The Trade Union Campaign for
Better Work Better Lives
Policy options for a Fair Share for All

NORTHERN IRELAND COMMITTEE
IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS
Contents

Introduction 4

Executive Summary 5

Decent Work:
The issue is *quality, not quantity* 7

Invest in skills, infrastructure & services 11

Scrap the Public Sector Pay Cap 15

Policy areas for consideration 18

Conclusion 22
Introduction

Life in Northern Ireland is getting harder. Our society and economy has suffered nearly a decade of austerity imposed by the UK government, a failed policy which has hit Northern Ireland disproportionately harder than many other parts of the UK.

Living standards and pay in both the public and private sectors continue to lag significantly behind the rest of the UK. Economic growth and productivity remain stagnant and also lag behind other regions of the UK.

Public services, and the number of workers delivering them, have been consistently cut back and curtailed and this has impacted upon people and communities right across Northern Ireland.

In a bizarre attempt to make an advantage of our weakness, state agencies charged with developing economic policy proudly market and boast that Northern Ireland is a cheap and low cost place to do business.

The policy response to the economic and social challenges facing Northern Ireland has been to ‘rebalance the economy’ by cutting public sector numbers by 11.5% and by promoting the idea of an even lower rate of corporation tax than the rest of the UK.

The 1% public sector pay cap which was imposed by the Conservative government (amongst other things), bridge the gap between private and public sector pay, has led to a de facto pay cut of approximately 8.5% in real terms as pay has continued to fall behind inflation.

Meanwhile, pay across the NI private sector has remained as low as other peripheral regions of the UK, especially in comparison with London and the South-East of England. In fact, during this period we have seen an increase in the range and disparity of pay not between the private and public sector (which is a false comparison, see chapter on public sector pay) but within and between sectors in the private sector.

The Northern Ireland block grant has reduced in real terms by 10.2% since 2010. Worse still, this carefully chosen austerity philosophy is scheduled to continue to 2020, or even later.

With the added uncertainty of the UK leaving the EU, there are few assurances that can be made to offer confidence to workers, consumers or citizens.

It does not have to be this way. The policies that have been failing Northern Ireland have not happened by chance, but by choice.

The trade union movement in Northern Ireland, comprising of over 30 unions organising and representing 200,000 working people from across the community and all sectors of the economy, strongly believes that things must change and must change now.

We are caught in a cycle of low skills, feeding insecure work, delivering lower pay. We intend to campaign vigorously to seek to change and improve the lives of people across Northern Ireland.

To continue as we are is not a viable option for the well-being of this society.

We need an appropriate forum whereby the various representative strands of Northern Ireland society can come together with policy makers and government in order to chart a way forward for this society and economy.

Ideally, this will take place under a restored devolved Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly (the trade union movement fully supports the restoration of devolution); but the arguments we are making on behalf of our members and their families are consistent. We will make this case for a fair share to all parties and political views, and to as many forums as we can.

Our Better Work, Better Lives campaign seeks to build a broad and shared consensus across society whereby we work to change things for the better for all of society. We want to:

- Promote better, decent and more secure work and challenge the prevailing scourge of low pay in Northern Ireland;
- Argue for better, improved and targeted public investment in our public services for all our people;
- Demand the end of the self-defeating policy of austerity on public sector pay by lifting the 1% public sector pay cap.

We want to engage with politicians, NGO’s, our own movement and wider civic society to start a debate about how we can improve our society for all, so that everyone can enjoy Better Work and Better Lives. We ask you to pledge to support this campaign and to work with us to seek to build just that.

Our society and its people deserve nothing less.

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To continue as we are is not a viable option for the well-being of this society.

1. Data used in this policy document derive from research carried out by the Nevin Economic Research Institute, available on https://www.nerinstitute.net/research/
Executive Summary

The trade union movement in Northern Ireland, comprising of 30 unions organising and representing the interests of 200,000 workers, has come together to campaign for Better Work, Better Lives – a fair share for all.

We want to see society coming together to demand:

1. An end to the scourge of low pay and to promote decent work;
2. Better and improved investment in our public services;
3. An end to the 1% public sector pay cap.

The situation in NI is serious and needs to be addressed immediately.

