

Liberal Democrats Policy Consultation

Youth Policy

Consultation Paper 94



This consultation paper is presented as the first stage in the development of Party policy for young people. It does not represent agreed Party policy. It is designed to stimulate debate and discussion within the Party and outside; based on the responses generated and on the deliberations of the working group a full Youth policy paper will be drawn up and presented to Conference for debate.

The paper has been drawn up by a working group appointed by the Federal Policy Committee and chaired by Cllr. Laura Willoughby. Members of the group are prepared to speak on the paper to outside bodies and to discussion meetings organised within the Party.

Comments on the paper, and requests for speakers, should be addressed to: Cllr. Laura Willoughby, Youth Policy Working Group, Policy and Research Unit, Liberal Democrats, 4 Cowley Street, London SW1P 3NB. Email: h.banks@libdems.org.uk

Comments should reach us as soon as possible and in any event no later than 30th March 2009.

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Background

1.1 The Liberal Democrats know they have the strongest policies to give the best opportunities to young people. They are the key to creating a fair and free society. Our policies will enable them to develop into healthy and active citizens building an inclusive and liberal society.

1.2 In this consultation we are not looking to scrap the Liberal Democrat policies that are most relevant to young people. We want to add some new ideas that will help young people help us build the liberal society in which we would all like to live. We want to produce a manifesto for young people which we can be proud of, and which allows us to be bold in our demand of young people's votes.

1.3 To make this happen we are consulting youth organisations and young people directly. This consultation document, aimed at party members, is an important part of the process. Only you can connect the policies with our liberal ideals.

Introduction

2.1 The Liberal Democrats believe that society benefits from the energy and ideas which young people bring. We want to hear about young peoples' aspirations and concerns and what they think politicians should be doing to ensure that young people are given the support and opportunities to enable them to become confident, responsible and happy members of society.

2.2 The media, politicians and the public have a lot to answer for. More than ever before young people are demonised. We all know that not every young person misbehaves, is failing academically, has things too easy or is spoilt, but you wouldn't get that impression from the news. It is no wonder young people, as a sector of our society, are feeling got at, depressed and unsafe.

2.3 Many young people feel they can never do anything right and that politics and politicians can do nothing for them. Liberal Democrats want to change this situation. We believe the role of the state should be to provide young people with what they need to succeed, including opportunities and support for young people to be able to seek out new experiences, learn about themselves, discover their strengths and weaknesses, and equip themselves with the skills to be able to excel in the future.

This consultation

2.4 The aim of this consultation is not to rewrite the many Liberal Democrat policies that affect young people, but to make sure we are tackling the big issues, have policies that meet young people's needs now and in the future, and ensure we know how we are going to promote voting for the Liberal Democrats as a positive act amongst young people.

Below are a set of questions that will help stimulate debate. All responses from you are welcome.

Developing Strong Individuals

3.1 Liberal Democrats want young people to be optimistic about their future and we want to give young people the freedom and support to pursue the positive action that makes them happy, and to make provision for sorting things out when life gets difficult. We recognise that all people are individuals and that simplistic one-size fits all policies will not give every young person the chance to achieve the future that they hope for.

3.2 It is important to develop young people's interest in the rest of society, provide opportunities to learn about our world, and give them the knowledge they need to be independent. *How can we achieve this?*

3.3 Both the Tories and Labour talk about opportunity, but for the Tories this means increasing opportunity for the brightest and the best, and for Labour it means increasing opportunities so long as you conform. For example, following years of Tory under investment and cuts, Labour only invested in Youth Services in a way that underpinned the nanny state notion of control. Youth Services, like schools and the Health Service, have become subject to more and more paperwork. Youth workers are spending less time on the streets and in youth clubs because of the demands of paperwork. They have less freedom to work with young people on their terms because of constraints of the need to meet targets for accredited outcomes. Failed government initiatives such as the Youth Opportunity Card have been based on a complete disconnect, particularly with the most vulnerable young people in our society; they are underpinned by a desire for social control.

