

on Young People
FOCUS



**GENERAL ELECTION 2005:
LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**



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The Liberal Democrats are a young party – formed just 17 years ago, the people now reaching voting age have grown up with us – and I believe increasingly this generation share our concerns for the environment, liberty, justice, and public services that open up opportunity without imposing conformity or debt.

Take the environment. Often, young people who are not engaged at all in conventional politics, are much more enthused about green issues and living in an environmentally friendly way. Young people know that if we don't get it right on the environment it is they who will have to live with the consequences. We need their energy and idealism.

What can Government and political parties do to help? Well first we must understand that this idealism and energy is great news, and give them a voice and a say. If young people themselves do not feel that their views are valued and have an impact on the society around them, then they will not become involved positively as citizens in the community, let alone the political process. That is why for example we will give young people the vote at age 16. If you are at an age when you can get married, work and pay taxes, then you deserve a say in how taxes are spent and how the country is run.

It is important that young people are able to find the kind of job that can forge a career which would give them long-term financial stability and personal fulfilment. Along with more individually tailored job-finding schemes, there must be an emphasis on skills and vocational training. By matching young people to the kind of education that will develop their individual abilities, we can constructively engage many young people who don't find traditional academic learning is right for them or helpful for their future.

And if they choose university or college, then we should ensure that it is not based on how much people can afford but whether they have the talent and dedication to succeed. Do we really want young people starting out in life with mortgage style debts around their necks? That is why we would scrap university top-up fees and tuition fees and introduce fair grants.

Liberal Democrat policy offers young people a range of activities, education and employment schemes for them to develop their talents and change their communities for the better. We want to harness the enthusiasm of young people, because we are ambitious for our country and they are the future of Britain.

Charles Kennedy

Entering the world of work

Young people making the transition from school to work are far more likely to have trouble finding jobs, be paid less and receive less support from the benefit system. They suffer particularly from the high cost of living in the form of the unfair council tax system and unaffordable housing.

Young people should not be consigned to the first dead end job that comes along, just to lower the employment figures. Much more important is that they are able to find the kind of job that can forge a career which would give them long-term financial stability and personal fulfilment. Along with more individually tailored job-finding schemes, there must be an emphasis on skills and vocational training. By matching young people to the kind of education that will develop their individual abilities, we can constructively engage many young people who are not suited to traditional academic learning.

Liberal Democrats will help young people overcome the barriers to work and training. We would:

Reform the New Deal to get more people into work. The present New Deal puts too many people on unnecessary or ineffective schemes rather than into real jobs.

● Liberal Democrats will use the money currently spent on the New Deal to create a new employment scheme, which would tailor assistance so that jobseekers get the package of support they need to get real, permanent work. As part of this, Individual Work Schemes would operate across the country to give them one-to-one advice, focused on their needs and interests, from highly skilled professionals – and training if they need it

● We will also scrap the current benefit sanctions on those who do not participate in the New Deal, which leave genuine claimants unable to feed and house themselves.

Protect young 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. We will also end the lower rate minimum wage paid to those under 21 and ensure

that everyone aged 16 and over was entitled to full minimum wage. **Fight age discrimination at work.** We will strengthen and enforce age discrimination legislation so that people's ability to do a job is the only consideration, not their age. We will also introduce a Voluntary Code of Practice acting against inadvertent discrimination, put together by the CBI, Federation of Small Businesses and the TUC, rather than written by a government ministry.

Focus on vocational and skills training. We will bring together universities, further education and e-learning, opening up routes to technical and vocational as well as academic qualifications.

● Liberal Democrats will 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.

● We will make degree programmes more responsive to the needs of the student, by encouraging providers to design modular programmes. Students can then pick modules from different faculties, provided that their university or Further Education institution agree that the chosen courses constituted a coherent degree.

Abolish university tuition fees and have maintenance grants of up to £2000. We will get rid of both the present fees and the top-up fees due to be imposed from 2006 and introduce grants of up to £2000 towards genuine living costs for students from low-income homes. Unlike the current system, not a penny of the maintenance grant will have to be spent on tuition.

Liberal Democrats will ensure that young people are not disadvantaged by unfair local taxes and Britain's lack of affordable housing. We would:
Give young people more security by scrapping the fundamentally unfair Council Tax, which places a severe financial burden on many young people on a low income. Under the Council Tax system, the poorest 10% pay over 4 times more of their income than the richest 10%. We would replace it with a Local Income Tax, which is based on people's ability to pay – so that no one pays

more than they can afford. **Make housing more affordable** by developing new forms of affordable homeownership, between full renting and full owner-occupation.

● Measures would include mutual home ownership in which a household will own shares in the mutual housing association which in turn owns the home in which they live. A stake can be built up over time.

We will also free up much more land for housing, satisfying more demand and lowering the prices of new houses. We would also encourage local authorities to bring empty homes back into use.

Freedom from social exclusion

Young people are especially vulnerable to the effects of social exclusion. They may be exposed to crime, as victims, or drawn into early offending. They may skip important stages of their education and face unemployment or ill-health. Measures have to be taken to break this cycle, so that young people can make full use of the educational and employment opportunities that are available to them.