- 1 out of every 3 workers consider their work to be insecure
- 4 out of every 10 workers are in non-standard working arrangements
- 20% of all workers are on or below the Real Living Wage
- Women and young people are disproportionately affected, especially in the private sector
- Since 2010 the block grant has been cut, in real terms by 10.2%
- Education spend has been cut by 9% since 2009/10
- As a region of the UK, NI has been the subject of greater cuts than the majority of the other UK regions
- We have lost 26,000 public servants (11.5%) since 2010
- From 2011-2013 workers in the public service experienced a pay freeze. Since 2013 (planned to 2019), a cap of a total of 1% increase a year has been imposed
- Since 2010/2011, public service workers have seen their pay cut in real terms by at least 8%
- Inflation is forecast at between 2.5%-3% for 2017, workers are falling further behind
- The 1% pay cap in the public sector has done nothing to assist pay in the private sector.

We need a process of meaningful engagement with policy makers and others to seek to address these issues and change direction.

This situation has occurred because of policy choices not by chance.

We ask you to work with the trade union movement to support the Better Work, Better Lives campaign in order that we can all work together to address the underlying issues that have caused this situation.

We need to look at, among other areas, policies such as strengthening and improving employment law, changing the minimum wage setting mechanism, developing a shared industrial strategy, boosting productivity in the interests of all, addressing our skills deficit and inequalities in the labour market as well as promoting collective bargaining.

There must be a strategic approach to growing the private sector with workers voices center stage.
Decent Work - Anna’s story

Anna (her real name has been changed to protect her identity) works for a major food company as a meat packer earning just above the minimum wage and is a UNITE member.

She is a single mother from Eastern Europe; she has a young daughter who has asthma and various other related health problems.

Anna works hard, she has a mortgage to pay and is the sole provider for her family. She has health problems and following an operation 5 years ago, cannot stand for more than 3-4 hours on the production line. Although the company is aware of her health problems, they have refused to make any reasonable adjustment.

Anna often encounters hostility from managers at her workplace including one manager who openly curses at migrant workers.

Recently when her child became very ill and had to go to hospital, she asked if her hours could be adjusted to allow her a weekend off. She was told that she would have to work on Saturday but that they might give her Sunday off.

She worked all day Saturday and half day Sunday, but when she asked if she could go home, her manager refused her permission. Desperate, Anna found a colleague who agreed to cover for her. Despite this her manager still refused to let her go.

‘He did all this with a smile on his face’ Anna told us and despite appealing to him as a parent, Anna was not allowed to return home to her sick child.

Following only 2 weeks sick leave after a major operation, Anna returned to work because she was receiving no sick pay. She received a warning for being off sick. Despite appealing against this, many months later she still has not received any response from the Company.

Anna has another operation coming up, she is scared and does not know what will happen after that.

Anna supports the Better Work Better Lives Campaign because she believes that no-one should have to work like this.
Decent Work:
The issue is quality, not quantity.

The Wheel of Insecure Work

Research into the Northern Ireland labour market by the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) shows that there has been a worrying proliferation of insecure forms of employment, especially since the banking crisis of 2007-8. Certain sectors and certain workers are more at risk, but we are witnessing a slow and steady transformation of our private sector, and it is not necessarily in a progressive or positive direction.

What is the issue?

There are jobs - availability is not the central issue. The issue is quality, not quantity.

Whilst properly paid decent jobs still exist, they are fast being replaced by insecure jobs with less favourable terms and conditions of employment.

Research carried out by NERI illustrates the changing nature and quality of employment in NI and demonstrates the negative effect poor quality employment has for individual workers, their families, businesses, and the overall economy.

In short, we cannot afford to carry on this way.

The scale of the issue

The old mantra that ‘any job is better than no job’ is finally being put to the test and has been found wanting. The OECD argues that “poor quality employment negatively effects innovation, productivity, investment and consumer confidence.” Therefore, poor employment is bad for workers, bad for the economy and bad for society.

Looking at official data we can see that standard employment arrangements, those that are both permanent and full-time, now account for six out of ten of all workers in employment. The remaining four out of every ten workers are employed in various types of non-standard employment.
In Northern Ireland, 3.3% of all workers are employed in temporary full-time contracts, and 2.4% are employed in temporary part-time contracts. Temporary employment is the least prevalent form of employment arrangement but there has also been a worrying increase in self-employment.

Self-employment is not necessarily insecure for everyone but much of the increase in numbers since 2008 is not self-employment in the conventional sense and in many cases self-employed people are not people working for themselves. Jobs which were once directly employed are now staffed by people who are classified as self-employed. This suggests that the growth of self-employment may owe more to the spread of precarious employment than it does with any sudden burst of entrepreneurialism.

