

Amendments

Amendments are proposals to change a part of the original motion, or to add a new part or parts. The proposals they make should be of significant importance, should be within the scope of the original motion, and must not be a direct negative. You may find it helpful to talk to the proposers of the original motion; it is often the case that they may be happy to accept into their motion the points you wish to make. Requests for separate votes are taken at the discretion of the Chair of each debate, but will be viewed less favourably where an opportunity to submit a request by the deadline set out in the Agenda had not been taken.

Emergency Motions

An emergency motion is not simply a motion about something that happens to be important at the time it is written. An emergency motion is one which would otherwise qualify as a policy or business motion but is about a specific event which occurred after the deadline for submission of motions (11 January). You may find it helpful to indicate the emergency nature of the motion, either by a clause in the motion itself or by attaching a note for information. Emergency motions should be brief - 250 words is a good guide. The Conference Committee is unlikely to select for debate or the ballot motions which are substantially longer than this. Nor should they be capable of amendment.

How to write a better motion

What does the Conference Committee look for when selecting motions for the Conference Agenda?

In order to increase the chances of selection a motion must be easy to understand, logically argued and well presented. If the Conference Committee finds it difficult to understand the purpose of a motion or to follow the case it argues it is likely that Conference will also have problems. Equally, and this is harder for anyone drafting a motion to predict, the subject and policy implications of the motion should be in a subject area which is desirable for the Party to develop new policy or make its existing policies or achievements known. Other things being equal, a shorter motion usually has an advantage over a longer one.

What features will reduce the chances of a motion being chosen?

Any motion which is unnecessarily long (i.e. a long shopping list of detailed points), uses too many words to convey its message, is incoherent or unclear in parts or seems to be making a speech (try reading it aloud) will reduce its chance of selection. Similarly if the motion says nothing new, restates existing policy, is on an area of policy which has recently been fully debated by Conference or is about to be subject of a policy paper debate, its chances of selection are reduced.

How should we go about deciding what our motion should be about and what it should say?

A way of thinking about writing your motion is to have in mind a fourfold structure:

1. Description of the issue or problem which the motion seeks to address.
2. The Liberal Democrat principle(s) which underlie the solution.
3. Highlighting Coalition Government policies or existing Liberal Democrat policies which will contribute to the solution.
4. The further policy proposals which normally conclude the motion and are its most important element.

How should it be written?

Not everyone has the skills which enable spoken views to be translated into a motion which has clarity, coherence and style. You should try and find someone who has this skill - the ability to communicate a message as clearly and briefly as possible - perhaps your best Focus writer, a journalist, teacher or civil servant.

Useful words

The introduction should describe the issue, using words such as Conference "notes", "is concerned by" or "regrets". The motion can then "believe", "reaffirm", "recognise", "declare" or just list the principles that apply. Any positive government action on the issue, especially that which is due to Liberal Democrat influence, can be "welcomed", or "approved". Proposals are usually introduced by "calls for", "calls on the Government to" or even "calls on the Liberal Democrat Ministers to press within Government for", but could also follow from "recommends", "proposes", "urges", "demands", "insists", or "resolves".

The following is an example of a relatively well drafted motion from the September 2010 Conference:

Green Taxation

Conference believes that a key step in creating an environmentally sustainable economy is to establish a system of taxation which rewards activities which are non-polluting and resource efficient, achieved through a gradual switch from taxation on income and employment to taxation on pollution and resource depletion.

Conference notes and approves the commitments in the Coalition Programme for Government to:

- a) Increase the proportion of tax revenue accounted for by environmental taxes.
- b) Reform the taxation of air travel by switching from a per-passenger to a per-plane duty.
- c) Introduce a floor price for carbon.

Conference applauds the inclusion in the June 2010 Emergency Budget of commitments to reform the Climate Change Levy and to explore options for changes to aviation tax.

Conference calls on Liberal Democrat ministers in the coalition government to:

1. Press for rapid implementation of the reform of the Climate Change Levy so as to steadily increase the price of fossil-fuel-consuming activities and to promote energy efficiency measures and the development of renewable energy.
2. Ensure that any changes to the carbon price do not result in windfall benefits to the operators of existing nuclear power stations.
3. Press for full and rapid implementation of the coalition's commitment to reform the taxation of air travel.
4. Insist that the Government should set a target of securing not less than 10% of its revenue from environmental taxes by 2015, thus positioning the UK amongst the better performing members of the EU.