are failing to create permanent posts for newly qualified teachers. Short-term contracts are the reason that so many teachers are leaving the profession - not because of retirement. Temporary jobs mean that when teachers leave, there will be no vacancies to fill, leaving probationers out of work.

10 It is of huge concern that in the past eighteen months, the SNP have failed to commission a single new school using their promised Scottish Futures Trust. The SNP cannot explain how their Scottish Futures Trust will work and they have ruled out PPP for ideological reasons.

15 Now in office, the SNP are dropping promises they know they are unable to keep. They have failed to keep their manifesto promise to deliver two hours of physical education in primary schools, and are failing to deliver their manifesto pledge to provide children with "free, year-round access to council swimming pools".

20 While Labour were securing apprenticeships in the rest of the UK, the SNP refused to do so until forced to by Labour's changes to their 2009/2010 budget, which secured an extra 7,800 apprenticeship opportunities for those who are suitably qualified.

25 We believe that no young person should be left doing nothing. However, in 2007, the SNP made a 20% cut to the budget for Labour's Educational Maintenance Allowances, which are designed to encourage pupils and students from deprived backgrounds to remain in education beyond 16. This move damaged their right to reach their potential, a right that every young person in Scotland deserves.

30 Students and universities are right to feel let down by the SNP. Funding is tight for universities across Scotland. It is vital that Scottish universities do not fall behind the rest of the UK, when historically, Scottish universities have been world leaders. The SNP have been far too slow to react to this, and in fact actually made a real term cut to university budgets last year.

35 In addition, at the last election, the SNP promised to replace loans with grants and to write off student debt - students have seen election promises disappear before their very eyes. Student support in Scotland is falling further behind the rest of the UK.

Discussions for the Future

40 Improving our Schools

45 Scotland must be at the forefront of international educational thinking. Labour invested in school buildings, early years, teachers, and our curriculum for excellence. Our aim now must be to build the best education system in the world.

We need to improve how we support parents especially of primary children so we can start good habits young. We must increase opportunities for children to be active in the school environment, for physical education, and to take part in extra curricular activity.

5 We need to take the best of new thinking, to lead in closing the gap in achievement. We must learn from other countries and improve engagement in secondary schools and participation rates in upper secondary schools. It is our aim to create greater equity in higher education system and in our university sector.

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- What are the big ideas and practical programmes we need to adopt to improve education for all our young people?
 - How do we ensure that our brightest young Scots get every opportunity to take advantage of their skills and gifts?
 - How can we guarantee access to extra-curricular activities for all children?
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- How do we provide a qualifications framework and ensure all pupils have access to the best learning tools?
 - How do we provide a balanced curriculum to prepare our children for later life, and to contribute in the modern world? Should we invest more in certain subjects?
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- As we look to the future how do we get our school building programme back on track, and continue building schools that are fit for purpose and the pride of communities?
 - What examples do you know of great schools in Scotland, and why are they achieving success?

25 Labour believes that everyone should have basic literacy and numeracy skills, not just school pupils. Our ambition must be nothing less than to finally eradicate illiteracy across Scotland.

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- How can we eradicate innumeracy and illiteracy in Scotland?

Labour must examine the relationship between class sizes, teacher numbers, classroom assistants and classroom resources. We must work to have even smaller classes, more teachers, higher standards of teaching and work with our schools to improve leadership.

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- What control should schools have over their own affairs?
 - How can we recruit more teachers and make sure they have jobs?
 - How should the role of classroom assistants be supported to ensure maximum benefits for schools staff and pupils?
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- Can we end the use of unfair, short-term contracts who working across different local authorities?

45 All children have the right to learn without being bullied or held back by others.

- How do we best improve behaviour within our schools?
- How can we support teachers and head teachers to improve behaviour in the classroom? What good examples are there where behaviour has been improved?
- What is the role of teachers in tackling persistent and unacceptable behaviour, what authority do they have in and out of the classroom, and how do we ensure parents play their part and take responsibility?

Fairness for All

Labour must now look to the future, pushing forward and providing all Scots with opportunities to learn flexible, globally-useful skills.

- As we look to the future of education, what does “fairness” mean to you and your community?
- What does “Scotland of opportunity” mean to you and your community?
- How do we create opportunities in Scotland for everyone and where no-one is held back and no one is left behind?
- How do we ensure that people with learning disabilities are given the appropriate support and the opportunity to learn and develop skills?
- What more should we do to ensure that age is not a barrier to education and that everyone has equal access to learning opportunities?