In many cases, employees are pushed into self-employment by employers seeking to offload their responsibility for things such as occupational pensions and even holiday and illness entitlements. In other cases, unemployed workers are pushed into self-employment for fear of benefit sanctions.

The increasingly accepted term for workers in these forms of employment is ‘precariat’. That is those workers on short-term contracts, zero-hours contracts and not employed directly but through agencies. They have fewer opportunities for occupational training, career development, or paid holidays, limited access to basic financial services which demand a predictable income stream, such as pensions or a mortgage.

Some workers are more at risk of being in the ‘precariat’.

- Younger workers aged between 15-34 have a much higher risk of being in temporary employment than any other age group.
- Women are more likely than men to be in temporary employment, whilst men have a much higher likelihood of being self-employed.
- Those working in public administration, education and health (9.8%) or distribution, hotels and restaurant sector (7.3%) have the highest likelihood of being temporarily employed.
- Those working in the agriculture, forestry and fishery (66.5%) or construction sectors (34.8%) are at highest risk of ‘self-employment’.

**How Low is Low Pay?**

The introduction in 2016 of the ‘National Living Wage’ (NLW) sharply reduced the number of people in Northern Ireland classified as ‘low paid’. However, the increases in the NLW over the next number of years will not provide the same ‘jump’ that it did in the first year. Therefore, the significant reduction in Low Pay in Northern Ireland is only a temporary phenomenon.

Furthermore, given that the National Living Wage does not cover those under-25, low pay continues to remain a considerable problem for these workers.

We prefer the aspiration to reach the Real Living Wage (independently calculated by the Living Wage Foundation) which is based on the cost of a basket of household goods and services considered by the public as necessary to obtain a *minimum acceptable standard of living*. 

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**Figure 1: Percentage share of labour market, 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employees Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Full-time</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Part-time</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed Full-time</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed Part-time</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Full-time</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary Part-time</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because young people face the same living costs as everyone else, the Real Living Wage also applies to all workers over 18.

One in five NI workers earn below the real living wage.

**Figure 3: Percentage of employees below real living wage, by sector, 2016**

[Bar chart showing percentage of employees below real living wage by sector.]

Workers in some sectors are far more likely to be paid below the Real Living Wage than others. **For example, 75% of workers in the accommodation and food sector are paid below the real living wage.** It is probably not a coincidence that this sector is dominated by small traders and has a very high turnover of staff, especially of migrant workers. Consequently, the accommodation and food sector has very low rates of trade union membership.

The Retail sector is the single biggest employer in Northern Ireland and 40% of its employees earn below the Living Wage.

**Conclusion**

The NERI research demonstrates that the nature and quality of employment in Northern Ireland has undergone considerable change in recent years. There has been a marked increase in insecure forms of employment such as part-time temporary employment and self-employment. Furthermore, it has shown that low pay is a pervasive problem in Northern Ireland, with workers in some sectors particularly at risk.

Given the considerable body of evidence demonstrating the negative effect poor quality employment has for individual workers, their families, businesses, and the overall economy, improving the quality of jobs in Northern Ireland should be the central goal of policymakers.

If people in Northern Ireland are to have better lives, it is clear we need progressive policies that support better, decent work.
Public Services - Caroline’s story

I have worked in Causeway Hospital for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust as a Band 1 domestic for the last 5 years, I currently work 20 hours per week.

I am proud to work in the National Health Service and feel a valued member of staff within the public sector.

The Northern Trust covers a wide rural community with local families relying heavily on all of the services, including those provided in the hospital and those provided in local communities.

Public services are funded by us the tax payer so that it shouldn’t matter what you earn, they are services for us all whenever we need them. Whilst staff in the Trust do a fantastic job, everyone is under pressure and every year funding is squeezed. Public services should be prioritised and invested in as they benefit the whole community.

I support the Better work Better lives campaign not just for myself but for my children’s future.