3.4 Given that research (Ipsos Mori) reveals that up to 1 in 7 young people hate school, what more can we do to ensure that schools take account of young people's learning styles and ensure that learning is seen as something positive rather than negative?

3.5 For communities where there is inter-generational experience of poverty there is often, also, an inter-generational negative experience of the education system. For this reason there are many young people who look to get into the workplace as soon as they can.

3.6 It seems that we are beginning to understand the importance of vocational training in the UK. However the experience of many young people is that they undertake to complete courses provided by an FE or employment-based provider, without the opportunity of a job at the end of them. We want to offer young people education or training that inspires them, but we don't want to train them for jobs that don't exist. As Liberal Democrats we must address this gap in employment opportunities for young people and decide how the state will facilitate a remedy.

Questions

Young people in society

1. *How can we change the perception of young people by the rest of society?*
2. *How can we help young people to get jobs or volunteer, without others taking advantage of them?*

3. *What more can we do to ensure that young people are supported in the transition from education to work – and are exposed to the greatest range of opportunities to develop and use their talents?*
4. *How can we protect young people from bullying?*

Developing personal skills

5. *How can we ensure that all young people are equipped with good personal and social skills?*
6. *How can we develop good financial skills?*
7. *How can we help young people to prepare for their future roles as active citizens, parents, and positive participants in work and leisure pursuits?*

Providing opportunities to learn

8. *How can we ensure young people have the space and stimulation to learn?*
9. *What more can we do to ensure that young people have access outside of school to quality opportunities, particularly those that develop their soft skills?*
10. *How do we ensure that inspirational training with good job prospects is available to all young people that need it?*
11. *How can we widen opportunities for young people to take on voluntary responsibilities, such as mentoring and training in sport, music, scouts and cadets?*

Providing Equal Chances

4.1 Liberal Democrats believe that all citizens should have equal rights and we are committed to ensuring that resources are targeted at those who are most disadvantaged. Evidence, though, suggests that young people, and particularly vulnerable young people, are often short changed. Young people are often excluded by virtue of when or where they were born or how they are dealt with when they do something wrong. They are one of the groups most at risk of poverty, and are frequently disadvantaged over housing provision.

4.2 At the moment a young person who enters the youth justice system is very likely to graduate on to the criminal justice system. Research from the Prison Reform Trust states that in April 2008 there were 3,012 children under 18 in custody and that three quarters of all under 18 year olds released from custody are convicted within a year.¹ This suggests that putting children in prison is unlikely to work and a responsible Liberal Democrat society must think of alternatives.

4.3 Discrimination on grounds of race, gender, sexuality and disability is still an issue for many young people. Many of our policies already seek to redress these inequalities, for example on equalising the minimum wage and ending the single room supplement.

Questions

Young people and inequality

12. *Despite policy frameworks such as Every Child Matters, inequality is increasing. After the under 7s, 18-20 year olds are the next group most at risk of poverty. What more can we do to counter the impact of poverty on young people?*
13. *What should we be doing for those groups of young people identified as needing the most help – those in care, those who have been subject to abuse or have grown up in violent or unloving households?*
14. *What else could and should we be doing to ensure equality for all young people, regardless of their age, gender, race, sexuality or disability?*
15. *How can we ensure young people have access to good quality housing?*

Anti-social behaviour

16. *Given the increasing criminalisation of young people, particularly through the use of ASBOs, what can and should we be doing to tackle anti-social behaviour in a way that doesn't criminalise the young person?*

¹ Criminal Damage: why we should lock up fewer children

17. *How do the Liberal Democrats construct safe neighbourhoods and promote community cohesion among a diverse population without requiring the imposition of further state controls and heavier police presence?*

Young people and crime

18. *Young people are disproportionately the perpetrators and the victims of crime. What alternatives are there to custody? What more can we do to divert young people from crime?*

19. *How should we rethink our reaction to children who are committing crime? Should we see it as a reason to provide more help rather than punishment? How can we ensure meaningful but constructive punishments?*

20. *How do we create safer neighbourhoods and more cohesive communities without resorting to the imposition of further state controls and heavier police presences?*

Fostering Ambition

5.1 We believe that young people are naturally enthusiastic and ambitious. They want to learn, to work and to succeed. Society must not quash this ambition, it must foster it and help young people realise their dreams in education, employment, leisure and at home. So how can we achieve this?

