

Liberal Democrat Manifesto for Women

Liberal Democrats will:

- Increase the basic state pension by £5 a week for each single pensioner, £10 for the over 75s and £15 for the over 80s.
- Pay for all long term care costs.
- Strengthen anti-discrimination legislation by replacing the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts with a single, more effective and comprehensive Equality Act.
- Reform the tax system, taking those on low incomes, often women, out of paying income tax altogether.



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DEMOCRATS**

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Freedom, Justice, Honesty

Liberal Democrat Manifesto for Women

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A Message from Charles Kennedy

When I was elected leader of the Liberal Democrats in August 1999 I committed myself to ensuring that the under-representation of women in the House of Commons was addressed. It therefore gave me great pleasure to welcome Sandra Gidley as the first Liberal Democrat MP to be elected since I became leader of the party.

However the House of Commons still fails to reflect the true make up of society. We need to get more women elected at a national level. Selection procedures and mechanisms that enable more women to stand in elections will lead to greater numbers of women being elected to Westminster. A fair voting system in Scotland produced a higher number of women members of Parliament than anywhere else in Europe, apart from Sweden and Denmark. The clear benefit of proportional representation is that it leads to wider representation, not just for women, but for minority groups too.

Fairer representation at Westminster will ensure that the issues that most affect women are not forgotten. All Liberal Democrat MPs will fight to ensure that freedom and social justice are a reality for all women, whatever their aspirations.

Women have made great strides over the past thirty years but for many the old injustices and inequalities remain and new problems have arisen. Liberal Democrat policies address the problems of women who have not been given an equal opportunity. We want to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to discover and develop their own potential. Our goal is better representation of women achieved through real equality of opportunity.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles Kennedy, Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

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Freedom to Live: Health

Health is a fundamental freedom. No one can fulfil their potential without good health. We will invest in prevention and early detection, saving money in the long run and producing better results. We would:

- Double the government's commitment to invest in the latest screening and diagnostic equipment.
- Restore free NHS dental check-ups and eye tests.
- Reward low-paid nurses, midwives and other low-paid professionals by paying them an additional £1000 on average every year.
- Provide an extra 3000 hospital beds over five years.
- Provide training places for an extra 2,500 doctors and 7,500 nurses and midwives over five years.

Liberal Democrats are commitment to providing the care that patients need, when they need it. We would:

- Pay for all long-term personal care costs.
- Tackle the postcode lottery that means that some medicines are only available in some parts of the country. We will create a Pharmaceutical Agency to use the purchasing power of the NHS to drive down the price of established drugs and secure the more sophisticated medicines and technologies at affordable prices.

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We believe that everyone should be treated with dignity when they are receiving medical treatment. We will therefore:

- End the use of mixed sex wards in hospitals.
- Promote equal treatment of the sexes within the health service and expand facilities for women to consult female health professionals.



“Under Labour waiting lists for obstetrics and gynaecology have risen and maternity services are under staffed and under resourced. Liberal Democrats are fully committed to increasing the numbers of doctors, nurses and midwives and to ending the use of mixed sex wards. This is the only real solution so we can ensure that women in Britain have a real chance for real change.”

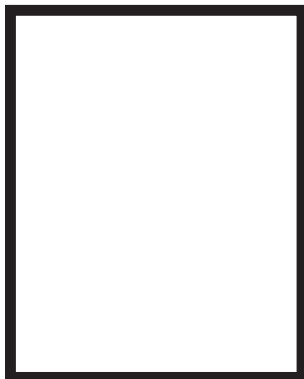
Sandra Gidley, Liberal Democrat Health Spokesperson

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Freedom to Earn: Employment

Despite legislation such as the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts women still face discrimination in the work place. For example part time workers are discriminated against because they do not have the same rights as full time employees. As 80% of part time employees are women, they disproportionately suffer from this anomaly in the law. Liberal Democrats are committed to giving men and women equality in the work place. We would:

- Amend the Part-time Workers Regulations to ensure that it includes cleaners, cooks and retail workers, many of whom are excluded at the moment. This would give part time employees the same rights as full-time employees.
- Protect workers on low incomes by reviewing the national minimum wage annually on the basis of recommendations from the Low Pay Commission.
- Reform the benefits system to make it easier for those with caring responsibilities to continue in part-time work.
- Allow parental leave to be shared between parents, replacing existing maternity rights, and introduce a new parental benefit extended, over time, to the equivalent of full pay for a total of 18 weeks, which can also be shared.
- Strengthen anti-discrimination legislation by replacing the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts with a single, more effective and comprehensive Equality Act.
- Aim to remove taxation for the lowest paid. We believe that people start paying tax at too low an income and will work to reduce the burden of taxation on the low paid. Over time, we will cut the 10p tax rate to zero, so nobody pays any tax on their earnings up to £6,500. At present, this would take 1.4 million people on low incomes (1.1 million of whom are women) out of tax altogether.