Caroline Campbell
Domestic, Northern Health and Social Care Trust. Unison member.
Invest in skills, infrastructure & services

Northern Ireland, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, has seen substantial reductions in public expenditure since the financial crisis of 2008. The Northern Ireland Executive has seen its spending power decline through reductions in the block grant. HM Treasury’s austerity programme has recently been adjusted, but the schedule of cuts is forecast to continue until at least 2019/20. Research from the NERI shows that:

- Day-to-day spending will have fallen by 8.5% in the 10 years up to 2019/20. In cash terms, there will be £885m less in spending than there was in 2009/10.
- Capital spending is set to be 12.3% lower in 2019/20 than it was in 2009/10. In cash terms, capital expenditure will be £176m lower annually by 2019/20.
- Total public expenditure in Northern Ireland fell by 1.7% between 2009/10 and 2015/16, among the largest reductions experienced by any UK region.

NERI has examined the **make-up** of public expenditure in Northern Ireland and how and where that money is spent.

It has also examined how **policy** has impacted on expenditure in Northern Ireland to date and the forecast impact up to 2019/20.

NERI has additionally examined the **scale** of the reduction in public expenditure in Northern Ireland compared to other regions of the UK.

**How is the ‘Block Grant’ funded?**

The block grant is the pot of money that the Northern Ireland Executive allocates to spending on public services in Northern Ireland. However, it only represents 55% of all public spending in Northern Ireland. The other 45% is spending on social transfers like pensions and benefits which is sent directly from Westminster and Northern Ireland’s politicians have only some control over how this money is allocated.

The block grant represents the means by which the Northern Ireland Executive can invest in public services and infrastructure. This money is allocated to Northern Ireland in the UK budget under the Barnett formula which decides how much money Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland get.

It comes in two forms, current spending which covers the day to day running of public services and capital spending to raise infrastructure and increase capacity among firms. But it also requires boosting for one off projects like building roads and hospitals. The Executive chooses how this money is spent and prioritises projects and service delivery in a Northern Ireland budget. The most recent budget agreed was for the fiscal year 2016/17.

**Current Spending**

Current or day-to-day spending on public services will have fallen by 8.5% in the 10 years up to 2019/20.

In cash terms, there will be £885m less in spending than there was in 2009/10. Current spending has been dominated by Health which accounted for almost 47% of all current expenditure in 2016/17 compared to 41.7% in 2010. In cash terms, the current budget allocation for Health increased from £4.3bn in 2010/11 to £4.7bn in 2016/17. This means that while the Executive has tried to keep pace with the increasing cost of health (which is higher than ordinary inflation as the average age rises), it has cut spending on other Departments.

Figure 1 shows how day-to-day spending has been reduced since 2009/10 and how much more will be lost up 2019/20.
Education spending forms the second largest portion of current expenditure. Education spending was £1.91bn in 2009/10 and £1.95bn in 2016/17. Adjusted for inflation, current spending on Education fell by just under 9% between 2009/10 and 2016/17. NI has more school-age children than most regions of the UK, and we can either choose to invest in their (and our) future, or not and face the consequences.

**Capital Spending**

In 2009/10 capital spending for Northern Ireland was £1.27bn and in 2016/17 it was £1bn. It fell to a low of £766m in 2015/16 and is only set to rise to £1.31bn by 2019/20. These figures are not adjusted for inflation. In real terms Northern Ireland’s capital budget will be considerably smaller by 2019/20. Capital spending is set to be 12.3% lower in 2019/20 than it was in 2009/10. In cash terms, capital expenditure will be £176m lower annually by 2019/20.

**All Spending**

While public spending in NI and most regions of the UK has been slashed, some regions experienced no reduction at all, but some even saw increases in expenditure over the same period.

Northern Ireland experienced amongst the largest reductions in total expenditure of any UK region. Whilst the reduction of 5.5% in the North East of England is striking, so too is the increase of almost 2% in the South East of England.
**Policy Implications**

The NI Executive does not control the amount of public spending in NI. Its tax-raising powers are not presently strong enough to make a meaningful difference to the challenges we face.

Northern Ireland is a low value-added economy compared to the UK as a whole, with equally low levels of productivity – we need to raise our sights and raise both.

Even with that, the cost of running public services will always be higher in this peripheral region owing to our geographical position.

The old solutions have not worked. The economy has become more imbalanced, and risks becoming more unequal. We need a more interventionist industrial policy to raise productivity and living standards and grow our revenue.

This requires significant investment, the scale of which will only be met by public expenditure - Capital spending to raise infrastructure and increase capacity amongst firms but it also requires boosting current spending to promote skills, education, aspiration, achievement, equality and wellbeing.

