



/03

THE COMPLETE CASE
FOR A BETTER SCOTLAND

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1 / Our Choice

What we are asking for on May 1st is the chance to prove ourselves to you. To make as much of a difference as we can with the current powers of the Scottish Parliament, and to show why we need the powers of Independence.

So if you support us in May and give us the chance to be the new government of Scotland, we will start to sort out the problems in our public services that Labour and the Liberal Democrats have created. To fix our ailing health service, improve our education system, tackle crime and stimulate the economy - the things that concern you in your daily lives. By doing this, and by being honest about what we can't do within the limited powers of the Scottish Parliament, we'll persuade you that only with Independence can we release Scotland's potential.

But it's not the Scottish National Party (SNP) that will decide when Scotland becomes independent. It's the people of Scotland in a referendum that will be held during our four-year term. Although many of you are already persuaded of the case for Independence, we know that some of you still have doubts.

It is our job to persuade you. We'll do that by proving ourselves as a government and by demonstrating how Scotland could achieve so much more with the normal powers that Independence would bring.

Only together can we release Scotland's potential.

Our values

Our values in government will be fairness, honesty and equality of opportunity.

Our duty will be to make our Parliament work by giving it the powers it needs to create a stronger economy with new jobs, to wipe out poverty, attack crime, and

provide the world's best education and health services.

Our decisions will be determined by fairness not cronyism, honesty not fiddled figures, and equality of opportunity not jobs for the boys.

We face big challenges but we will not shirk them and we will not deviate from these principles.

We will deliver good government by working with business, trade unions, the voluntary sector and, where appropriate, with other political parties, in partnership for the national good.

We will keep what works in government and change what doesn't.

We will deliver continuity where needed and change where it matters.

We will demonstrate what an independent Scotland could be by showing what our government can do.

Delivering our potential

We will give our economy, the engine of our prosperity and our future, all the attention that it needs.

We will increase our links to Europe and the wider world.

We will get our public services back on track after years of neglect and mismanagement.

Throughout all areas of public life we will deliver.

The SNP want a clean, green Scotland. We want our rural communities and beautiful countryside to be respected and sustained, and we want our culture to flourish. We want to see our industries thrive, tourists to be able to come Scotland by direct transport links, and improved telecommunications links to the

world beyond our shores.

We want to have higher health standards and shorter waiting times, less crime and more police, smaller classes and better education.

We want to see our public sector staff valued and our school and hospital buildings in public hands.

We want to deliver social justice and economic prosperity by getting our rich country to work for the people of Scotland.

And what we want, we can deliver.

Scotland is one of the richest countries in the world. So, like every other normal country and nation, we want to use the money raised in our own country on the priorities of our own country.

We want to see our economy grow and prosper for the benefit of the people.

We want more people to be in more jobs to increase the tax base and decrease reliance on benefits. Only with a fast growing economy can government raise more in taxes without increasing the burden on the individual.

We want Scotland to work for economic success so that economic success works for Scotland.

We want to release our potential.

2 / Our Prosperity

We believe that a successful, competitive economy is the bedrock on which a prosperous and just nation will be built. Delivering that success is at the heart of our vision for Scotland. Our approach will put Scotland in control. It will deliver economic prosperity and improve public services. It will give us the opportunity to generate wealth and release the potential of a modern, prosperous, competitive nation.

Building our prosperity

Scotland has all the attributes for economic success. A top international brand and reputation, a superb environment, rich natural resources, a good location, and an educated and skilled population. But we need to bridge the gap between our mediocre economic performance and our outstanding potential.

That means promoting and supporting a high-skill, high-wage workforce. It means removing the barriers that prevent too many people accessing employment. It means building a wealthy, prosperous nation through work, creativity and innovation. It means supporting skills development and a high-value workforce.

But more than anything it means taking action to tackle the causes of low economic growth.

The problem

The Scottish economy has recorded thirty years of low growth, well below the UK and European Union (EU) average. Since Labour came to power in 1997, the Scottish economy has grown on average by just 1.4 per cent a year, compared to the UK's rate of growth of 2.6 per cent, Finland's of 4 per cent, or Ireland's of 8.6 per cent.

If Scotland had kept pace with these countries there would be billions of pounds more in the Scottish economy, making more resources available for investing in our public services without raising tax.

This is how it works. Higher growth means more jobs. More jobs mean more competition for staff. And that means higher wages and more spending power for individuals. It also means that the government collects more in tax and so has more to spend on public services. It's not rocket science. It's what every other nation in Europe does. So why can't we?

London government regards the south east of England as the only powerhouse in the UK economy, with successive Chancellors regarding it as their only economic priority. The south east of England acts as a magnet for people, businesses, investment, and growth within the UK. The area is attracting more and more people and businesses from Scotland and it's getting worse. We need to make sure we are more competitive than the south east of England, not less, so that we can overcome its gravitational pull and start winning success for Scotland.

At the moment the Scottish Parliament can do little to change this because it only has very limited financial powers and is forced to operate under a uniform UK tax regime.

The key to success

Unless Scotland can start taking key decisions in Scotland, our economic decline will continue.

To reverse that decline the SNP believes we must address the single core problem facing the Scottish economy - the limited powers of the Scottish Parliament.

Governments can't create wealth, but they can and do create the conditions, which either help or hinder

wealth creation. And successive UK governments have been more of a hindrance than a help to Scotland. As long as we remain part of the centralised UK, we will continue to see low growth, loss of head offices, low business birth rates, early takeovers of promising Scottish companies, low spending on research and development and a 'brain drain' that sees us lose people and ideas to the south east of England.

This all has a disastrous effect on Scotland's economic performance and on the life chances of Scottish people. It means higher unemployment and more people on benefits, more part-time work and short contracts, low incomes, low birth rates, child poverty, poor diet, poor health, and lower life expectancy.

To turn this around the Scottish government must be able to use the normal economic powers our competitors take for granted. And crucially we must focus them on creating the competitive conditions for an enterprise economy that puts Scotland first; and creates and retains more jobs and prosperity in Scotland.

With the full powers of Independence we can work to deliver a high-wage, high-skill economy with greater prosperity, better job opportunities and more self-reliance. This will lead to more taxpayers with higher incomes and reduced spending on unemployment, enabling government to focus on improving public services and delivering social justice.

Delivering better policies for growth now

Although the SNP is clear that we need the full powers of Independence to deliver long term economic growth, that does not mean that we would not act within the limited powers of the devolved Parliament. The SNP backs the overall aim of 'Smart Successful Scotland', and will provide the continuity and unity of purpose required to support the skills and research and development required to allow Scotland to compete in terms of

the quality of what we produce. All parties need to work together to deliver a consensus for growth.

But we will do more.

We will reduce Scottish business rates to below the UK rate within the first term of our government. The first stage of funding this will come from the resources released by the replacement of local enterprise companies in the Scottish Enterprise area with around half the number of regional offices, and other measures will be taken to fund this change. Our cut in business rates will be a strong signal to business that we will be focused on competitiveness when we obtain full powers. Reducing business tax to create a competitive edge to Scottish companies will be a top priority of an independent Scotland.

We will launch an aggressive strategy to win business and investment for Scotland. Initially focusing on the top 500 UK companies with branches here, we will press the economic case for opening headquarters in Scotland, to help increase or at the very least consolidate their market share. And we will not stop with the UK; our strategy will encompass all our competitor nations and regions.

Boosting our economy

The SNP will not increase income tax. You are already paying higher taxes for public services. Our job in government is to make sure that the extra money raised is used to deliver improvements in our public services like health, education and tackling crime.

And also to make sure that long term, sustainable investment in public services can be secured through a strong and growing economy.

That is why, with Independence, we will cut the taxes on growth and increase our competitiveness compared to our competitor nations and regions, particularly the south east of England. This is critical if Scotland is to

retain the skilled people and ideas we need if we are to be a successful 21st century economy. In managing Scotland's finances we will operate within strict financial disciplines to ensure we don't beggar future generations as successive London governments have.

We will establish a Scottish Fund for Future Generations, modelled on the Norwegian Oil Fund, to invest a share of the North Sea revenues. This will ensure a sustained income stream to finance public service investment well into the next century.

Too many of our brightest people have to leave Scotland to succeed. We will look at ways of encouraging these people to return. We will also examine ways of encouraging skilled migrants to settle in Scotland, improving the tax base and wealth creating capacity of our economy, by building a nation where people with skills, capital and ambition can find a home.

And we will launch, for the first time, an aggressive and effective strategy to market Scotland abroad.

These steps are necessary to give Scotland's wealth creators the competitive advantage they seek and secure the long-term investment in public services our country needs.

Working together

Our nation works best with co-operation rather than conflict. Our proposal for a National Pay Commission demonstrates our approach in bringing people together to secure, in this case, an agreed approach to resolving public sector pay disputes and tackling the problem of low pay.

We will ensure that people who can work, can access high-wage, high-skilled employment wherever possible and that those on lower incomes are not penalised by the benefits system.

We will work to ensure that people who have in the past been unable to access employment can join the

workforce and play their part in increasing the prosperity of Scotland.

This means ensuring a fairer approach for those who earn modest incomes but are currently penalised for doing so. It means providing affordable quality child care to ensure working mothers have more employment choices and the introduction of measures encouraging women who choose to have children to be able to return to work and secure better paid employment.

Economic double standards

Other small European countries have the power to compete on their own terms. They are led by politicians whose utmost priority is creating a better future for their people and their country. They have the advantage of sitting at Europe's top table and of arguing for their own interests and industries.

Small European countries are 35 per cent richer per person than large ones like the UK; they grow 64 percent faster; they have 40 per cent lower unemployment; have deficits around a quarter of large countries like the UK; they have a balance of trade seven times more favourable; and they spend 36 per cent more on research and development.

We could do the same and more. Scotland has potential in abundance. We just have to release it. The fact is we would be the eighth richest country in the world if Scotland were an independent state. But as part of the UK, we are nineteenth and falling.

For too long, Scotland has been led by politicians who say we cannot afford to be independent. Yet it is those same politicians who over the next five years will put the UK over £100 billion into the red. To those who say we cannot afford to be independent, we say: why the economic double standard?

3 / Our Public Services

A country that looks after its public services looks after its people. After all, what is more important than the health and education of our population and a justice system that is fair and equal? The SNP want high quality public services that Scotland can be proud of.

Scotland's public services

Our public services are vital and a benchmark for any developed country. High quality services will be delivered only if those employed in the public sector are valued and respected.

We want our people to be healthy but to know that if they do get ill, care and treatment will be free at the point of delivery. We want to attack crime by tackling the causes as well as the symptoms. And we want education and continued learning to be an important and enjoyable experience for our youngest generations. If they are our future, shouldn't we do all we can to ensure they are healthy, educated, and safe on our streets?