Questions

Expectations and aspirations

21. *Do we need to think more flexibly about our expectations of what young people should be achieving at what age?*
22. *How should a Liberal Democrat government equip its young people to succeed in life?*
23. *How can we give young people the confidence that the work they do now will affect their future?*

Education and training

24. *How do we make sure young people are learning the right skills to equip them for work?*
25. *If we want young people to progress, and be sure this is happening can it be done without lots of tests?*
26. *How can we ensure that technical and vocational qualifications and jobs are seen as important?*
27. *If we think apprenticeships are important, how do we make them attractive and more readily available?*

Careers and future lives

28. *How can we give young people good advice about their future whilst also allowing them to explore their own interests?*
29. *Could we find ways to give young people more experience of different types of careers and interests to help them make their own decisions?*
30. *Are there ways we could give all young people time to explore life outside their own area before they make big life choices like university and college?*

Healthy and Creative Young People

6.1 A happy and healthy life should include rewarding, enjoyable and creative leisure time. What young people choose to do in their spare time is as important to their well-being as it is to anyone else in society. What they want to do varies just as much as it does with adults. Almost three quarters of teenagers would like to be involved in doing positive activities such as football, dance, going to the gym, music and martial arts. Many of policies in this area are laid out in policy paper 66, *Personal Best*. What further policy developments can be made in this area?

6.2 We know there is an increase in teenagers who have low self-esteem and suffer from stress. Young Minds estimates that 1 in 10 young people have a mental health issue. We need to work to reduce teenage stress, and help teenagers manage stress better.

6.3 The preamble to our constitution asserts that "*no one should be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity*". We need to ensure our policies for young people meet that aspiration and tackle the real problems facing young people in a way that respects individual freedom.

Questions

Healthy leisure

31. *How can we provide a variety of activities in an area whilst accepting there needs to be flexibility depending on the young people? How can we provide this activity in rural areas?*
32. *There is a big class income divide in the activities that young people do and where they do it. How can we bring young people together more? How do we deal with the fact that many young people's parents don't help connect their kids with activities that are already there?*
33. *How can we break the culture of risk and free young people to try new things?*
34. *How can we target opportunities to those who feel that money or where they live excludes them?*

Young people's health

35. *How can we engage young people more in improving health services for young people?*
36. *How can we improve the way young people with mental health issues are treated?*
37. *Is there more support and preventative work that can be done to ensure early diagnosis and treatment for those young people who are at risk of suffering mental health conditions?*
38. *How can we help young people take control of their own physical, sexual and mental health?*
39. *Should sexual health services for young people be more widely available? If so, where?*
40. *Should society provide better guidance for teenagers, more mentoring and more positive role models? How can this be achieved?*

What Can We Do?

7.1 As a party we should not be embarrassed to ask young people for their vote. We offer strong policies that create optimism and a vision for Britain that we know young people share. But how do we get this message across? How could we communicate better? Through this consultation we would also like to provide some recommendations for the party about how it can take forward the Liberal Democrat message to young people.

Questions

Young people and the Liberal Democrats

41. *How can we make sure young people know more about our policies and what we stand for?*
42. *How could the party communicate with more young people nationally?*
43. *How can we present the party to young people when they are 18? Are birthday cards enough?*
44. *Could we use new media and the web to promote the party more? If so, how?*
45. *Should we be bolder in asking young people for their vote? If so, what should we be saying?*

Conclusion

8.1 Our list of questions is by no means exhaustive. We welcome your thoughts, comments and suggestions. Please feel free to contact us at comments@consult.libdems.org.uk