The block grant which has been eviscerated in recent years needs to be restored and we need to see committed investment, in order to invest in our society and economy’s future.
Scrap the Cap - Yvonne’s story

I have worked in a primary school for over 23 years as a school secretary. I work 32.5 hours per week and since 2007 I have had to rely on a second job to make ends meet.

The last time I got oil for the house I had to put it on a credit card & will be doing the same again this month.

I can’t remember the last time I bought myself clothes and would love to be able to get some new things for the house.

I dread the future now as I know that when/if I retire I will struggle instead of having a little nest egg to rely on.

My wages being capped this past 7 or 8 years is, in reality, a pay cut. I have no idea how I am going to manage until I am 66 years old.

That’s why I support the Better Work Better Lives campaign.

Yvonne Clarke
School Secretary,
NIPSA member
Scrap the Public Sector Pay Cap

Research conducted by the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) into the issue of public sector pay has comprehensively demonstrated the necessity for a just and equitable solution to this matter, as it affects the public finances as much as the personal finances of public servants who have had seven years of below-inflation pay restraint imposed from HM Treasury.

There is evidence that the pay cap is hindering the recruitment of essential staff for public services, especially in the NHS. However, the damage is not contained to the public sector. Public sector workers with less money in their pockets each month means less spending in our local shops and businesses. In this way the cap on public sector pay hurts the private sector too.

The debate around this matter has been plagued by a series of misconceptions about public sector pay and the NERI research challenges many of these.

The reality of the pay gap and the pay cap.

From 2011-2013 the Westminster government froze pay rates across the public sector. Since 2013, annual increases have been capped at an average of 1% and it is intended that that cap will remain in place up until 2019.

The NERI research states that “Private sector pay growth has outpaced public sector pay growth for all but two of the last 17 years. There is no evidence that the fall in public sector pay boosts overall private sector pay. As Figure 1 shows, it is more likely that the opposite is the case.”

Figure 1: Growth of Public and Private Sector Pay in NI 1997-2016 (1997=100)

Looking at the cost of living implications of the pay cap, Figure 2 shows that inflation has exceeded 1% per annum for all but two of the past six years. Inflation is also expected to remain above 1% every year up to 2019.

This means that, with the exception of 2015 and 2016, government policy will have delivered a real-terms cut in pay every year from 2011 to 2019.

The cumulative loss from 2011 to 2016 has been at least 8%.

Public sector workers with less money in their pockets each month means less spending in our local shops and businesses. In this way the cap on public sector pay hurts the private sector too.
Public/Private Pay Gap

Public sector pay in Northern Ireland has been the issue of contention for some years. Most of the discussion and debate regarding this topic stems from the contention that the average public-sector worker earns more than the average private sector worker in Northern Ireland. However, while this assertion is technically correct, it is a crude comparison and can actually be quite misleading.

We cannot know what the increase in pay was for individual workers in the public sector, we can only look at averages. For instance, if a number of low paid jobs are lost or outsourced from the public sector, the median wage for the public sector as a whole is likely to increase. This can take place even if individual workers receive no increase in their pay.

A Voluntary Redundancy Scheme launched in 2015 is likely to have impacted numbers in the figures for 2016 and into the future. What this means is that further redundancies in the public sector are likely to increase the median wage of the sector without necessarily increasing the wage packets of individual workers.
It also means that those workers who have decided to stay are expected to deliver more services to the people, with less resources and fewer colleagues.

In order to look at what the real pay gap is between workers in the public and private sectors, simply comparing overall median rates of pay is not sufficient.

To make a real comparison of pay gaps, most studies carry out an analysis of pay rates between workers with similar characteristics carrying out similar jobs. It is possible with existing data in Northern Ireland to identify individual characteristics and job functions, but even with that, problems persist.

Put simply, the nature of work carried out in both sectors is rarely comparable. For certain professions in the public sector, private comparators are possible. It should not prove difficult to find accountants or HR managers performing similar functions in both sectors.

The task becomes more difficult with professions such as nurses and teachers. For social workers or members of the police force, there are simply no comparators at all in the private sector.

**Which Gap?**

The public/private pay gap as it is currently reported is the ratio of median weekly wages. NERI research shows that in 2016 it was 1.43 and in 1997 it was 1.46. However, if we look across the economy as a whole we can find much larger gaps than this.

For instance, a corporate manager is paid almost four times that of a Sales Assistant or an Elementary Administrator. Health and Social Care workers, many of whom work in the public sector, earn less than half of the average corporate manager.