For too long our public sector has been neglected. The needs of services, staff, and infrastructure have been at best mismanaged and at worst ignored by successive Tory, Labour, and now Labour-LibDem coalition policies. The SNP will restore quality, efficiency, and responsiveness to our public services by adhering to five key principles.

First, we will ensure public services should be just that - public. Government money intended to provide public services must do just that and should not be wasted through inefficiency or be taken out of the system to pay excessive private profit. Second, the needs of those using public services must come first. Third, those delivering public services must be treated with respect. Fourth, public services should be under the control of the communities who use them. Fifth,

the delivery of public services should be clear and accountable to everyone.

We will apply this approach across the full range of public services to ensure our nation has the high quality public services we deserve.

Public service finances

Funding for our public services is set to rise by nearly £5 billion in the next three years. This is not down to generosity on any governments behalf but to increased taxes that you have paid. It is vital that this new money is used to maximum effect. That is why we will set up a New Projects Fund. It will take money away from the pet projects and bureaucracy of the Labour-LibDem coalition and spend it on frontline services. So, for instance, it will be our New Projects Fund that pays for the reduction in class sizes and the abolition of the Graduate Endowment.

An SNP administration will also focus our spending more. We believe that the key to reducing waiting times for hospital treatment is to employ more nurses. The best way to do that is by offering them a competitive salary. That is why we will use money from the £2 billion increase in the Scottish health budget to give our nurses and midwives an 11 percent rise.

Not for Profit Trusts

New Labour has tried to tackle years of under investment in our infrastructure, our public buildings, schools, and hospitals, with an expensive privatisation project, the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) or Public Private Partnership. Under this scheme, schools and hospitals are no longer owned by the public sector - they are transferred to a private consortium. Consequently, they are run for profit rather than the public good. By this route, money intended to pay for public services leaves the system to pay excess private profits.

Furthermore, use of PFI-privatisation means that profit comes before service provision. Consequently, PFI schools have lost after-hours access to playing fields and leisure facilities and PFI hospitals have resulted in fewer beds.

We reject this notion of PFI-privatisation. Scotland deserves better, and we will pursue policies that put public service before profit. We propose the use of Not for Profit Trusts for the provision of public sector assets. These would allow the main issues of ownership, control and finance to be addressed. Under our proposals, the assets would not be owned by a private consortium, whose first motivation was profit, but by a trust, whose first priority was public service. This would ensure that the asset was run for the benefit of the community. It would also mean that instead of being creamed off to pay excess profit, public money was channelled back in to the provision of services.

Our proposals mean better services and cheaper delivery of these services. And they mean that services are run for the benefit of the communities they serve, rather than the benefit of financiers and bankers.

3.1 / Health

The SNP has big ambitions for our National Health Service (NHS). We have the resources and the vision to make sure the NHS delivers the high quality modern healthcare we all expect.

Our health service

Across the country the SNP has listened to the concerns of patients and staff and we have produced simple but effective proposals to give you, as patients, and thousands of dedicated NHS workers, a health service we can all depend on.

Labour has got many things wrong with the health service. But if we focus on the core problems, we can put it right. Your vote for the SNP on May 1st will mean we can start building a health service that is responsive, delivers locally and looks after its staff.

That means paying nurses properly to ensure that our hospitals have sufficient staff to care for patients and to bring down waiting times. It means determining bed numbers according to needs of patients and communities, rather than the demands of a PFI-privatisation project balance sheet. It means targeting investment to front-line services rather than back-room bureaucracy.

Our health service could and should match the best in Europe.

Tackling patient waiting times

Quality treatment, when you need it. That's what we all want from the National Health Service.

Scotland's NHS staff give their utmost and deliver high standards of care. But constraints in the system mean that too many patients still wait far too long for treatment. Our focus will be on bringing waiting times down.

It is the SNP's aim that, by 2005, everyone will receive hospital treatment within six months of diagnosis.

But for many, the lengthiest delays occur whilst waiting for diagnosis. Waiting times for first outpatient appointments have increased steadily in recent years.

That is why we will also work towards a maximum wait of six months for a first outpatient appointment and we will seek to deliver that by the end of our first term in office.

But we recognise that setting targets is the easy part. The real challenge for government is to equip the NHS to deliver on them.

The SNP will tackle the core problem in the health service – it is too small to meet the growing demands that we place on it.

We have an ageing population, our people are living longer and advances in medicine and technology have increased our expectations of what the NHS can deliver.

And as these demands have grown, the capacity of the NHS has shrunk.

The NHS has 980 fewer acute beds today than in 1999, and there are serious staff shortages exist in all parts of the service.

An SNP government will halt the reduction in acute beds. We will set up a Review of Acute Capacity to determine the number and range of beds that are required in the NHS in the medium to long-term.

Our building and refurbishment programme will be designed to meet that need. And by making sure that we have the right number of beds in residential homes, as well as the right number of acute beds, we can more adequately tackle the problem of bed blocking.

As a matter of urgency we will look to see what action requires to be taken to resolve the ongoing dispute between central and local government and private and voluntary care home providers.

Our frontline staff

We will take measures to boost staff recruitment, starting with better pay for nurses. Common sense tells us that we can't reduce waiting times unless we have the right numbers of nurses in the health service. Nurses, after all, provide 80 per cent of patient care.

But recruiting nurses and retaining them in the profession is getting more and more difficult. Around 25 per cent of student nurses drop out before they qualify.

Many of those who do qualify take up better-paid posts south of the border or further afield. There are more nursing vacancies than ever before and, regrettably, some health trusts use vacancies as a way of managing budgets. As a result, expenditure on agency nursing has gone through the roof. We believe that money spent on agency nurses would be better invested in permanent staff.

That is why the SNP will immediately increase the pay of our nurses and midwives by 11 per cent over and above any UK settlement. This is right because, as we expect nurses to expand their roles and assume more and more responsibility, we must reward them properly. But it will also give Scotland a vital competitive edge in the recruitment market.

This measure will cost £150 million each year, and will be funded from within the health budget, which is forecast to grow by almost £2 billion over the next three years.

Of course, delivering health care is a team effort, involving doctors, nurses, technicians, ancillary staff and carers.

Other staff working in the health service must be valued just as much as nurses and under the SNP, they will be. Where appropriate, we will use enhanced pay to tackle shortages in other professions within the NHS. We will examine ways of providing financial incentives in specific areas of the country, particularly rural and remote areas, and in specialities where there are the most acute staff shortages.

We will implement the new consultants' contract both because it is a good deal for them and because it delivers more for the NHS and its patients.

We recognise that in many areas, access to an NHS dentist is limited, and we will consider a range of measures to address this problem, including a review of how dentists are remunerated and the number of dentists being trained.

The SNP will also work with health professionals and unions to ensure adequate support for staff development and childcare.

In the longer term, of course, making sure that we have the right number and mix of staff in place will demand better workforce planning.

Primary care

Building the capacity of the health service with more beds and more nurses is essential. But so too is changing and improving the way we deliver health care. Patients want to be treated as close to home as possible.

That's why primary care should be the engine room for change in the NHS. We will give Local Health Care Co-operatives a remit to develop innovative delivery of health care and remove barriers to multi-disciplinary, multi-professional working whenever they occur. Patients should experience the minimum number of referrals and assessments possible. To reduce the

burden on GPs and to make services more convenient for patients we will look for ways to scale down the role of the GP as 'gatekeeper' to all other services, including patient self-referral to other primary care services. We will value all members of the primary care team. For example, many services provided for patients are delivered by local pharmacies. The recent report by the Office of Fair Trading would threaten the viability of many pharmacies. That is why the SNP will not implement its recommendations.

Meeting the needs of patients

The NHS is still run to suit the targets and demands of politicians and bureaucrats. Whether it is complaints over treatment or reduced levels of service it is clear the current culture creates barriers for patients, staff and local communities. The people who matter most are the ones with the least say.

But again there are simple steps we can take.

First of all, our health service requires a patients' champion, someone who will act in the interest of patients at all times. We will replace NHS Quality Improvement Scotland with a National Health Inspectorate, independent of government, to do this job. It will conduct regular inspections of general standards within hospitals, including cleanliness, hygiene, nutrition, standards of accommodation, fabric of buildings, and the general environment for patients. It will make clear recommendations for improvement and take action if they are not met.

Under the SNP, patients will come before profits. We will bring all hospital cleaning contracts back in-house to the NHS. Too many of our hospitals don't meet acceptable hygiene standards and too many patients pick up life threatening infections while in hospital.

We will introduce a new Code of Practice for Health Boards to govern the way they inform patients when mistakes occur, and bring greater democracy through a directly elected element to Health Boards and Local Health Care Co-operatives.

We will make local health councils independent of the NHS and create a statutory independent patient body at national level to serve as the 'voice of the patient'.

While we believe in the local delivery of health care, we will not tolerate postcode prescription. It is not acceptable for someone living in one Health Board area to access a drug, while someone in a neighbouring Health Board cannot. Therefore we will take steps to ensure that drugs which are deemed clinically effective are accessed equitably across the country.

Good health for life

The SNP's approach will be as much about preventing illness as treating it. Both must go hand in hand, and we need more from our government than a few speeches about healthy eating. There are practical steps we can take to promote lifelong good health.

Studies show the importance of healthy diet during pregnancy. The SNP will give every expectant mother on Income Support, for the six months before birth, £50 per month to spend on fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods.

We will extend the free fruit in schools scheme to make sure that every child in primary school gets at least one piece of fruit every day, and abolish charges for dental check ups.

We do not accept the arguments for compulsory fluoridation of public water supplies, although we will consider optional alternatives.

Cancer and heart disease are still major killers and as part of our strategy to combat these we will bring in measures to reduce smoking levels. We will ensure that the law prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to children is rigorously enforced and introduce tough new penalties for those caught flouting the law, including a negative licensing scheme to remove the right of the most persistent offenders to sell cigarettes.

We will review the ban on tobacco advertising annually, tightening it when necessary, and consult on legislation to provide smoke-free areas in public places to protect people from passive smoking.

As part of our commitment to lifelong health care we will seek to reduce the current complex bureaucracy faced by elderly and vulnerable people in our society, including improved co-operation between our health and local authority service providers.

Damaging drugs

Since 1999 much of the SNP's drugs policy has been adopted by the Labour-LibDem coalition, including our proposals for Drugs Courts to deal with specific drug related crime.

In this election our priorities remain the same. We want to reduce the damage that drugs and drug related crime does to Scottish society. We need to focus on those substances which cause most damage. We need to concentrate on identifying and dealing with drug dealers, and we need to provide education and information to protect young people in particular against the danger of drugs. We recognise that harm reduction and education are key to reducing the damage done by drugs. We also recognise that for problem drug users, rehabilitation services are vital. Community based work is essential in both of these areas, and we recognise the importance of stabilising funding to the organisations that provide them.

