

on Students
FOCUS



**GENERAL ELECTION 2005:
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO
FOR STUDENTS**



Charles Kennedy MP
Liberal Democrats
4 Cowley Street
London
SW1P 3NB
020 7222 7999
www.libdems.org.uk

Are you in favour of top-up fees and tuition fees? Did you agree with the war in Iraq? The Liberal Democrats opposed both. Do you agree with compulsory ID cards, or feel they are an affront to civil liberties as I do? Do you think the Britain is setting a good example on the environment or feel that much more could be done?

When I have asked students these questions in my visits to schools, colleges and universities around the country, what I have found is that their sympathies are with us – the Liberal Democrats. In the country as a whole we are going from strength to strength. Because we have been the real opposition to the Government in this Parliament, the public are rewarding us with their support. Among students in particular the Liberal Democrats are well ahead of Labour and the Conservatives.

Our opposition to top-up and tuition fees has been important in this. Top-up fees put students off university, especially those from a poorer background. And is it really right that so many young people are starting out in life with mortgage style debts hanging round their necks? Labour broke its manifesto promise to students about top-up fees – that will not be forgiven. We would scrap top-up and tuition fees, and reintroduce fair grants. The Liberal Democrats were also instrumental in scrapping tuition fees in Scotland – proving we mean what we say.

But that's not all. Thanks to Liberal Democrats, the remit of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) now includes the needs of part-time students, who were previously ignored. Importantly, we are the party that passionately believes in the value of education of all kinds – and the importance of promoting skills and vocational training. Everyone should have the opportunity to develop their own particular talents.

Of course students care about more than just their personal education. Being a student is also about having hope in the future; working to change society; wanting your voice heard.

For many people in this country the defining issue at this election will be the Iraq war. The Prime Minister – as we now know – led us into battle on a false premise: with the Conservatives as his principal cheerleaders. My party stood united in opposition to the war. It was a matter of principle. Today, we continue to ask the critical questions. We want to know the exit strategy. We are urging the Government to set a date to bring our troops home. We are still representing what you care about.

A much larger issue is the environment. Climate change is a threat that we simply cannot ignore any longer. If Britain is going to lead on the world stage and convince George Bush of the danger, we have to get our own environmental act together. And that means everything from tackling car and aviation emissions, encouraging ethical consumption all the way down to making sure that recycling facilities are available to all.

Apathy has, sadly, been one of the outstanding issues of recent elections; particularly among young people. But this time, I think it will be different. There are so many issues which directly affect students or which you have shown you passionately care about. In many parliamentary seats – it is student votes who will decide who will be elected. Your vote matters.

Charles Kennedy

Fairness for all students

The Higher Education Act 2004 represents a significant departure for British higher education. It has created a system in which access depends on your ability to pay, not your ability to learn, and on your ability to deal with large debts. There is mounting evidence that tuition fees and top-up fees discourage many potential students from a low-income background from starting a degree. Many of the poorest students are forced to take up jobs to get through their degree, which means less time for their studies. Students are also being forced to start their working lives with large debts. Careers in the public sector with a lower income will be a less appealing option, as many graduates take up jobs to pay off their debts.

We would also like to see a level playing field for all those who wish to study. That means creating more opportunities for school-leavers who would like to combine academic learning with more vocational, skills-based courses, in preparation for a particular job. We would provide for this growing need by creating more flexibility in acquiring qualifications and allowing students to take a mixture of academic and vocational courses from a choice of universities and colleges. To make this possible, we would open up more establishments that provide skills and vocational training.



We would ensure that university tuition is free and available to all and that students are able to create an individual learning path, which caters to their needs. We will:

- **Abolish university tuition fees** – We would get rid of both the present fees and the top-up fees, due to be imposed from 2006. We have already done this in Scotland. No one should be deterred from the chance of a university education because of fear of debt.

- Have maintenance grants of up to £2000 towards living costs for students from low-income homes. The grant currently offered by the Government to the poorest students will only be enough to cover the cost of fees. Students receiving grants under the Liberal Democrats will be able to use them for their intended purpose – not a penny will have to be spent on tuition.

- **Provide a more flexible and diverse course structure**, tailored to the needs of the individual student. We would allow students to combine academic and vocational training by encouraging universities and colleges to design modular programmes, where students can pick and mix courses to make up a fully rounded degree. If a student decided to take a break in studying or wanted to change university, they could carry the credits from their completed modules with them, making it easier for them to re-enter higher education.