We are not arguing that a Corporate Manager should be paid the same as a Sales Assistant. The two jobs are almost incomparable because they require vastly different levels of experience and qualifications. But if it is inappropriate to make this comparison, it is equally inappropriate to make it between public and private sector workers. The truth is more complicated than simple comparisons would suggest.

**Conclusion**

The UK government policy of capping pay in the public sector has delivered a real terms pay cut to workers in Northern Ireland. Making simple comparisons between public and private sector workers cannot be used to justify this policy.

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Public sector workers and their Unions in Northern Ireland, and indeed across the UK, must have a right to collective bargaining under agreed industrial relations mechanisms now. The cap must go and all public servants deserve a pay rise now.
Policy areas for consideration

The policy areas outlined below are not exhaustive and we welcome discussion and contribution to develop these and other areas.

The 3 key campaign elements of this paper are interlinked and therefore so are the policy options and choices that support improvements in these areas. We want to engage in dialogue on these issues and are conscious that no one policy is the panacea to all our problems, however what is clear is that new thinking and a new approach is needed.

We invite legislators and others to work with us to develop policies which, if adopted and promoted, we believe could make real improvements in:

1. seeking to promote more secure decent work and addressing low pay;
2. improving investment in our public services which is crucial for citizens and the economic good;
3. taking the pressure off those who deliver our public services by facilitating proper collective bargaining on pay in the public services without the artificial and self-defeating policy of the 1% pay cap.

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**Restore the cuts to the block grant and increase its funding to invest in our future**

Since 2010 the block grant has been cut by 10.2% in real terms from Northern Ireland, which has endured greater cuts than most regions of the UK despite our structural deficiencies. We need to seek annual improvements to the block grant with targeted investment in health, education, welfare, and housing. Each of these areas affect the overall well-being of our society.

Public investment needs to be considered as just that, a worthwhile investment in our society's future.

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**Strengthen and improve employment law**

Employment law in Northern Ireland is a devolved matter. Thanks to this, the NI Assembly has prevented the imposition of the Tory anti trade union act of 2015. In the context of Brexit, it is critical that a revived Assembly maintains and improves employment law in Northern Ireland and implements any future progressive EU directives supporting workers’ rights.

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**Change Minimum Wage setting mechanism**

The current national minimum wage stands at £7.50 for over 25’s. This is unrealistic. We believe the Real Living Wage formula is a better and more accurate mechanism to determine what the minimum wage should be.
Develop an industrial strategy that puts innovation at its core

NI needs an industrial strategy that is developed through meaningful engagement with private sector unions and employers. Those engaged in the world of work can shape the strategy and policy needed. The state needs to be more interventionist, entrepreneurial, active and more targeted in its investment approach.

Boost Productivity in the interest of all

Productivity is as much an issue for workers as it is for employers. State agencies charged with marketing Northern Ireland need to stop selling it as a cheap and low cost place to do business. Instead they need to promote Northern Ireland as a more effective, efficient and entrepreneurial place to do business.

Address the skills deficit

30% of our young people leave the education system with no qualifications. If we are to seek to develop a focused industrial strategy and to start doing things differently, we need to match this with the necessary and appropriate skills. Employers in the UK invest only half as much as the EU average in vocational training, and the adult skills budget has also been slashed by 41% since 2010. The latent potential of the existing workforce should be realised through career-long access to education and personal development.

The ULF (Union Learning Fund) which has been a state sponsored learning scheme since 2002 needs to be expanded and further resourced to support the evolving workforce.

Apprenticeships for this century

The changing requirements of the 21st century economy demands the development of an Apprenticeship programme which is industry led, properly funded, places quality and equality at its core and has a strong legislative framework where all partners, employers, providers and the apprentice are clear about their roles and responsibilities and legal duties.

Promote collective bargaining

Active and representative trade unions engaging in collective bargaining with employers improves pay, protects workers and can improve the economy. There is a clear link between the decline in the number of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements and the decline in real living standards for many workers. International evidence clearly demonstrates that societies that have a higher level of collective bargaining coverage and higher union density, such as the Nordic democracies, are not only more equal but also more innovative and efficient.
**Investment in childcare**

The cost of childcare is shockingly high in Northern Ireland, (in 2016, the average weekly cost for childcare was £168), so much so that for 1 in 3 parents, it ranks as their largest monthly bill. According to the Annual Cost of Childcare survey, 50% of parents reduced their working hours or left work altogether because of the cost of childcare. If people, particularly women, are to be encouraged into work and to stay in work, Northern Ireland urgently needs high quality, affordable and flexible childcare provision. Funding decent childcare is both a social and economic imperative.