In these challenging times, people will find it harder to keep and find work and employers may find it harder to invest in their workforce. A fully trained, better skilled, workforce not only helps build our economy: it helps people to find better jobs.

Labour will support more apprenticeships. An apprentice isn't just the chance of a new job: it's the chance of a better future. We want to build on our previous policies such as development training for trade union representatives and make life-long learning a reality for all. Labour must consider how we can get even greater investment in vocational education and, in particular, how we can support our young people aged 16-18 to ensure that when they leave school, they do something meaningful. Our plans should build on successful work of the 'determined to succeed', and the 'skills for work' programmes, but we must do more.

- What does 'to do something meaningful' mean to you and your community?
- How can Scotland bring out the talents of all our young people in Scotland, and do you have any examples?
- How do we make it easier for workers and employers, and their trade union representatives, to receive skills training?
- How do we equip people with the skills they need to help them get back into work as soon as they possibly can?
- And how do we do more to help the long term unemployed?

Labour wants to increase participation rates in education. We should reflect on the amount of resources available to both academic and vocational funding. We must end the false perception that vocational skills are of less importance than academic learning. Our aim is for equality in status between the sectors.

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We believe that no young person should be left doing nothing. Our aim is to end 'dropping out'. In government we worked to ensure young people were encouraged to make the most of educational opportunities.

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- How can we improve confidence, and relationship building, in young people who are disengaged from education?
- What are the skills that Scotland needs to compete internationally?
- How do we make colleges more attractive to young people, adult learners and the wider community?

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- How can we encourage every young person to engage in education and skills training at some level?

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- Should we guarantee training and education for everyone under 18? How do we ensure young people could take advantage of such a guarantee?
- Should we raise the school leaving age? Should it be compulsory for young people to take up training or education if they leave school early?

Tackling Poverty and Inequality

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Since the foundation of our party, Labour has aspired to end poverty and inequality. Everyone has a role to play: business and trade unions; government, local authorities and public services; the voluntary sector and community based organisations. We must invest in infrastructure to bring benefit to all areas across the whole of Scotland.

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We remain committed to ending child poverty by 2020, fuel poverty by 2016, ensuring every home is a warm home, and that all non-intentionally homeless people have the right to a home by 2012. We also want to see full employment in Scotland because work is the best route out of poverty. We also believe in providing dignity and security to those who cannot work.

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- As we now look to the future, what do these commitments mean to you?
- What more should we do to end child poverty, fuel poverty and reach our ambitious homelessness target?
- What anti-poverty programmes have had success?
- How do we focus resources on those who can make the most of them and those who need them most?
- How do we provide further support to people in work who are not in employment?
- How do we ensure that people can access decent, meaningful work that brings prosperity and improvements to themselves and their families?

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We know that credit unions play an important role in offering alternative financial services to people living on various income levels, and they protect people when the fall on hard times.

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- How we best ensure that everyone has the financial services, advice and protection they need and know how they can enforce their rights.
- Should we extend the remit of Co-operative Development Scotland to include support for credit unions?

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Labour believes passionately in equality and we know that women and men experience poverty differently. Women are more likely to live on a low income and be in low paid work. They are much more likely to be a lone parent or be caring for others. Supporting women and families is crucial to ending child poverty. The risks of poverty are even higher for people from a black or minority ethnic background. We must consider how all policies and plans affect the diversity of the people who live in Scotland.

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- What experiences do you have of discrimination and what works when focusing resources to tackle poverty for black and ethnic minority people, or women and young children, people with special needs and older people? Do you have examples?

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Labour champions equal opportunities for all. We believe that all people should live free from discrimination and have the same opportunities. Labour are proud of our what we achieved in tackling domestic violence, tackling racism and sectarianism, supporting fresh talent and supporting gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

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- What more should Labour do to tackle discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for all?
- What more can be done to tackle sectarianism through education?

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Children and Young People

Labour aims to improve the lives young children and ensure they have the best possible start in life. We want to improve the quality of affordable, safe and dependable childcare and ensure it is centred around children and families.

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We aspire towards integrated childcare. We need to help vulnerable families and lone parents but we have to guard against the misconception that economic background is the sole factor in parenting ability.

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- Should we extend free early years education and if so where should we target resources?
- Should we move to universal childcare for 2 year olds?
- How can we increase wrap-around care in schools and improve the quality of what is available for young children?
- How can we promote good nutrition in our schools?

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It can never be right that the best thing for a young person to do is hang around a street corner.