Building for the future

The PFI-privatisation policy of the Labour-LibDem coalition is beginning to unravel. More and more Scots are coming to realise that Labour's new hospitals come at a price – fewer beds and staff, and hospital buildings mortgaged at high rates of interest. Too much money goes out of the system as excess private profit, at the expense of hospital services.

But there is another way. We will match the building programme of the Labour-LibDem coalition brick for brick using Not for Profit Trusts. Our hospitals will remain publicly owned and all money will go back into the health service – meaning more resources to provide the extra doctors and nurses the NHS needs.

PFI-privatisation is one reason why the number of NHS beds has fallen – but it is a trend we are committed to reverse.

Getting the structure right

There are also some vital structural reforms to undertake which will strengthen the delivery of healthcare nationwide. We want to simplify the structure and create a more accountable and transparent service, with devolved powers to allow communities to shape services according to their needs.

As first steps in that process, we will introduce three key reforms. We will introduce early legislation to abolish health trusts. We will review the number of Health Boards and give the remaining boards the lead role in strategic planning, budget holding and commissioning of services. And we will strengthen Local Health Care Co-operatives, by requiring Health Boards to devolve budgets and commissioning powers.

The SNP will also establish a National Healthcare Commission, chaired by the Health Minister, and

comprising a range of professional and patient interests appointed by Parliament.

The job of the Commission will be to advise the Health Minister on the strategic direction of the NHS, and to subject the decisions of government to the kind of rigorous scrutiny that can only come from people who know, from experience, what works in the real world.

Those who know best what is needed in the health service are those who work at its sharp end, and those who use its services. These voices need to be heard much more loudly when decisions are being taken.

Taken together these plans offer a new direction for the NHS in Scotland. A direction where patients and staff come first. And where your priorities are the priorities of our government.

3.2 / Justice, crime and our communities

We want to stop criminals stealing our streets. Cutting crime and the fear of crime will be a high priority for an SNP administration. We want to create a Scotland where we can all walk down our streets without concern for our personal safety – a Scotland where crime and the fear of crime are no longer part of our daily lives.

A force to reckon with

It is essential that we have sufficient police numbers to ensure not only the speedy detection of crime, but also its prevention.

That is why the SNP are committed to providing money from our New Projects Fund to put 1,000 more police officers on our streets.

Visible policing plays a vital role in reducing the fear of crime, which can be as debilitating as the level of crime itself, so the SNP will ensure more front line police. To further increase frontline police numbers there are a number of additional measures we will take, including a reduction in the amount of police time spent in court and an increase in the number of civilians undertaking auxiliary tasks in the police force.

Tackling youth crime

Youth crime is a growing problem in many of our communities. Too many people are the victims of vandalism, disruptive behaviour and verbal assaults, committed by a small group of young repeat offenders. An SNP government will take a dual approach to youth crime, by using early intervention programmes that divert young people away from crime and by ensuring tougher sanctions for persistent young offenders.

Parental Compensation Orders will be introduced to give the courts and Children's Panels the option, in appropriate circumstances, of making sure that parents take responsibility for offences committed by their children.

Serious and persistent young offenders should not be allowed to roam the streets just because there are no secure accommodation places for them. There are too few secure places so young offenders are either sent home, sent to adult prisons or to secure units in England. We believe that the number of secure units available in Scotland should be doubled.

But we want to do more. We want to stop the cycle of crime before it begins and deal with the causes of crime, not just the symptoms. Those who begin committing crimes when they are young are likely to continue offending later in life, so the SNP will deal with this earlier rather than later. We will tackle the numbers of young people who drift into crime and get involved in drugs or alcohol by encouraging our young people to improve their aspirations, establish connections with their communities and help them back into education.

Our approach will be multi-agency, respecting young people, their views and the communities they form. It is about more than simply making recreational and educational opportunities available, but engaging with young people to determine what sort of opportunities they want and need.

The justice system

Despite increasing levels of reported offences and arrests, the number of cases referred for prosecution and the number of convictions are falling year on year. It is clear that there is a failure in the system, and we will ensure that the resources becoming available are used to improve efficiency and effectiveness within the Crown Office and Fiscal Service.

We recognise however that further steps will be required to relieve some of the pressure on our court system. We will investigate setting up weekend courts, which would ease some of this pressure on the system. Summary criminal courts could meet at weekends and in the evening, and the Small Claims Court likewise.

Family Courts

A system of Family Courts has worked well in countries such as Canada, Australia and Japan, and we would set up Family Courts in Scotland - combining divorce, contact, residency, domestic violence, and some youth crime.

This combination of civil and criminal matters in the same court would allow issues to be dealt with in a coherent and holistic manner, allowing the recognition of family breakdown or dysfunction as a key factor in the lives of offenders. It would not only be a suitable place to deal with family matters, but could help address the burden currently placed on the under-resourced Children's Hearing System.

Drug Courts

In 1999 the SNP pioneered the idea of Drug Courts as an effective way of tackling drug related crime. Over the last term of Parliament, the Labour-LibDem coalition introduced this concept with positive results. The aims are harm reduction across the community, reduction in drug use and dependency, with the ultimate intention of preventing re-offending.

This involves recognition that prison is not a simple, effective or cheap answer to all drug crime. A more holistic approach must be taken, with the aim of preventing re-offending, for example through Drug Treatment and Testing Orders. In government we would introduce Drug Courts across the country

Dealing with offenders

Scotland's over-crowded prisons are failing to address the offending behaviour of prisoners. The result is increased re-offending and higher crime levels.

A central objective of an SNP administration will be to reduce re-offending rates, through reducing prison numbers, creating conditions in prisons that aid the rehabilitation of prisoners and employing alternatives to custody.

Alternatives to custody

There is no question of not sending criminals, from whom society needs protection, to prison. The problem is that there are too many people in prison who do not belong there, whether they be fine defaulters or criminals who could be dealt with more effectively by alternatives to custody.

Fine defaulters made up a massive 37 per cent of all those sent to Scotland's prisons in 2001. An SNP government will reform the system of fines to help cut fine defaulting and cut prison numbers. One of the reasons for default is inability to pay the fine imposed. We propose a 'unit fine' system, which takes full account of ability to pay. Under such a system, fines are imposed in terms of a number of units. Then, the convicted person's means are assessed and the value of the units related to his or her means.

When fine default does occur we need to be able to deal with the problem more effectively, and avoid sending people to prison unnecessarily. Supervised Attendance Orders have been piloted and have proved to be highly successful. We would investigate expanding these across the country, as well as other methods of civil recovery. We also need to look at new sentencing options.

Weekend prisons are successful in many parts of Europe. They act like a Community Service Order, as a

fine on time, but allowing an offender to hold down a job and maintain contact with their family - one of the most important elements in preventing re-offending. We believe the use of weekend sentencing would give our courts greater sentencing options without increasing prison numbers, and we would examine the configuration of our prison estate with a view to their implementation.

We would also like to see the expansion and development of electronic tagging as a tough alternative to custody.

Tackling re-offending and reducing prison numbers

It is vital that we create conditions in prisons that aid the rehabilitation of prisoners and cut re-offending.

The problem of over-crowding and the practice of 'slopping out' are not conducive to this aim, and so our prison estate is in need of renovation and renewal.

We are committed to a 100 per cent publicly owned and run prison service and reject the involvement of the private sector through PFI-privatisation. In government, we will use public sector resources and innovative ideas such as Not for Profit Trusts to deliver this investment.

We are committed to the long-term future of Peterhead Prison and will ensure that the valuable resource it provides in dealing with sex offenders is not lost.

We must improve our drug rehabilitation services in prison, which will require a greater effort to recruit key workers in this area.

To help reduce re-offending rates, we require greater inter-agency co-operation between services for prisoners when they are released.

3.3 / Children and education

We believe that excellence in educating our children will help build the modern society we want and desire. Scotland pioneered free education and built a reputation for quality; we want to get that reputation back and be the pioneers once again.

Scotland's future

The SNP regards education both as a means of investment in Scotland's future and a way of preparing our young people for the modern world. To ensure we focus on these objectives we will create a single department of Children & Education, covering all stages of the life-long educational continuum.

We will use the current powers of the Scottish Parliament to build a better framework for Scotland's schools. And with Independence, will ensure education benefits from increased national wealth, with a programme of additional investment. An SNP administration will give children room to learn and teachers space to teach. We will build on the traditional strengths of the Scottish education system by learning and applying the lessons of the most successful initiatives at home and worldwide.

Nursery education, pre and after school care

There is still a lack of affordable childcare in Scotland. Parents in Scotland have to spend more on childcare, and find it harder to get, than in any other European country.

More action is needed. An SNP administration will make a start in creating a national system of supported childcare by introducing a series of pilot childcare projects. This will help prepare children to get the most out of school and assist parents who wish to return to work or to secure better paid work, but cannot afford, or find, suitable childcare.

Welcome progress has been made with nursery education, although provision does not yet meet demand in some areas of the country, and this is a situation that we will address. The development of after-school homework clubs and pre-school breakfast clubs is positive, and we would look to expand this type of provision according to local need and demand.

Lowering class sizes and raising expectations

International and UK research has found significant gains in pupil achievement in the first three years of schooling if class sizes are reduced.

Starting with children in the most deprived areas, the SNP are committed to rolling out a programme to reduce all Primary 1, 2 and 3 classes to eighteen or less within five years. This will be financed from our New Projects Fund. We will also take steps to progressively reduce class sizes in later primary and early secondary and increase the focus at all ages on acquiring and keeping the basic skills.

Stability and harmony in our schools

An SNP administration will honour the McCrone agreement on teachers' pay and conditions in full and in a way that guarantees the period of stability and co-operation that the agreement was meant to achieve.

We will also address the problems of indiscipline and truancy in schools, which have such a detrimental effect on both teachers and pupils, by developing a rights and responsibilities code to instil a sense of personal responsibility in our young people.

We will adopt a culture of zero tolerance towards violence in the classroom, coupled with a strategy to change behaviour that will include expanding alternative curricula, along with the use of temporary exclusion to centres where behaviour change is an integral part of

the learning process. Early intervention is a proven route to reducing indiscipline and truancy and this, coupled with the positive effect of smaller class sizes, will be a key factor in achieving higher standards of behaviour and attainment.