“Women in part time work often suffer from unequal rights and paying tax on low incomes. Liberal Democrats will give part-timers equal rights and cut tax on the low paid.”

Matthew Taylor, Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor

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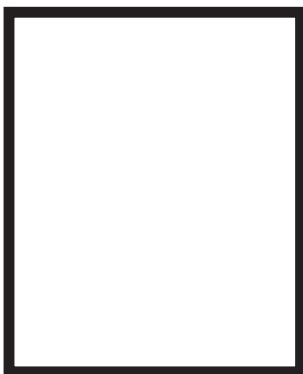
Freedom to Learn: Education

High quality education is the key to personal freedom. Education provides the freedom to choose a fulfilling job, the freedom to exploit one's talents to the full, and the freedom to contribute fully to society. Education is also the key to Britain's future prosperity. We will:

- Cut class sizes to 25 on average for 5-11 year-olds.
- Recruit 5000 extra secondary school teachers to reduce class sizes for 11-16 year-olds.
- Increase funding for books and equipment in schools.

In the long term our goal is to give every citizen an Individual Learning Account. Ultimately this approach to life-long learning would provide the flexibility to access each person's entitlement to post-sixteen education throughout their life, rather than at times imposed by the state. Tuition would be paid for and student loans would be available for maintenance. This would help, for example, women with children who have to study part time. We will:

- Abolish university tuition fees throughout the United Kingdom. Liberal Democrats have already achieved this in Scotland by making it a priority issue and have set abolition in train in Wales.
- Reform student maintenance. We would restore grants for poor students and access to benefits for all during the summer holidays, and raise the salary threshold at which student loans are repaid.
- Give every adult an entitlement to publicly funded tuition. We will provide the funding to allow any adult the chance to acquire a Level 2 qualification (the equivalent of 5 GCSEs at grades A to C). We will fund those aged 16 to 24 up to Level 3 (equivalent to 2 A-Levels at grades A to E).



“Liberal Democrats are committed to a high quality free university provision open to all who can benefit. Our carefully costed commitments will allow us to restore the principle of higher education free at the point of access, open up our universities to students from poorer backgrounds, remove some of the burden of student debt, abolish the disgraceful pay gap that exists for female academics and tackle the recruitment and retention crisis affecting lecturers and researchers.”

Evan Harris, Liberal Democrat Higher Education Spokesperson

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Freedom from Poverty

Poverty restricts freedom because people without a decent income do not have the opportunities enjoyed by others. More needs to be done for pensioners and those with low incomes to ensure that all in Britain have a better quality of life.

Liberal Democrats recognise that many low paid workers with families and lone parents have no choice but to depend on the state. We do not believe people should be stigmatised for relying on the welfare state. We believe everyone deserves a decent standard of living. We would:

- Alleviate child poverty by paying an additional £200 per year to all families with children who have been on income support for more than a year. Such children suffer from the poverty their parents find themselves in.
- Abolish the Child Support Agency, which has caused unjustifiable hardship to so many people, and replace it with a system of family courts. Their maintenance assessments will be strongly enforced and will supplant the rough justice of the current crude and simplistic formula.

In the long term we aim to help people to lift themselves out of poverty and dependency on the welfare state. We would:

- Abolish the benefit sanctions that were brought in under the New Deal. These have placed harsh burdens on poor people and in many cases, the children of those penalised are the ones who suffer most. We will not impose further penalties until the effects of existing sanctions have been evaluated.

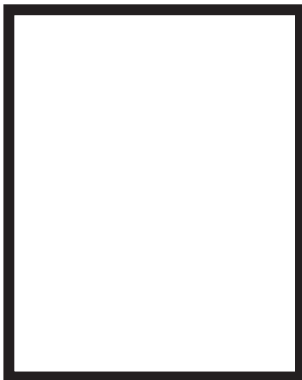
Women make up the majority of the poorest pensioners, as nearly two fifths of women pensioners have incomes of under £100 per week and they outnumber men by nearly 2 to 1 for means-tested benefits. Liberal Democrats are committed to targeting resources at the poorest pensioners, we would:

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- Increase the basic state pension by £5 a week for each single pensioner, £10 for the over 75 and £15 for the over 80s.
- Introduce a flexible age of retirement for both women and men. The value of pensions would reflect the age at which individuals choose to retire.

