



Liberal Democrat  
**policies for people  
with disabilities**





## Liberal Democrats will build a fair society where opportunities don't depend on luck, health or money, but are available for everyone.

It's a scandal that we still live in a country in which opportunities are regularly closed to people with disabilities – at school, at work, and across our public services. All politicians talk about fairness, but there is no fairness for Britain without fairness for people with disabilities.

So the Liberal Democrats will build a truly fair society, where a person's life chances don't depend on luck, health or money. It isn't right that, because of their disabilities, so many people are expected to go without the basics – like heating they can afford and public transport they can use. We'll help disabled people to live independently wherever possible by making sure they can access the job market, and by giving them more control over their own healthcare.

Here we set out our key policies to lift the barriers for disabled people in Britain today:

- Practical help to get to work
- Better education for children with disabilities
- Winter fuel payments for disabled people
- More accessible public transport
- Integrating health and social care
- A review of social care with guaranteed respite for carers

Only the Liberal Democrats will make the change that works for you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nick Clegg". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Nick Clegg  
Leader of the Liberal Democrats

## practical help to get to work

Today, just half of people with disabilities who are of working age have a job, compared to 80 per cent of people without disabilities. Yet there are currently 1.3 million people with disabilities in the UK who are ready and willing to work.

Not only are people with disabilities more likely to come across practical barriers to work, like access to buildings or unsuitable equipment, they often face discrimination too. And many people with disabilities and mental health problems don't get the detailed advice and support that can make a real difference in finding and sustaining a job.

So Liberal Democrats will give jobseekers with disabilities better practical help to get to work, using voluntary and private sector providers, as well as JobCentre Plus services. We will improve access to counselling for people with mental health problems. We will promote and reform the Access to Work scheme, allowing jobseekers to apply for the grant while they are looking for work. We will champion employment support programmes that work in partnership with employers which improve attitudes towards disability. And we will ensure that government departments lead by example and have strategies to employ more people with disabilities.

## better education for children with disabilities

It is just plain wrong that, last year, not even one in 5 teenagers with special educational needs achieved 5 good GCSEs (including English and maths). Too many children with disabilities that affect their education aren't getting the extra support they need, and problems often go undetected because the necessary support isn't in place.

Liberal Democrats will ensure that, when a child has special educational needs, it's picked up. We will have children take a diagnostic assessment when they start school. By investing an extra £2.5 billion into schools to cut class sizes and provide one-to-one tuition we will also make it far easier for teachers to support children with disabilities. And by massively scaling back the bureaucracy imposed on teachers from central government, we can free them up to spend more time with all their pupils. Teacher training will also be reformed so that all new teachers get better quality training in identifying and responding to children with special educational needs.

## winter fuel payments for disabled people

Over-60s get a Winter Fuel Payment of at least £200, no matter their income or health. Meanwhile many adults and children with disabilities and the terminally ill – who regularly spend more time at home than other people – can't afford their heating bills.

Over 60 per cent of people with disabilities can't afford to heat their homes properly, the majority of families of children with disabilities struggle to pay their fuel bills in the winter, and one in ten have had their gas or electricity supply cut off – either by their supplier or because they didn't have the money to top up a prepayment meter.

Liberal Democrats will extend the Winter Fuel Payment to people already receiving the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), on the grounds that they have limited movement, and to those receiving the higher rate care component of DLA, who are terminally ill. We will also pay it to families with children with severe disabilities under the age of 5. Up to 1 million people with severe disabilities, including the families of almost 21,000 young children with disabilities, will get an extra £200 towards their fuel bills each year.

## more accessible public transport

As well as being more polluting, many older buses are inaccessible for travellers with disabilities. So Liberal Democrats will introduce a bus scrappage scheme that helps bus companies to replace old, inaccessible buses with greener, more accessible ones.

We will allocate £140m to this scheme and bus operators will be invited to bid for grants. Taking into account the £30m already spent by the Government, our bus scrappage scheme would mean almost 2,000 new accessible buses in operation around the country.

## integrating health and social care

Many people who are treated by the NHS, particularly those who are disabled, older or suffering from mental health problems, have complex needs that go beyond the boundaries of their local health service.

GP practices, community care services, local hospital, and social services often have separate staff, different priorities and limited budgets. So all too often the costs of treating someone are passed from one organisation to the other, putting budgetary concerns over patients' best interests. Patients suffer, and instead of getting better their health deteriorates, meaning more trips to hospital.

Liberal Democrats will require, by law, that Local Health Boards and Social Services Authorities develop and commission joint services and establish joint budgets.

## a review of social care

The long-term funding system for adult social care in England doesn't work and funding for services is likely to become more difficult in the future. Liberal Democrats will create an independent commission to reach a consensus on social care, sorting this problem out once for all with a plan that is affordable, that will last, and that – most importantly – is fair.

We will also cancel Labour's plans for 'free care at home', which are so badly funded they will either lead to cuts in social care support for many vulnerable people or an increase in council tax. We will instead spend the money on providing a week's respite to 1 million carers who work more than 50 hours a week.



Liberal Democrats have championed the devolution of powers to Scotland and Wales, and many decisions made in Westminster now apply to England only. That means that policies in those nations are increasingly different from those in England – reflecting different choices, priorities and circumstances. Our Scottish and Welsh Parties make their own policy on those issues. This document sets out our priorities for a Liberal Democrat Government in Westminster.

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