Repair and refurbishment

Crumbling schools do not provide our children with the right environment for learning and the SNP is committed to establishing a Not for Profit Trust as a means of funding new schools and school refurbishment. We will match, brick for brick, any plans for new or refurbished schools in Scotland currently offered by the Labour-LibDem coalition. And we will go further. The simplified means of funding which is available through Not for Profit Trusts will give us even greater resources. So these new and refurbished schools will not only be built, they will be built at a lower cost to the public purse, allowing us to build more schools, and provide better facilities than PFI-privatisation schools.

And with the Not for Profit Trust model, communities retain ownership of their schools, instead of handing them over to private contractors - who can sell off their interests on a purely commercial basis with little regard for the interests of the schools or the communities they serve. We recognise that, where contracts have been signed, they must be honoured. However an SNP administration will always use the Not for Profit Trust alternative where possible.

Simplifying systems

The mechanisms used to assess school pupils have become too complicated, placing excessive pressure on pupils, teachers and administrators. We will undertake a comprehensive review of the 5-14 curriculum guidelines, with new emphasis on the basic skills. At all stages we will lift the burden of unnecessary and over complex assessment. And we will work with the Scottish

Qualifications Authority, schools and colleges to develop a simplified examination system with outcomes that are clear, easily understood and obviously demonstrate to employers and the students themselves, the levels of achievement gained.

We reject the concept of school league tables but we will make the provision of performance information from schools to parents more comprehensive, accessible and understandable.

Widening choice

We will initiate a major consultation on extending pupil choice by allowing young people who wish to and who have their parents' permission, to utilise college opportunities for vocational education in S3 and S4, while remaining under the general supervision of their school. This initiative would help build up the high skills base we need to compete as a modern economy, as well as enabling all our young people to access subjects and facilities which engage their interest.

We will also ensure that Scottish History, Literature, and Languages are taught in our schools, giving a window on the world which is relevant to our young people and will help them compete in the 21st century world.

Encouraging diversity

Educational provision will be delivered within a unified, but locally diverse, state sector, which is one of the major strengths of the Scottish system. The SNP will continue to encourage this diversity and, where circumstances are appropriate, will also encourage new thinking and provision, such as e-schools.

We will continue to support Catholic schools recognising the contribution they make to meeting educational needs in Scotland, and, will do so for so long as parents wish to send their children to them. We will secure the future of the special educational needs schools, which

have had so much insecurity in recent years, and will continue to encourage mainstream education for all young people, providing it is appropriate, achievable and well supported in meeting the needs of the child. We will guarantee in law the right to a Gaelic medium education at primary level, where demand exists, and will continue to support community schools. We will ensure that adequate provision is made for the distinctive needs and interests of ethnic minorities in our education system.

The SNP is committed to further extending devolved school management, while recognising that some budgets are best controlled at local authority level, as the most cost effective and efficient way of spending precious educational resources.

An SNP administration will assist local authorities by offering them clearer information on an annual basis about all the funding available to them as well as giving them greater powers to decide how to use it.

At the same time we will ensure that our rural schools have a future by introducing a legislative 'presumption against closure' and tightening the regulations that allow schools to be shut down.

Extending involvement in decision making

The SNP does not believe that politicians should have exclusive ownership of education policy. That is why we re-affirm our commitment to establishing an Education Convention consisting of representatives of teachers, parents, pupils, employers and wider civic Scotland.

The Education Convention will have a statutory position with regard to consultation on educational proposals and will be able to bring forward ideas for legislation. It will also have the power to delay, though not over-rule, any proposals with which it profoundly disagrees. Above all, it will help to

establish consensus rather than conflict as the basis for future educational progress.

Protecting all our children

Protecting all of our children is an absolute priority so we will take immediate steps to recruit and retain more child protection social workers by establishing a McCrone-type committee to find solutions to the crisis in our social work departments.

In addition to fully supporting the implementation of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and making Scotland a more child friendly country, we will also remove the reservation that the UK government has entered into relating to refugee children. We believe that no child should be made to suffer because of his or her status.

3.4 / Lifelong learning

The SNP believes that Scotland's future success must lie in drawing the right lessons from our past and investing in a highly skilled and educated workforce. So when compulsory education ends, society still has a role to play in ensuring that individuals have the opportunity to access lifelong learning backed by excellence in research and development.

Learning for the future

Scotland has a long, and internationally renowned, history of enterprise, innovation and learning. Scottish scientists, scholars and craftsmen played a major role in laying the foundations of the modern world. Yet in modern Scotland we have serious skills shortages at all levels, and one of the lowest levels of spending on research and development in Europe.

The SNP wants to invest in a highly skilled workforce, rather than competing for the lowest labour-market prices in an effort to attract and retain jobs. We remain committed to the principle of free education.

There is growing and justified concern that the current financial underpinning of the lifelong learning sector including further and higher education is extremely pressured. We do not believe it is sustainable to have devolved policy control of the sector without devolved financial control.

Any attempt to mitigate the symptoms of the impact of policy moves south of the border, such as the introduction of greater private charging and top up fees, will not work in the long term. This further illustrates the need for independent Scottish control of public finances.

We will build on existing strengths in our colleges and universities to give more people an opportunity to learn for life. New skills can mean new rewards for

you and for Scotland as a whole, and we will work to reduce barriers to further and higher education and to give more Scots access to education and training throughout their life.

Lifelong learning

There is a general consensus in Scotland that a vibrant system of lifelong learning is critical to the success of the economy. Therefore we will continue to argue that it is neither sensible nor sustainable for the Scottish Parliament to have control of lifelong learning policy without having control of the means to fund it.

Important work has been done by the Scottish Parliament's Enterprise & Lifelong Learning Committee examining Scotland's options for the future. It considered a number of key issues including a national lifelong learning strategy and funding for Further Education colleges, and it is critical that the Committee's conclusions are taken seriously at the next stage of the policy process. Within the first year of our term we will publish an implementation analysis of each of the report's recommendations in line with inherited policy commitments and resources.

Filling the skills gap

Tackling skills shortages will be a key priority of an SNP administration. We will work with schools, colleges and business to ensure adequate assessment of skills needs and effective provision of support and training for communities and industries where there are skills gaps.

It is important that the careers guidance service, working with schools, colleges and employers, is well equipped to allow young people, to make informed choices about their future career. This way we will ensure that the demands for skills in the labour market is better matched with skills training.

This, however, is only part of the solution. The SNP propose to pilot a scheme to encourage more young people into skilled trades by allowing young people in S3 and S4 to utilise college opportunities for vocational training, thus allowing best and earliest access to skills training. It is essential that we make the necessary investment in our skills base if we are to succeed in the global economy.

This must go hand in hand with increased flexibility for colleges to allow them to fund the courses that are required, and a national strategy matching training, and funding for training, to skills shortages.

Higher education

The SNP remains absolutely committed to the principle of free education and believes that charges on students serve to reduce equality of access to education rather than enhance it.

We will therefore abolish the Graduate Endowment and will work to ensure a more comprehensive, coherent and fair national system of student welfare funding.

We will reconvene the Cubie Committee with a remit to review financial support for students at present, as well as the overall context of further and higher education funding. The committee will not be restricted in its remit and will by necessity examine the impact of policy decisions currently reserved to Westminster.

Research and development

We are determined to build on Scotland's reputation for excellence in key areas of research, and we will ensure our focus on skills development includes provision for maximising the flow of highly skilled graduates able to contribute to cutting edge research and development. We see partnership between universities and industry as the core way of keeping the benefits of Scottish

research within the Scottish economy.

We believe that more must be done to promote co-operation and collaboration between universities and colleges and we will bring forward a mix of incentives to produce a rational provision of facilities at a national and regional level. This must work in concert with promoting diversity of provision in both learning and research.

Scotland's proud history of technological and scientific advance continues. More must be done, however, to allow Scotland to enjoy the economic benefits of this work through commercialisation. In too many cases, lack of access to venture capital is the impediment both to entrepreneurship, and to moving from proto-type to production-line, and this is a matter that we will look to address.

4 / Our Environment

Scotland is a nation of abundant natural and cultural assets. We have breath-taking scenery, rich energy sources and fertile agricultural land, and all of them can be developed to create jobs and economic prosperity for Scotland. We want to ensure our rural industries such as agriculture and fishing are supported and our rural communities flourish.

We want to have a clean green environment that is a pleasure for our people, and we want our vibrant heritage, culture, and creativity to flourish and be shared with our neighbours in the world.

4.1 / Environment

We want Scotland's resources to be developed, sustained, and protected for the future. We will do this in a way that protects and enhances our natural environment, our traditions, and benefits everyone in Scotland – both now and in generations to come.

Locally and globally

We live in a beautiful country, which is rich in natural resources and energy sources. But we need to keep it that way. We need to allow Scotland to meet energy requirements in a clean sustainable way and create Green Jobs for Scotland. The SNP's commitment to sustainable development will put all these considerations at the heart of government.

Environmental degradation is not only a global issue; it impacts greatly at a national and local level. From the litter on our streets to the quality of air that we breathe, the environment affects us all.

Environmental problems like climate change can only be tackled by a concerted effort from all the nations of the world and it is vital that Scotland meets international environmental targets.

An SNP administration will undertake an Environmental Audit, to inform our National Plan for Sustainability. It will set out clear actions, targets and indicators across all areas of government.

A Green Jobs Strategy will be placed at the heart of our economic policy – offering employment growth in areas such as waste recycling, renewable energy, agriculture and public transport.

Climate change

The SNP will focus on achieving a programme of reduction in greenhouse gases involving different sectors within society. As part of our National Plan for Sustainability, we will ensure that, as a minimum, we adopt targets agreed as part of the Kyoto Protocol of a 12.5 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions on 1990 levels by 2008-12, and a 20 per cent reduction in CO2 emissions by 2010. We will undertake consultation with different sectors with a view to setting and monitoring specific greenhouse gas reduction targets for each sector, and we will carry out CO2 proofing on major policies and projects.

Energy efficiency

In order to reduce our energy consumption, combat fuel poverty and meet our environmental targets, it is vital that we become more energy efficient.

We will examine regulations to ensure the highest standards of insulation and construction methods deliver improved energy efficiency in all sectors. We will also encourage energy efficiency by setting targets and by consulting on the inclusion of a system of Energy Ratings for buildings in any schedule for sale or let.

Renewable energy

With 25 per cent of Europe's potential for renewable energy, and the potential capacity to produce 75 per cent of the UK's electricity needs from renewable sources, Scotland should aim to become the green powerhouse of Europe. Only with Independence can Scotland capitalise on this green energy potential and gain the maximum economic benefit from exporting our electricity.

Our aim is to produce 25 per cent of current generation capacity from renewable sources by 2010. We want to

progressively build upon this by setting further targets for the generating industry of 30 per cent of current capacity from renewable sources by 2015 and 50 per cent by 2020.