Liberal Democrats in the long term aim to ensure that no pensioner lives in poverty. We would:

- Extend the entitlement to the basic state pension to all citizens. This would eventually help around 3.4 million people, mainly women, carers and long-term disabled people. This would also help many women who have incomplete contributory records as a result of their caring responsibilities by abolishing the contributory principle.
- Establish a level of minimum income after carrying out research to establish the appropriate amount.
- Introduce a new Owned Second Pension Account (OSPA). We believe that the best way to prevent poverty among future generations is to ensure that all people have a second pension of their own to top up the state pension. Over time we would ensure that a growing proportion of the workforce were members of either a company pension scheme or had an OSPA, with the government making contributions for those who are too poor to do so.



“It is outrageous that many thousands of married women are still retiring on little or no state pension because of pension rules which belong in the middle of the last century. Many married women who paid the reduced rate had little or no idea that this would wipe out their pension and are genuinely shocked when they received pensions forecasts promising them only a few pence per week. The Government must launch an inquiry into these women’s complaints and take action to right this injustice.”

Steve Webb, Liberal Democrat Shadow Social Security Secretary

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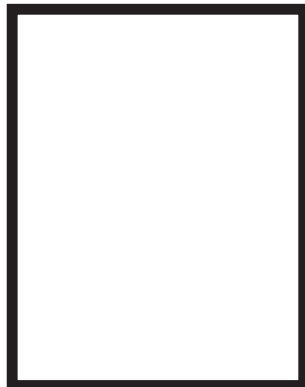
Freedom from Crime

We all want freedom from crime. Fear of crime blights the lives of many people, particularly the most vulnerable in society. The state should offer all its citizens equal and adequate protection. The law and the police have a mixed record in providing support for women who have suffered from rape and domestic violence. The Liberal Democrats will reform the law and build on the good practice established by many police forces, to make the police more effective and increase public confidence in them from all sections of society. We would:

- Improve the provision of refuge places for victims of domestic violence.
- Create a Judicial Appointments Commission to achieve a Judiciary that is representative of the population's diversity.

Our approach is rooted in the belief that the best way to beat crime, and the fear of crime, is to have effective policies to tackle its causes. We would:

- Reinforce front line police with a new Community Safety Force and by retaining retired officers in a back-up role.
- Recruit 2000 full time and 2000 part time police officers on top of Labour's plans so there are at least 6000 extra police officers than last year.
- Expand facilities to help drug and alcohol abusers. We will aim for a maximum four-week waiting time after an abuser is referred for treatment.
- Establish a Standing Royal Commission to tackle the range of problems currently associated with drugs.



All over the country police forces are under strength and need more resources to carry out their duties effectively.

That is why we have pledged ourselves to putting 6,000 extra police officers on the beat. We need to ensure that the police and special constables can be where they are most effective and give a sense of security- out on the streets and not in the office filling in endless paperwork.

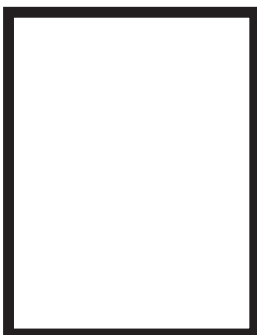
Jackie Ballard, Liberal Democrat Home Affairs Spokesperson

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Freedom to be Yourself: Civil Liberties

Civil liberties are the basis of a genuinely free society. They are essential to a liberal society in which people are enabled to fulfil their potential and make informed choices about their lives. We would:

- Pass an Equality Act to outlaw all forms of discrimination. This will fight unfair discrimination on whatever grounds, including race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age or gender identity.
- Establish a scheme for the civil registration of partnerships. This will give two unrelated adults who wish to register a settled personal relationship, legal rights, such as next of kin arrangements that are at present only available to married couples.
- Free immigration laws from discrimination. We will ensure that immigration policy is non-discriminatory in its application. We will reform current immigration law so that families are not divided.



“It is now nearly 25 years since the legislation on race and sex discrimination was enacted. These acts have virtually remained the same. It is time to set out a new framework for equality legislation which will take into account the changing social situation.”

Lord Navnit Dholakia, President of the Liberal Democrats

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