- **Create a 'Colleges for the Future' programme.** We would address Britain's skills deficit by investing in a 'Colleges for the Future' programme – a new partnership between colleges, business, local authorities and the government to ensure modern high quality college facilities in every community.

- **Fund these commitments from progressive taxation** – from the revenues raised by our proposed 50% income tax band for those earning over £100,000 – the top 1% of earners.

Improving student life

Student life is a case of juggling the responsibilities of studying with the demands of living on a very low or even non-existent income. This is particularly the case for part time

and mature students. The situation has been brought sharply into focus by the introduction of tuition and top-up fees, which have left many students with the prospect of incurring huge debts simply to survive throughout their studies. In addition to removing the burden of fees, we would introduce a range of measures, which would help make student life a more positive experience.

Housing

- The quality of their accommodation is an ongoing concern for many students. Unhelpful landlords do not make the situation any easier. We would encourage local authorities to raise standards by licensing private landlords, controlling persistently bad landlords.

- We would also make housing more affordable by developing new forms of affordable homeownership, between full renting and full owner-occupation.

Poverty

- We would protect workers on low incomes through an annual review of the national minimum wage by the Low Pay Commission who will make recommendations on its level to the government. This would particularly benefit students who take on part time and holiday work to support themselves.

- We would also encourage home working, part-time working and self-employment, by raising the status of such work and ensuring they are awarded the same rights and protection as full-time permanent workers.

Health

- We would encourage a healthy lifestyle by promoting education about issues like smoking, healthy eating, and the need for physical activity. Measures would include introducing a clear traffic light labelling system for foods to give people more information and control over what they eat and encouraging sports in schools, to promote a more active lifestyle from an early age.

- We would develop an NHS National Service Framework for Sexual Health Promotion, Screening and Treatment Services. We would also develop a National Service Framework for Sexual Health

Top 3 Liberal Democrat policies for Students

- **No tuition fees, no top-up fees** – Higher Education affordable for every student.
- **Increase maintenance grants for students from low-income homes.**
- **World class skills for a world class economy** – addressing the gap between academic and vocational skills training.

Promotion, Screening and Treatment Services and make contraceptive advice more widespread in GPs and pharmacies.

● We would have a more constructive approach to drugs policy with the emphasis on the health impact, promoting education, treatment for addiction and harm reduction strategies for heavy drug users, rather than criminal sanctions.

Strong on the issues that matter to students

1. We should not have gone to war in Iraq – it's time to restore trust in government. There were no Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq; there was no serious and current threat; and inspectors were denied the time they needed to finish their job in Iraq. In the future, we would prioritise international law, democracy and respect for human rights, believing national security and preventing international terrorism are best achieved through international co-operation.

2. A cleaner and safer environment. The environment is a major concern for Liberal Democrats. We are committed to tackling climate change by ensuring that Britain achieves its targets from the Kyoto Protocol well before the deadline. We would tackle pollution by cutting down on domestic waste and promoting recycling and reduce congestion by promoting public transport. We would also do more to do more to promote 'green degrees', by giving universities guidance about saving energy and money through energy

conservation, alternative energy sources, and increased recycling.

3. Meeting Britain's promise on aid. Liberal Democrats are committed to realising a world free from poverty. In order to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015 (which include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, providing universal primary education, and combating HIV/AIDS) the UK needs to provide more effective international assistance. Liberal Democrats will increase British aid spending from 0.35% today to at least 0.5% by 2007/08, and set out detailed plans for it to reach 0.7% of Gross National Income by 2011 at the latest.

4. Protecting civil liberties. We oppose the Government's plans to introduce ID cards – they are an affront to civil liberties. They will not prevent crime or terrorism and may lead to our personal data being shared without our consent. We would spend the ID card money on more and better equipped better police to fight crime more effectively. We are also firmly against the limitation of trial by jury. We believe that round the clock detentions, prolonging our opt-out from the human rights convention and having politicians - not judges - at the forefront of decisions on control orders represent an unnecessary attack on civil liberties.

5. Promoting equality and fighting discrimination. We would strengthen the fight against discrimination with an Equality Act. This would protect people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the

basis of race, religion, belief or sexual orientation. It would also tackle inequality for women by requiring employers to address any failings in equal opportunities and pay between men and women.



This document contains Federal Liberal Democrat policy, except in areas where policy of the Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats applies.

A full costing document will be published at the same time as the General Election Manifesto.



Printed on recycled paper to preserve our environment for future generations.

Published & promoted: Chris Rennard on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, both at 4 Cowley Street, London SW1P 3NB. Printed: Park Communications, Lea Mill, Eastway, London, E9 5NU. 020 8525 6200