We will develop a National Strategy for the development of Scotland's green energy potential and establish a National Forum to bring together governmental bodies and those with an interest in the renewable energy industry. We will support further research and development of renewable energy sources. We will also review the operation of Renewables Obligation (Scotland), making it better placed to support the development of wave and tidal renewable energies.

As part of our Green Jobs Strategy, we will look to capitalise on our strong research base in alternative energy sources, and sell our skills and expertise in the world market.

We also recognise that the capacity of Scotland's electricity distribution system is a major obstacle to the development of renewable energy. As part of new electricity trading and transmission arrangements, the costs of improving the grid must be spread across all UK customers.

A non-nuclear future

The continued use of nuclear power to produce electricity for Scotland is neither acceptable nor economically viable, and the nuclear waste it produces makes it environmentally unsustainable.

We will use the current powers of the Scottish Parliament to prevent the building of any new nuclear power stations. With the full powers of Independence, an SNP government will ensure not only that no new nuclear power stations are built in Scotland, but that existing facilities are decommissioned at the end of their economic or technical life.

As part of our Green Jobs Strategy, we will use the opportunity of decommissioning to create long-term jobs. We will create scientific enterprise zones around the three existing nuclear power stations to help local communities maximise the job opportunities that come with decommissioning and to diversify into other enterprises.

Waste

Our nation has one of the worst recycling records in Europe. In government, the SNP will make the National Waste Strategy and Area Waste Plans mandatory, and they will include targets for waste minimisation and recycling.

A 30 to 35 per cent Scotland-wide target for recycling of household waste should be achievable by 2010. In government, the SNP will support the introduction of separation at source for domestic waste through kerbside collection. In addition, our Green Jobs Strategy will allow us to maximise the potential for employment growth that this policy creates.

Landfill

Continuing to dispose of our waste in landfill sites is not a sustainable option. Incineration of waste, however, is not an acceptable alternative to landfill and it will be greatly restricted.

We will reduce waste going to landfill to meet EU directives. To achieve this, we believe that the power to levy Landfill Tax, and decisions on how best to utilise the revenue raised, should be transferred to the Scottish Parliament. With these powers, we would ensure that the proceeds raised from the Landfill Tax are used to support and develop the introduction of separation at source recycling methods, re-use and composting schemes.

Protecting and enhancing our environment

It is vital that our environment is protected and enhanced, for us all to enjoy and to safeguard jobs in the tourist industry – a consideration vital to our Green Jobs Strategy. This is the responsibility of us all as individuals, businesses, and local and national government.

It is essential that environmental awareness is part of our children's education, and that maintaining a clean and healthy environment becomes part of our daily lives.

To ensure the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, we will modernise legislation in the areas of wildlife, conservation and the seas.

We will ensure that our fiscal service is adequately trained in environmental law, and that those who pollute will be prosecuted.

Our Environmental Audit will deliver, for the first time, a true picture of the extent, nature and location of land contamination. This will allow us to target our actions and resources.

To tackle air pollution, an SNP administration will consider making air quality standards mandatory. To reduce harmful emissions we will aim to reduce the number of car journeys through improved public transport alternatives, by championing cleaner fuels such as LPG, bio-fuels and hydrogen fuels, and by encouraging the development of cycle routes in cities.

Last year, only 40 per cent of our beaches passed the 'Guideline' standard, compared to the European average of 78 per cent. It is our aim to raise Scotland's beaches to European standards.

To tackle the problem of litter, we will improve enforcement procedures for Local Authorities, and raise the level of Fixed Penalty from its current level of £25.

Climate change will result in greater incidences of inland and coastal flooding. An SNP Government will ensure that Scotland has a National Strategy for Sustainable Flood Management.

Planning

Resistance from local communities to new developments in their neighbourhoods often stems from a feeling of powerlessness in the decision-making process. We will develop new guidelines to ensure that Local Authorities proactively designate sites as acceptable or otherwise for the erection of, for example, wind turbines and telecommunications masts. All new telecommunications masts, and future alterations, will require planning permission. We will investigate the introduction of a third party right of appeal where a development requires an environmental assessment or is contrary to the local plan.

Scotland's national parks

We will extend the boundaries of the Cairngorms National Park to include the areas of Highland Perthshire, that were included in the Scottish Natural Heritage report, but that have been excluded from the Statutory Instrument on the park. We will also review the success, or otherwise, of the differing planning mechanisms used in the two national parks.

4.2 / Agriculture, forestry and fishing

Scotland relies on a high-quality, high-value reputation in its agriculture, fishing and forestry industries. These industries contribute to our economy and provide jobs in our rural areas, so it is vital they are protected. Our policies reflect the economic, social, and environmental action needed to sustain this sector.

Our agriculture sector

The Scottish agriculture sector has a high-quality, high-value reputation. However, the potential of the sector is being lost because the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs in London still has too much control and the Labour-LibDem coalition has allowed this situation to continue at the expense of Scotland's farmers. Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is overdue; however, Scotland has no direct voice in the EU, and there is considerable danger that reform could make the situation for Scottish farmers worse rather than better. We need to argue the case for Scottish farmers, and ensure that CAP reform is to our benefit and not our disadvantage.

With Europe playing such a key role in agricultural policy, the SNP will work to protect our industry's competitiveness and maintain a level playing field by ensuring new regulations are only introduced in Scotland after implementation by a majority of EU nations.

At all levels, both within Scotland and the EU, our agriculture sector needs a voice that will speak up for its interests. We need to address, among other matters; the lack of control of imports; the promotion of a workable organic farming plan and a fairer rural stewardship scheme; the introduction of a single 'country of origin' labelling and marketing scheme to

take advantage of Scotland's high quality reputation; promotion of the interests of small farmers and crofters; and the encouragement of new markets in the emerging organic sector.

Genetic modification

Scottish public opinion on the GM issue is clear. The case for genetically modified foods has not been won either in the supermarket or in the communities where GM field trials are being carried out. Local residents and consumers alike have voted with their feet. The Labour-LibDem coalition has ignored these views and continues to press ahead with dangerous and unwanted GM field trials.

We will adopt the precautionary principle and introduce an immediate moratorium on GM crop trials in Scotland, unless and until such time as the safety of genetic modification procedures and their crops have been established.

Maturing our forests

Forestry is a major employer in many parts of rural Scotland, but current legislation is outdated and needs reform to ensure long-term viability for the industry. Our approach will consider economic, social, and environmental aspects to deliver a policy which has long term sustainability.

We would allow local communities to play a greater role in the management of their local woodlands, and would re-examine woodland grants to allow for activities other than on-site operations. We would promote biodiversity, and encourage the re-development of Scotland's natural woodland.

We need to act now to ensure that there is a diverse market for our forestry as it reaches maturity. Our current conventional markets need to be developed. This includes the promotion of a procurement policy

more sympathetic to the use of local timber, as well as the promotion of exports. We also recognise that there are significant opportunities for Scottish forestry in the development of biomass renewable energy schemes, and our access to this emerging market must be developed.

Our fishing industry

The failure of the Labour-LibDem coalition and the UK government to adequately represent and protect the interests of our fishing industry is one of the greatest failings of the current constitutional settlement. The thirty-year history of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has witnessed numerous sell-outs by successive UK governments.

The most recent sell out of the Scottish fleet provides further evidence of the pressing need to give Scotland full control over fisheries negotiations.

The UK always has, and always will, give fishing a low priority, but with an SNP government arguing the case, Scotland's fishermen will begin to get the representation they deserve. They will get a fishing conservation policy designed to provide long-term sustainability for the industry and deliver a management regime for Scottish waters with direct input by both fishing and scientific interests. Such a conservation policy will take into the account the demands of a mixed fishery.

While the SNP recognise the case for the common management of fish stocks, the CFP fails to benefit Scotland. The SNP will campaign for the current CFP to be replaced by a policy that provides the Scottish Parliament with genuine control, and strong regional management of Scotland's fishing grounds.

The SNP will safeguard the interests of Scotland's valuable inshore sector and consult on a strategy to promote its contribution to our fishing communities.

We will work closely with the successful pelagic sector. We will also re-open negotiations over the deep water fishery from which our vessels have been excluded due to recent changes in the management regions.

We will re-open negotiations over the adjustment to the Scottish fishing zone, following the change to the fishing boundary.

To tackle the current crisis facing our fishing communities, an SNP government will take five immediate steps.

First, we will implement a Recovery Plan that will include a range of fleet support measures, including tie-up schemes, allowing the industry to retain its critical mass in the face of current quota cuts. Although there may be a case for a limited voluntary decommissioning scheme, the wholesale decommissioning of the Scottish fleet will be rejected.

Second, we will provide a package for onshore businesses including rates relief for fishing-related businesses adversely affected by the current restrictions, and further provide a support scheme to offset the loss of harbour dues caused by tie-ups. We will seek to take full advantage of EU financial support and demand assistance from the UK Treasury given that the UK Government signed up to the Brussels agreement. Specific measures will be provided to support the fish-processing sector.

Third, we will move immediately to renegotiate the current EU fisheries deal and insist that Scottish ministers lead the UK delegation from now on.

Fourth, we will use European and bi-lateral negotiations to begin tackling industrial fishing.

And fifth, we will take steps to prevent quota falling into the hands of foreign fleets or being retained by individuals not actively fishing.

Aquaculture

Produce from fish farming represents nearly half of Scotland's food exports. It provides employment for around 6,000 people many in the most peripheral areas of the Highlands and Islands where there are few other job opportunities.

The SNP is fully supportive of the industry and recognises the higher environmental standards which it has now achieved. Continued progress in this area will be required. To develop future potential we will, like Norway, introduce for the industry a one-stop shop approach allowing it to deal with one body, not a plethora as at present.

With Independence, we would be able to scrap the rental of sea bed payable to the Crown Estates Commission, which at present accounts for nearly one third of the total profits of farming. We will simplify and streamline bureaucracy and encourage development of, and diversification in, farming other species.

Freshwater fishing

We will work with anglers and local communities to create a national freshwater fisheries policy that will ensure access, maximise economic benefit for our rural economy and ensure the protection of the environment.

4.3 / Culture, broadcasting and sport

The SNP believes that the proper role of government in our national cultural life is to provide the right framework for Scotland's artists and creators to flourish. That means placing culture in the mainstream of government thinking and ensuring that government policy is geared towards releasing the creative potential of all our people.

Culture and the arts

The SNP will work to develop and promote our unique and world-renowned culture. That means supporting the arts at the grassroots and on a national and international stage, and bringing a new impetus to the development of the arts in all corners of the country.

We will administer Scotland's culture and languages within a new department. This department will also have responsibility for the built and natural heritage, acknowledging the link between land and people, which is so important to any culture.