Government focus on tackling youth crime and introducing punitive measures to deal with anti-social behaviour has left many young people feeling unfairly burdened by a negative public perception. Young people's positive contribution to their community needs to be emphasised and valued and more needs to be done to stop them from becoming involved in criminal activities in the first place.

To tackle the problem of social exclusion, Liberal Democrats would make young people feel safer in their communities and help rehabilitate those who've offended. We will:

Cut crime and the fear of crime by putting 10,000 more police on the streets. We will give the police the technology to spend more time on the street, and less time tied to the desk.

Focus on tackling drug traffickers and drug users who resort to crime to feed their habits. We would help heavy drug users recover by expanding drug rehabilitation, rather than criminalizing them. **Establish an independent standing**

Top 5 Liberal Democrat policies for young people

- **Reform the New Deal to get more young people into work.**
- **Focus on vocational and skills training** so that young people are helped to achieve their potential.
- **No tuition fees, no top-up fees** – Higher Education affordable for every student.
- **Tackle social exclusion** by dealing more effectively with anti-social behaviour and drug abuse and improving health and transport services for young people.
- **Give young people a voice** in how society is run by encouraging political involvement.

Commission to tackle the range of problems associated with drugs. It will look at the issue of illegal drugs and ways to tackle problems in areas such as health and the huge profits of organised crime.

Tackle anti-social behaviour effectively and without creating a negative image of all young people, by:

- **Involving local people in tackling anti-social behaviour and low-level offences.** We would by establish community justice panels to rebuild links between law-abiding people and offenders, and save valuable court time.

- **Encouraging the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs),** where children and parents are educated to take responsibility of unacceptable behaviour. This would help reduce anti-social behaviour in communities without resorting to blanket curfews or immediate use of heavy-handed court action through Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

Make offenders pay back to victims and their communities.

Liberal Democrats will make more non-violent criminals do tough community work as an alternative to jail. Experience proves this reduces reoffending, gives them skills for legitimate work, and means that they pay back to the community. Promoting long-term good health with a focus on preventative measures is essential for everyone in society. Young people will particularly benefit from measures to:

Tackle the root causes of ill health by promoting education about issues like smoking, healthy eating, and the need for physical activity. Measures will 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.

Make advice on the full range of contraceptive options available to all patients; provide free condoms in GP surgeries and other sexual health service providers and give better access to emergency contraception, including in pharmacies. Develop an NHS National Service Framework to improve Sexual Health Promotion, Screening and Treatment Services

Have a more constructive approach to drugs policy with the emphasis on the health impact, promoting education, treatment for addiction and harm reduction strategies rather than just criminal sanctions

Access to reliable and affordable transport is an essential part of ending exclusion. All the components of helping young people achieve their potential – from focused training and employment schemes to preventative healthcare – are only useful if young people can actually access them. The problem is particularly acute for those living in rural areas where public transport is less widespread. To improve access, we will:

Provide more upfront investment for public transport by encouraging local authorities to extend the congestion charge where suitable. Congestion charging in London (first proposed by the Liberal Democrats) has cut pollution, cut traffic jams and paid for new investment in buses.

Reward owners of less polluting cars with lower taxes. For many people, particularly in rural areas, cars are a necessity and cannot be replaced by public transport. But they can be far less damaging to the environment when they are more fuel efficient or use alternative fuels. We will reform the system for taxing cars to cut tax on those that pollute less, funded by increasing it on those that pollute more.

Giving young people a voice

Political parties face a real challenge in making policies, which are relevant to young people. We need to get away from the too often 'we know best' attitude, which has characterised youth policy through successive governments. Disillusionment with the formal political process is rooted in young people feeling that their views are not heard and not taken account of. To say that young people are not interested in politics is to ignore the growing rise of political activism – mostly involving young people – that characterises modern society. We need to involve young people in the political process by giving them the say that they want and deserve. *We will:*

Allow people to vote and stand for

office at sixteen. We believe that involving young people earlier in the political process will lead to a lifetime of interest and activism. Sixteen is the age when they are given many other responsibilities of citizenship such as beginning full-time work and paying taxes. We will promote active citizenship through citizen education and youth councils.

Introduce a fair and representative voting system for all national and local elections. Ultimately, we want to see the Single Transferable Vote (STV) used for Westminster elections. There are enormous benefits to having proportional representation as a voting system:

- **Voting is more representative of the wishes of the electorate.** Having votes more directly translate into seats in Parliament and an eventual Government would encourage people to participate in politics – as they saw that their votes made a difference to who was in power.

- **It creates more diverse decision-making.** More representative bodies allow for a diversity of views which can be fed in to the decision making process. In the majority of cases where PR is used in Europe, a greater proportion of women are elected. Young people would also be better represented.

- **It boosts the democratic process.** In elections, parties must address the wider electorate rather than the small number of swing voters in marginal seats. This forces politicians to take notice of all groups of voters throughout the country.

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.



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