**Welfare Reform**

Hard won mitigations have protected NI from some of the worst impacts of Tory welfare ‘reform’. However the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) will harm our poorest citizens, many of whom are in low-paid work and depend upon the hand-up of an inclusive and fair welfare system.

UC has been proven to be a disastrous policy and it is imperative that the trade union movement continues to resist its implementation. We will also continue our campaign to ensure that the most vulnerable retain the protection of vital mitigations and that these are funded for as long as is necessary.

**Better trade union and workers’ rights**

We need to ensure that we protect and enhance important rights for workers such as protection from discrimination. We also need to protect the rights of trade union representatives and their enterprises in relation to training, education, safety and representation. Devolution has been important in that recent Tory anti trade union legislation of 2015 has not been enacted here. We need to ensure that we have robust rights for elected trade union Shop Stewards, Union Learning Reps and Health & Safety officers in both public and private sectors who act on behalf of their members and protect and improve facility time.

**End the 1% public sector pay cap now**

All parties elected by the people of NI oppose the public sector pay cap, and rightly so. Our public services must be first class, but cannot be when those workers who deliver the services have been the subjects of pay cuts in real terms. Morale has been seriously damaged. The cap must completely go now right across the public service and public sector workers, their unions and public sector employers should be free to collective bargain under agreed industrial relations mechanisms.
**Equality in the labour market**

The overall gender pay gap in Northern Ireland stands at just over 9%. Within the labour market, there is gender segregation across and within sectors with women more likely to be working in the lowest paid sectors. 58% of women in the NI labour market are in a form of employment which is less secure and of poorer quality than the traditional ‘standard’. We must promote equality in the labour market through actions such as robust gender pay gap reporting legislation and the promotion of pay transparency.

**Tackle the Growing Housing Crisis**

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive should have the right to borrow to invest in upgrading and maintaining its current stock and also to embark on an ambitious programme of building new social homes. As well as tackling the housing emergency this would also create approximately 4000 much needed construction jobs and hundreds of apprenticeships for young people. The long term impact on the health of citizens and educational attainment of children and young people of providing decent homes is recognised internationally. This measure alone would provide significant benefits to the wider community.
Conclusion

We need a new direction for the society in Northern Ireland. The people deserve better work which leads to better lives.

Unemployment statistics tell only half the story. It is not just the quantity of employment we should be looking at but also the quality of employment.

4 out of 10 workers in Northern Ireland have not chosen to have more insecure work. Greater flexibility yes, insecurity no. Yet this is the reality many of these workers face.

Clearly Northern Ireland needs a pay rise. Inflation for 2017 is forecast to be between 2.5% and 3%. Workers in the private and public sector need an income which deals with this and incentivises greater productivity.

Our public services are creaking at the seams. Workers have been expected to do more with less, while citizens who use the services have been expected to settle for less. We need to reverse the cuts to the block grant and improve the quality and quantity of our public investment.

We believe the state, unions and employers have a key role to play in developing a more interventionist and strategic industrial policy that plays to the strengths of Northern Ireland, boosts productivity and overall economic and societal well-being.

Public servants will no longer tolerate an artificial 1% pay cap. This policy has been destructive and it will take some time to reverse its effects. But public servants and their unions must be free to negotiate and bargain on pay through agreed industrial relations mechanism. We need to move away from the lazy narrative that the public sector is too big. No proper cost benefit analysis or equality impact assessment was carried out for the last Voluntary Redundancy scheme and staff numbers in the public service have dropped by 26,000 since 2010.

The public sector is not too big, the private sector is too small. It is not an either/or, but both. An interventionist public policy can help boost the economy.

We in the trade union movement in Northern Ireland intend to campaign vigorously to build support across communities to:

1. Tackle low pay and insecure work and promote better decent work;
2. Seek a reversal to the cuts to the block grant and demand improved investment in our public services;
3. Demand an immediate end to the 1% public sector pay cap.

We are prepared to work with everyone who shares these ambitions.

We fully accept that we do not possess all the solutions to our collective problems but the time for a collective focus to chart a better way forward for Better Work and Better Lives for all is now overdue.