An SNP administration will carry out an urgent fundamental review of priorities and a thorough examination of the structure and funding of the arts in Scotland. This fresh start, from a new baseline, will allow the development of a new, firmly placed set of cultural foundations for Scotland. The review will include consideration of the right structure and purpose of Scotland's museums.

We will create a direct relationship between government and the national arts companies, in line with the existing relationship between government and the national institutions, to encourage excellence. We will also review the constitutions of the national companies and the national institutions to make them modern, accountable

and energetic in their national and international roles. We recognise the continued demand for a National Theatre and will investigate the establishment of a national company for Scotland's much-neglected traditional arts.

These changes will fundamentally alter the role of the Scottish Arts Council and we envisage a new, flexible, pro-active funder of first resort for the arts, resourced by, but separate from, government.

We want to actively involve the creative community in policy-making so we will bring together artists, audiences, administrators and others to form a Scottish Academy for the Arts with a remit to scrutinise and contribute to arts policy and make it better.

We will act to engage young peoples' creativity by ensuring that all pupils have access to more arts oriented education in schools, predicated firstly on a review of the 5-14 curriculum guidelines.

We will ensure that the marketing of Scotland's culture and heritage as part of our overall tourist promotion will be vigorous but sensitive.

Securing our languages

The SNP in government will introduce a Languages Act, giving secure status for the Gaelic and Scots languages and encouraging community languages. We will build on the Gaelic Language Bill, the hearings on which have brought forward many positive suggestions for change.

We will establish Bord Gaidhlig na h-Alba in statute and strengthen its ability to persuade public and private bodies to creatively consider their attitude to the language. We will introduce measures to assist the learning of Gaelic, including the learning of Gaelic as a second language in schools and adult learning.

Broadcasting

The SNP will continue to demand that control of broadcasting is transferred to the Scottish Parliament.

The Communications Bill at Westminster will centralise media control even further and would not be enacted by any Scottish government, as it poses a serious threat to Scotland's broadcasting industry. As a minimum measure an SNP administration will demand Scottish representation on the new media regulator OfCOM.

We will also put pressure on broadcasting authorities to provide digital television to all parts of Scotland and will make the case that universal coverage should be a pre-requisite for any national broadcasting licence.

A sporting chance

An SNP administration will reduce bureaucracy and create a more effective structure to improve participation in sport.

We will ensure that every school has access to qualified physical education instructors and that a comprehensive physical education programme is implemented in all our schools. This will secure the minimum two hours per week for every pupil, predicated on the successful completion of our review of the 5-14 curriculum guidelines.

We will end the scandal of playing fields and recreation facilities being cut back under PFI-privatisation.

We will encourage greater emphasis on swimming lessons.

We will protect local sports councils by moving to direct funding and will establish stronger links between local sports councils, schools and sports governing bodies.

We will work to enable equality of access to facilities.

An SNP administration would also ensure that sport is built in to Scotland's tourist strategy – for example, golf is currently promoted as part of a British Golf package, diluting Scotland's potential market.

4.4 / Renewing our countryside

Geographically, Scotland is a diverse nation, with some of the least densely populated and most scenic landscapes in Europe. As a nation, our strength is in that diversity, and it is vital that our rural communities are not merely viable, but prosperous which means the sustainable development of our rural economy.

Regenerating the rural economy

Living in Scotland's rural areas should not deprive people of the basic services that should be taken for granted in a modern nation. We don't believe our rural population should have to pay a 'rural surcharge' for living in our countryside

Economic growth and regeneration are central to our commitment to renew Scotland's rural areas. Our proposed review of the local enterprise network will ensure appropriate focus is given to the specific needs of businesses in remote and rural parts of our country. Tied in with our commitment to an aggressive and effective marketing of Scotland as a world class tourism destination and the real prospect of new high-skill jobs with the development of the green economy (in particular green energy resources), Scotland's rural areas will play a central part in the growth of a truly 21st century economy.

Now, more than ever before, connectivity is vital. Not just in terms of the road, rail, air and sea links that are vital in the mountainous and island terrain of much of rural Scotland, but in terms of e-connectivity and access to broadband communications.

Transport

The state of rural roads is a key concern and the SNP's commitment to Not for Profit Trust alternatives to the private financing of road building projects will mean

cheaper finance and greater opportunities to renew our rural roads network. The SNP will not use PFI-privatisation so will therefore put more money into rural roads and less into the pockets of private contractors.

The maintenance of direct and affordable air, sea, and rail links is a crucial element in developing Scotland's rural economy. The SNP will continue to work to promote the development of Highlands & Islands airports and maintain key connections. Our proposal for Strategic Transport Authorities will allow a holistic approach to be taken to improving transport links across rural Scotland, including our long-standing commitment to the abolition of Skye Bridge tolls.

Housing

Lack of adequate housing holds back development in much of rural Scotland. We will lift the barriers created by housing shortages in our rural communities by reviewing current planning laws, targeting financial assistance to the areas of greatest need, and working with communities to ensure empty and out of use buildings can be turned into affordable homes as a way of tackling rural depopulation.

Post Offices

We remain committed to securing the future of rural Post Offices and rural postal services. We need the powers of Independence to ensure that the special needs of rural Scotland are protected against Westminster's privatisation and competition plans, which threaten both the rural Post Office network and standards of service.

Land reform

The SNP has long been in the vanguard of the reform movement. We are pleased that the Scottish Parliament has made a start on changing the pattern of land

ownership in Scotland, but believe that more needs to be done. We recognise that the changes that have been made must be given some time to settle so we will assess the impact of these changes during the next Parliament.

Quangos

We believe many rural quangos have far too much power and far too little accountability. Some are necessary but all need to be brought under proper control and scrutiny. We will work to identify and reform those quangos which are unresponsive to local needs and create barriers to enterprise and development.

5 / Our Nation

We want to make Scotland not just a place you live, but a nation you can thrive in. It is about getting it right in all the areas that come together to give us a better quality of life. The SNP want to build Scotland and build a better nation.

A great place to live

The SNP has big ambitions for our country. This is clear not only in our commitment to win full powers for our Parliament, but in our determination to build a nation and release Scotland's potential.

Scotland is a great place to live but it isn't everything it could be. For too many years our national infrastructure has been falling behind the standards found elsewhere in Europe. Water threatened with privatisation; the lack of new communications technology; outdated railways; and a potholed road network that doesn't even link our two main cities by motorway – all these things are testimony to years of mismanagement and under investment.

The time has come for change. The SNP will make Scotland a better place to live, and part of that is creating the best possible infrastructure. It is about putting our nation's interests first and ensuring that we have a country equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century. We need basic facilities like water, we need transport that we can rely on, we need an electronic communications network to get Scotland connected to the world, and we need a vibrant tourism sector so we can compete with the best.

The SNP want to create a country that works and that we are proud to live in. We want to release our nation's potential.

5.1 / Transport

Our prosperity is linked to our ability to move people, goods and services within our country and to access European and world markets beyond. To do that we need an integrated transport network, strategically planned to meet the needs of our nation.

Strategic thinking

Our transport network has been neglected. The current powers of the Scottish Parliament are too limited to allow us to consider all elements of transport policy. For example, the Scottish Parliament has responsibility for passenger trains, but not the rails on which they run. We need Independence to take responsibility for all aspects of transport policy; road, maritime, rail, and air, to come up with a comprehensive and integrated policy which will address Scotland's needs.

We have suffered because successive Tory and Labour governments have taken a piecemeal approach to Scottish transport. As a consequence our infrastructure is a patchwork mess; an incomplete motorway between our two major cities, missing strategic links in the trunk road and motorway network, and airports which are not connected to the rail network (a network which itself varies from modern electric to antiquated Victorian). Our air links to the continent are mainly routed through London, and we have only recently secured a ferry link to the continent.

Lack of strategic planning and lack of ambition for our nation are responsible for this mess. We will take a strategic overview of all forms of transport to develop a National Transport Plan to determine short, medium, and long term priorities to ensure that investment in our transport network will both meet Scotland's social and economic needs and respect our environment.

Our proposals for Strategic Transport Authorities, acting as joint boards on behalf of groups of Local Authorities, will enable the needs and challenges of individual localities, travel to work areas, and wider regions to be efficiently addressed. It will be a key objective of the Strategic Transport Authorities to improve public transport and reduce car dependence, thus addressing traffic congestion and the social, economic and environmental damage caused. We will continue the road-building programme we inherit and will remain attentive to concerns over road safety and strategic demands on the network throughout our term in office.

Scotland's railways

The Westminster-driven fragmentation and privatisation of our railways has been damaging for our economy and difficult for commuters. It's time for Scotland to take back control of the railways. There are three elements to this strategy.

First is tackling our rail infrastructure. The privatisation of railway lines and signalling has been acknowledged as a failure even by the UK Government. We believe that control and funding of the rail infrastructure in Scotland should be through a publicly accountable Not for Profit Trust.

Second is our railway services. The Scotrail franchise, which provides passenger train services across most of Scotland, is due for renewal, and we believe that it too should be taken under public control through a Not for Profit Trust.

Third is integration. When we have regained public accountability and control of our rail network, we will re-integrate Network Rail, the Strategic Rail Authority, and the Scotrail Franchise within a Scottish National Railway Authority. This new body will be able to provide the holistic approach necessary for the successful running of our railways.

Bus re-regulation

The Tory de-regulation of buses has not been a success and neither has New Labour's attempts to deal with the situation in Parliament. Services are inadequate, especially in rural areas, while in urban areas 'bus wars' have been allowed to develop in which the most popular 'commuter' routes are flooded with buses at the expense of services on less profitable routes.

The SNP will bring forward legislation to allow the regulation of buses and ensure that service provision matches need and is of high quality to make public transport an attractive, reliable, and affordable option.

Maritime matters

As an island nation with a rich maritime history and numerous island and archipelago communities, sea links are vital. The opening of the Rosyth-Zeebrugge ferry link has been a major boon to the Scottish economy. We will seek to ensure the success of that service. We will seek to enhance it and to create new links where a market exists. Moreover, we will look to maximise our geographic location by encouraging and promoting maritime initiatives, such as the structures into hub ports.

Connecting Scotland with the world

In order to compete in the global economy, Scotland must become more accessible. At the moment most of our important international destinations are accessible only through London.

More direct flights to a greater diversity of strategic world and European destinations are vital for all sectors of the economy. Identifying the market for and supporting the development of new routes is a vital strategic step to attracting carriers to operate more flights from Scottish airports. We will work in partnership with industry using a Route Development Fund to establish and develop routes to our key markets.

We will also examine the issue of prohibitively high landing charges which act as a barrier to attracting carriers to Scottish airports. This strategic view can connect Scotland properly with the key European and world markets that are vital to our success in the global economy.