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- How do we encourage young people to participate in sport? Is this best delivered through providing programmes like free access to football game and free swimming for young Scots?
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- How can we use the Olympics in 2012 and Scotland's 2014 Commonwealth Games to engage young people in sport and community activity?
 - What other activities should Labour be looking to provide for young people and how do we make it easier for young people to access those activities?

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One of the most important responsibilities of any government is to protect vulnerable children from harm. Children thrive on the love and support of parents. Early intervention, parental education and teaching relationship building are all components which should be examined as part of our strategy to enhance the quality of life for families.

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- How do we give every child the best start in life?
 - How can we improve the support for parents of young children?
 - Should parental training be obligatory for all parents?
 - How do we better link health, social work, and education to provide a holistic service and improve the protection of all children in Scotland?
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- What should "early intervention" mean in protecting children?
 - How can we better support families with disabled children?

Looked-after Children

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We believe no child should be left behind and that includes looked after children. Government has a responsibility to all children, but that responsibility extends further for looked after children. While removing a child from his or her family is a last resort, we should strive to ensure that those children have the same opportunities as all others.

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- How do we ensure looked after children receive the same opportunities as all other children?
 - How do we ensure that they are properly protected and they have a loving upbringing?
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- How do we improve the over all outcomes for looked after children?
 - What more should be done to help kinship carers receive the support they deserve?
 - How do we encourage more people to become foster cares?
 - How can we encourage more people to put themselves forward to adopt?

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Culture

5 We should examine ways in which we can improve the experience of culture and the arts for young people. We must look to schools, cultural coordinators, music and drama classes and other activities which promote not only Scottish culture but international culture.

10 We must work towards a wider definition of culture which emphasises that Labour is passionate about ensuring the widest possible access to art, music both traditional and modern. We will address affordability for all audiences, looking at ideas such free admittance for sporting and cultural events, which will improve spectator levels and remove financial barriers which may discourage young people. Different and innovative ways of engaging the public in local and national cultural activities should be examined in an effort to promote our community history.

15 We want to support and sustain the Scottish screen, film and TV industry. In addition, we have to recognise the cultural importance of our thriving contemporary music industry and ensure our new artists and existing artists have the support they require.

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- How can we ensure all age groups can access and engage in their choice of cultural activities and establish a cultural entitlement to everyone?
 - How can we build a better link between Scotland's art schools and the enterprise network, so as to maximise opportunities for our graduates in the arts?
 - Is a Scottish digital channel the best way to achieve an increase in Scottish-based television production and programming in Scotland?
 - What is the best way to manage funding for cultural activities throughout Scotland?
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Investing in universities, science and further education

35 Graduates are vital to the future of our economy. Scotland needs skilled graduates to ensure a thriving and highly skilled economy. Working together to ensure everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential is crucial both for a fairer Scotland and a sustainable, growing Scotland.

40 Whether encouraging participation in further education courses, encouraging study for higher education certificates or degrees or ensuring we have a steady supply of postgraduates, tertiary education is a priority for Labour.

45 We understand the difficulties students face: they are a diverse range of people with a diverse range of needs. We need to consider how to make tertiary education opportunities available to all so that everyone can reach their full potential completing courses with the fullest support possible, financial or otherwise.

- How can we encourage people to access education and ensure they reach their full potential at whatever level they study?
- How do we fund the increase in participation?
- 5 • How do we break down barriers between students moving from college to university?
- How can better childcare support be provided to parent students at college or university in Scotland?
- 10 • What other support is needed for returning students, disabled students and students from low participation backgrounds to enter tertiary education?

15 Students in Scotland face poverty, levels of commercial debt and concerns around graduate debt. Student support for higher education students is far lower in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. The poorest students in Scotland able to access up to £4510, compared with up to £6200 in England. Many students in Scotland work long hours and take out commercial debt to top up their support. We need an approach that fair, affordable and achievable.

- How can student support levels be increased to reduce student hardship in Scotland and reduce levels of commercial debt?
- 20 • Should we explore the balance between loans and grants for higher education students?
- Should resources be prioritised at student poverty or graduate debt?
- 25 • Which groups of students should benefit first from any increased investment?
- What other consideration could be given to reducing the burden of graduate debt for Scottish graduates?

30 We also understand the difficulties faced by colleges and universities. Universities out with Scotland are seeing significant additional investment. Scotland's universities argue they require significant additional investment to remain competitive.

- How can the financial needs of universities in Scotland be met without increasing student poverty?
- 35 • What better contribution can colleges and universities make to Scotland's economy?
- What more can we do to make our colleges and universities the best in the world?