5.2 / Tourism

Tourism is Scotland's biggest industry and we have an excellent product - our scenery, our cities, our heritage, our people. We want to release the potential of our tourism industry by focusing on promotion, accessibility, and affordability.

Marketing

While visitor numbers fall, Scotland faces increasingly stiff competition from other European destinations. To ensure that our tourist industry thrives, two core problems must be overcome - one is ineffective marketing and the other is poor accessibility.

If we are to release the potential of our tourist industry, VisitScotland must be properly focused and empowered. Currently it acts as tourism police force, whereas marketing is the responsibility of a number of organisations. This leads to wasted resources and mixed messages.

VisitScotland must be refocused from its current regulatory function to a more effective role as a dedicated marketing body. Once refocused on marketing, VisitScotland must then be empowered to sell our tourism product abroad. VisitScotland, and not the British Tourist Authority, must become the marketing agent of Scotland overseas - thus enabling us to target our key markets and boost the number of tourists visiting Scotland.

Accessibility

In order to compete, Scotland must become a more accessible and affordable holiday destination.

Good transport links, both externally and internally, are vital if we are to support and promote our tourist industry.

More direct flights to a greater diversity of strategic European and world destinations are vital, not just for tourism but across all sectors in the economy and will be promoted with our Route Development Fund.

5.3 / Water

Water is our most basic need so the SNP will ensure we have a supply of clean, fresh, and wholesome water controlled by the public, not the private, sector.

Public water

Water is too fundamental a service to be governed by the market forces of privatisation. We will protect Scotland against the Labour-LibDem coalition threat of water privatisation.

The SNP will guarantee that water remains under public control. An SNP administration would use a Not for Profit Trust to deliver infrastructure investment and keep charges under control.

Quality and cost

Under the Labour-LibDem coalition, water charges have increased by as much as 150 per cent in some parts of the country, but the quality of our drinking water still falls short of what we should rightly expect.

Despite the continued rises in water charges, the quality of our drinking water that will be achieved in Scotland in 2006 will be below the quality standard enjoyed in England in 1999.

Infrastructure investment is needed, yet the current models for investment (including PFI-privatisation) have failed to deliver the level of improvement needed and have hit consumers hard in their pockets.

Consumers in Scotland need a tough new champion to protect their interests. We will amalgamate the offices of the Water Commissioner and the Water Regulator to give consumers protection.

We will also improve legislation to ensure that consumers are given greater protection against the supply of water with unsatisfactory levels of contaminants such as cryptosporidium.

5.4 / Broadband communications

Scotland's domestic topography means we would see the greatest benefit from widespread deployment of high-speed communications technology. While in Wales projects to deploy broadband internet access to rural communities are well underway, here in Scotland the Labour-LibDem coalition have delivered too little too late.

Broadband access is limited and in rural areas only available through technology that is both too expensive and too limited. Communities and businesses that should be linked by technology are isolated while employment opportunities that could be secured in areas with high unemployment are lost to our better-connected overseas competitors.

The SNP will introduce a Broadband Scotland Programme. By taking the lead in a national overview and following it with a strategy to roll out high-speed access nationwide, we will oversee delivery of high-speed communications to communities across Scotland. Wherever practical, we will deliver broadband access to business parks throughout Scotland as a first step in supplying the communications infrastructure our businesses deserve and require.

In rural Scotland we will work both with existing telecommunications suppliers and other companies in providing innovative solutions through fixed-line, power-line, and wireless technologies, securing maximum coverage and benefits from the existing Broadband Development Fund.

With service providers we will improve awareness of broadband and its benefits to homes, education and business alike. Using our support network for local businesses we will offer low-cost, high-value advice enabling businesses both to take up and derive

maximum value from improved communications technology. By facilitating projects led by community groups and local businesses we will deliver solutions uniquely tailored to their circumstances.

Looking forward we will ensure that, wherever possible, future business and residential developments are accessible to broadband technology. Our strategy will move Scotland firmly onto the front foot in delivering and utilising broadband communications.

6 / Our Scotland

The governance of our nation matters. So does playing our part in the world. Scotland is a small nation but we can have a big voice. We value our society and want to set standards for ourselves that set an example.

6.1 / Outward Looking Nation

Contributing to Our World

Scotland has always been an outward looking nation. With Independence we can once again take our full and rightful place in the international community.

Even under the limited powers of the current Parliament we will press for a greater say in external relations, and make as full a contribution as possible to the international community of nations.

The SNP will undertake a number of measures to ensure Scotland plays her full part in the wider world.

We will promote a greater Scottish role in EU matters to secure a better deal for Scotland, and seek to end the secrecy of inter-governmental relations within the UK.

We will build trading partnerships and enhance political links with other parts of Europe and the world and enhance Scottish representation abroad to promote trade, tourism, and inward investment.

And we will support Scottish voluntary humanitarian agencies which provide international assistance and aid.

We look forward to working constructively within the British-Irish Council, and recognise the opportunity it offers to build a new post-Independence Council of the Isles partnership, based on common interests and shared experiences.

Getting the most out of Europe

Independence in Europe is our gateway to the representation we deserve. With Independence, our Ministers will sit at the top table in Europe fighting for the best deal for Scotland.

We will work to get the most out of Europe for

hard-pressed industries and will ensure that Scotland's fishermen and farmers are not given the second-class treatment they have received under successive UK governments.

The EU is a partnership of independent states. We will get the most out of Europe when we are there in our own right, making our own decisions and alliances, and working flat out to protect all Scotland's interests and industries.

That is why we will give you a referendum and the chance to join the euro when the economic circumstances are right; it is why we support an enlarged EU as a confederation of nation states; and it is the reason we support increased European co-operation in areas such as defence and foreign affairs. But we recognise some key powers must rest at home in Scotland. That is why we will oppose tax harmonisation in the EU.

The wider world

An independent Scotland will play a full role in the international community through its membership of the EU, the Commonwealth and the UN. We will always promote Scottish interests internationally, ensuring productive and harmonious relationships with the other countries of the world.

Like most nations and people, the SNP believes in a sustainable future for our planet and we will ensure that Scotland's contribution to the world is based upon principles of fair trade and sustainability.

Overseas development

As a wealthy nation we believe we can play our part in the eradication of poverty and the development of a peaceful, stable and just global community. To this end, we will work towards meeting and exceeding UN targets on assistance to the poorest nations, give our full support to international efforts on the cancellation of third world debt, and take steps to prevent the export

of defence products from Scotland to countries that will use them for internal repression or external aggression.

A peaceful nation in a peaceful world

As an independent nation, Scotland would seek a defence role based on co-operation and peace. Independence means that our Parliament will decide if our servicemen and women should take part in military conflict.

Like countless other small nations, we will meet our obligations to peace-keeping and humanitarian missions and will join the world community, where necessary and on the side of international law, to preserve peace and security. We will work with allies and partners to achieve these ends.

We are opposed to remaining a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) while it continues to be an alliance based on nuclear weapons.

We will rid our country of weapons of mass destruction by seeking the negotiated removal of Trident submarines from their bases on the Clyde.

Our defence capabilities will ensure the security of our people, our land, sea, and air space, and our forces will be fully equipped to assist the civil community in natural or man made disasters. Membership of the Scottish Defence Services will be open to all Scottish citizens serving in the British Armed forces, and all UK and Commonwealth citizens serving in Scotland, or in Scottish units, at the time of Independence. The SNP remains committed to safeguarding existing levels of manpower and expenditure at currently operating military bases.

6.2 / A roof over everyone's head

Public Housing

The condition of our housing stock across the public and private sector remains an issue of real concern, and it stands as one of the most powerful indictments of the Labour-LibDem coalition's failures in power. The SNP will do things differently.

We will introduce a new national Decent Homes Standard as a benchmark for measuring progress towards achieving decent housing for all our citizens.

We intend that all homes will meet the Decent Homes Standard by 2013 and to do this we will make use of the full range of investment options open to us.

Local Authorities will be allowed to borrow on a prudent basis. The government's unfair 75 per cent 'clawback' of council housing sale receipts which eprives communities of much-needed housing investment funds will be repealed. The work of community based Housing Associations will be encouraged and, where it has the backing of the tenants concerned, we will support local housing stock transfer.

The current obsession of the Labour-LibDem coalition with wholesale stock transfer has done great damage to public sector housing. Financial wrangling, waste, backstairs deals and misinformation have meant delays and false starts. The SNP in contrast will work with local people to lever in additional cash more effectively (using models including Not for Profit Trusts) and will ensure full community involvement. We will not put ideology in the way of decent housing.

Heating homes

We will extend the Central Heating Scheme to families with young children, people with disabilities and pensioners with inadequate heating.

Private housing

In private rented housing we must ensure landlords bring their properties up to the best possible standards without making it uneconomic to rent out property.

For homeowners we want to guarantee sufficient government support without providing an unfair public subsidy. To that end we will institute a full review of the regulation of private rented housing and the available government support for owner-occupiers.

Homelessness

Labour promised to end rough sleeping by 2002. Yet many people are still sleeping on our streets. The SNP will take action to prevent young people in particular, from ending up on the streets; give support to those already sleeping rough; and ensure that there is a supply of decent, affordable houses for rent.

To eliminate rough sleeping, the often chaotic lifestyles of rough sleepers, that may involve alcohol, drug or psychiatric problems, must be addressed. Prevention of homelessness is the key.

6.3 / Returning power to the people

Local government is the building block of democracy. It is responsible for spending around one third of the current Scottish budget, and we believe it should be about putting people in real control of the communities they live in.

To do this we need local governance legislation to define and protect the role of our councils and to reform local government. We need legislation to allow communities to take their own decisions and set their own priorities in the areas for which local government is responsible. It means a hands off attitude from central government. We want to make the unaccountable accountable, and we want to reduce unnecessary public sector bureaucracy by transferring powers from unelected quangos to democratically elected councillors.

This strengthening of local democracy will mean professionalisation. It means acknowledging that the role of a councillor will be increasingly full time and reforming remuneration and structures accordingly.

Financial reform

Under the Labour-LibDem coalition, Council Tax has risen by one third, yet local services have been pared to the bone. Communities are not able to determine their own priorities because too much control of expenditure is in the hands of politicians in central government rather than in the local community.

As a matter of urgency we will hold an independent review of local government finance to establish transparency and allow local communities to take as much control of their budgets and services as possible, and we will replace the unfair and spiralling Council Tax with a fairer system based on ability to pay.

Fair voting

Under the current voting system, power has been concentrated in the hands of relatively few people, and often the council does not reflect the communities it is meant to serve. In Glasgow, for example, Labour hold 94 per cent of the council seats yet got less than 50 per cent of the vote. The current voting system therefore acts as a barrier to democracy and it helps create stagnation in local government.

The SNP will introduce a system of Single Transferable Vote for local government elections, which will mean that local councils then reflect the political complexion of the communities they represent.

We will also break the cycle which sees council elections held on the same day as Scottish Parliament elections, meaning that the vital local agenda is in danger of being swamped by national politics. Local government is too important to be obscured in this way so we support four year local government election terms, with elections held midway through the Parliamentary term.

6.4 / An equal society

Governance

We will restore good government by working with all sectors of our society - business, trades unions, the voluntary sector, and local government. And by basing our decisions on the principles of fairness, honesty, and equal opportunity.

We will cut the size of government, starting with a smaller Cabinet and less ministers. And we will abolish unnecessary tiers of unelected, unaccountable public bodies and release resources from excess bureaucracy.

We will always seek ways to devolve control over decisions from government to local communities. The shape of our government will be determined by what we need to deliver - high quality public services for Scotland.

Honest and accountable taxation

The SNP will not increase income tax during our four-year term in government. But we will reduce Scottish business rates to below the UK rate within that term. These are our immediate tax pledges.

Our task for the long term is to change the tax and benefits system to one that will deliver prosperity for individuals and growth for our nation. So an SNP government in an independent Scotland will undertake a comprehensive review of tax and benefits. It will be driven by our determination to deliver, for the long term, a system that is honest, fair and easy to understand, efficient to administer, and that restores accountability between those who pay taxes and those who decide how they are spent.

There are a number of key groups who are unfairly penalised by the current system. These include sixteen and seventeen year olds, pensioners on low incomes, many people who are vulnerable or who are caring for those who are vulnerable, students and people with disabilities. It will be a priority of the review to ensure that their needs are met.

Constitution and citizenship

We believe that an independent Scotland must have a written Constitution that clearly enshrines the rights and responsibilities of all those who choose to live in Scotland.

With Independence, the Queen and her successors will remain as Head of State of Scotland, as defined within the written Constitution, subject to the democratic consent of the people in a referendum.

In the context of EU citizenship, the SNP have an open and inclusive approach to Scottish citizenship. The automatic right of citizenship will be open to all those living in Scotland, all those born in Scotland and all those with a parent born in Scotland. All others are free to apply.

Fair voting

The SNP is committed to introducing proportional representation for all parliamentary and local authority elections using a system of Single Transferable Vote. It is widely acknowledged to be the most effective way of putting power into the hands of the voters, rather than the politicians.

We re-affirm our long-standing commitment to reduce the voting age to sixteen. Sixteen and seventeen year olds are expected to take on the responsibilities of adulthood and must therefore have the right to vote.

Equality of opportunity

All of our people have a right to share in our nation's opportunity and potential, and we want to guarantee that equality.

The SNP has a long held commitment to a constitutionally enshrined guarantee of equal opportunities for all Scots regardless of race, gender, age, sexuality, faith, belief, disability or social background. We will continue to place this commitment at the centre of our actions and, until Independence, we will press for legislative powers in this area to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Welcoming ethnic minorities

The SNP welcomes the contribution of Scotland's ethnic minorities to our national life. Scotland has a long tradition of welcoming those who choose to live here. Many of us are descended from people who came to Scotland fleeing famine or persecution - or just hoping to build a better future for their families. They helped to shape our nation and make us the people we are. The SNP therefore commends the 'One Scotland Many Cultures' campaign and, in government, we will continue this approach to promote a tolerant and inclusive Scotland. But words are not enough. The efforts of the Labour-LibDem coalition to tackle racism have been hampered by the fact that control over key policy levers such as immigration, asylum, and equal opportunities are reserved to Westminster. With Independence, however, the SNP will deliver a fair immigration policy without racial bias. And we will support and safeguard the rights of our ethnic minorities, as well as addressing the serious social and economic problems that have been exploited by racists.

Rights for refugees

An SNP administration will promote a new, positive attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees that

regards them as an asset to our community, not as a burden.

We will push for responsibility for refuge and asylum to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament, to ensure that all people seeking sanctuary in Scotland are fully afforded the provisions set out in the UN Charter of Human Rights. With legislative control we will deliver a fast and fair assessment of asylum claims and will encourage successful applicants to contribute to the Scottish economy by removing restrictions on their ability to work.

Breaking the barriers of disability

The SNP is committed to tackling discrimination and eradicating the barriers faced by disabled people in Scotland. We will ensure that every area of legislation promotes equality of opportunity, focusing on the rights of people with disabilities. We will guarantee equal access to employment, public services and transport, and will examine the complex link between poverty, ill-health and disability in order to overcome the barriers to full participation in society.

Caring for carers

There are more than 600,000 carers in Scotland and the number is growing rapidly. The SNP appreciates that for many, becoming a carer involves considerable life-changes; not being able to work, an adverse impact on health, through stress and often physically demanding support for loved ones, reduced household income, new barriers to accessing education, training, and even simple leisure opportunities. So, as a start to addressing this, the SNP will promote improved flexibility in education, training, and employment.

It is important that government acknowledges the role of carers as central to Scotland's social well being, and greater priority must be given when considering service

provision. In particular, the availability of respite care is insufficient. We will examine what reforms and resources are necessary to improve availability and ensure that the respite care provided matches the standard and nature required.

Support available to carers also varies from area to area. Carers often fall between the responsibility of Health Boards and Local Authorities, and greater strategic planning and co-operation at all levels is necessary to ensure that service provision matches need. Similarly advice and information to carers about the assistance to which they are entitled is essential.

The SNP is committed to income maximisation. Following the example of the success of Benefit Entitlement Promotion campaigns in our Local Authorities, we will take steps to ensure that carers are accessing all the benefits to which they are entitled. Even with full access to benefit entitlement, however, the current Westminster benefits arrangements cannot lift many carers out of poverty. With Independence, we would have the power to tackle this shortcoming through our comprehensive review of tax and benefits.

Fighting poverty

One in three of our children and one in four of our pensioners live in poverty, and the SNP is determined that all will share in the benefits that a strong, vibrant economy can bring.

Under devolution we will continue efforts to deal with the impact of poverty and will provide better solutions than the current Labour-LibDem coalition with initiatives in health, education, social justice and other areas.

We will ensure that government works strategically across departments to implement anti-poverty measures through a Scottish National Anti-Poverty Strategy.

We will help people on lower incomes keep more of what they earn rather than return it to the state, whether their income is a pension or a wage. Those who cannot work will be properly supported by a straightforward benefits system.

We will remove the over extended poverty bureaucracy by abolishing the Social Inclusion Partnership network and transferring the resources to local front line services, including securing more long term support for voluntary sector services dealing directly with poverty.

We will abolish Communities Scotland and transfer their role and function to local government.

We will restore local government to the lead role in implementing measures to tackle poverty and promote regeneration.

We will devolve budgets and decision making to create a participative democracy and, with support for community empowerment and partnership working, make sure local communities are key to regeneration.

We will pilot childcare initiatives and smaller class sizes initially in areas where there are high levels of poverty.

The SNP believe that to fundamentally tackle the root cause of poverty in Scotland, we must tackle the under performance of the Scottish economy and address the low-income levels and lack of opportunity that affect too many people living in Scotland.

Supporting communities locally and strategically

We recognise that there is a need to stimulate demand in our economy. This means supporting local enterprise development, supported by capital investment in initiatives such as restoring derelict and vacant land, providing factory and office space, and investment in transport, and other aspects of infrastructure to help regenerate

neighbourhoods, allowing our towns and cities to compete internationally for people, jobs and investment.

Voluntary sector

The growing importance of the voluntary sector in delivering services and securing Scotland's well-being cannot be overstated. It is vital that the independence of the voluntary sector be preserved and respected in its dealings with all levels of government. Work already done through the Voluntary Sector Compact should be rolled out across agencies and different tiers of government.

We recognise that the voluntary sector is a stakeholder in terms of the delivery of services, and we believe that it should not be at a disadvantage when considering the strategic delivery of services. Volunteering is a vital part of our country's social and economic well-being, and our proposals will respect and protect that sector and its independence.

Trades Unions

We will guarantee the rights of trades unions and the rights of workers to representation through a statutory Charter of Trade Union Rights. We recognise that the ability of Scotland's trade unions to represent their members is hampered by the most restrictive legislative framework in the EU. This is unlikely to change as long as control over employment legislation is reserved to Westminster. With Independence however, an SNP administration will deliver employment legislation, that recognises the vital role trade unions play in our workplaces.

Pensions

In order to ensure we have a system of pension provision to meet the growing and varied needs of our population, we will seek to build a national consensus about long-term pension policy.

We recognise the serious concerns held by many about the current operation of private pensions. As part of our comprehensive tax and benefits review, we will develop a pensions policy based on five key principles.

First, we will share responsibility for pension provision between individuals, employers and government.

Second, we will ensure the portability of pension provision to reflect modern employment patterns.

Third, we will provide simplicity, transparency, affordability and accessibility for the consumer with effective regulation to achieve accountability of providers.

Fourth, through the benefits system, we will reward rather than penalise those who have saved for retirement.

And fifth, we will ensure fairness in our state provision by restoring the link between increases in the basic state pension and increases in average earnings.

7 / Our Potential

On May 1st you have a simple choice. Vote for Labour and you'll wait... and wait. Contrary to what they tell you, nothing has changed. And nothing will. The wealth gap between Scotland and the UK is widening as Scotland languishes at the bottom of the European growth league – but in Labour's thinking, Scotland is not a priority.

Vote for the SNP on May 1st and you'll see a difference.

That is because our ambition is to release our country's potential. Yes, to make much of ourselves at home. But more, to play our full and rightful part in the world.

We think Scotland could, and should, be free of poverty. Our old and infirm should be respected and well treated. No one should feel afraid on our streets. We should be able to achieve every bit as much as other countries our own size.

Our case for a better Scotland outlines solutions not problems, the future not the past, and Scotland's potential not its shortcomings.

We have set out our agenda for improving public services and making them more accountable to the needs of the people.

Increasing nurses' pay means more nurses and more nurses mean more beds for patients.

Cutting business rates would boost competitiveness and growth.

1000 more police would make our streets safer.

Reducing class sizes would give Scotland's children the best start to their education.

Cutting government down to size would reclaim our public services for the people.

And Independence?

We want it because only with Independence can we release Scotland's potential. But that's not for us to decide. That decision lies with you.

Our priority is to prove ourselves as a party that can make a difference to Scotland; which we will do, because our priority is the people of Scotland.

So vote for Labour and wait... for nothing.

Or vote for change.

Vote for a party that truly cares about Scotland.

Vote for a party that will make a difference.

Vote for a party that will release our potential.

Vote for the SNP.

