

Investing in Talent, Building the Economy
*Policies for Adult Further and Higher
Education*

Policy Paper 90



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Executive Summary

Liberal Democrats believe that high quality education and training, accessible to all, is crucial to the achievement of a fair, free and open society, in that:

- It helps people gain the skills, knowledge and aspiration to move out of poverty.
- It develops their intellectual capabilities so that they can overcome ignorance.
- It boosts their individual self-esteem so that they have the confidence to challenge conformity.
- It improves the productivity of the nation and our employers.
- Above all, it widens people's horizons and opens up new choices and experiences to them.

The key principles on which we base our adult further education and higher education policy should be:

- The creation of a climbing frame for learning which provides for each student a choice of 'pathways' from basic skills to higher level qualifications and the opportunity at every stage to move sideways and upwards rather than just up a straight ladder, mixing academic and practical learning to achieve success by following a variety of routes.
- The creation of a level playing field in which both free tuition and maintenance support is offered equitably to those studying part-time and full-time, in adult further and higher education, and in universities, colleges and work-based settings.

We will promote a coherent approach across the Adult FE and HE sectors by:

- Replacing HEFCE and the LSC with a single Council for Adult Skills and Higher Education, while transferring 16-19 LSC funding for education and training including apprenticeships to local authorities.
- Developing a credit-based framework for learning across the FE and HE sectors, using a modular system with funding following the student.

We will improve opportunities for Adult Further Education by:

- Covering the full fee costs for first level 3 qualifications (eg. A-levels, Advanced Apprenticeships and NVQ Level 3) for those over aged 25.
- Making maintenance grants available to adult first level 3 FE students at the same level and on the same means-tested basis as for full-time and part-time HE students
- Enhancing provision for Adult Community Education.
- Redirecting resources from the employer-led Train to Gain programme into Adult Education, Adult FE, and Adult Apprenticeships.

We will strengthen Adult Apprenticeships by:

- Fully funding the off-the-job training costs of apprenticeships.
- Developing a national application system for apprenticeships similar to UCAS.

We will enhance University education and research by:

- Developing a common recognised teaching qualification for university lecturers which should first be introduced as an element of doctoral programmes to train all new entrants to university teaching, before ultimately being extended to all those teaching in HE.
- Developing doctoral programmes which better prepare graduates for the research world.
- Providing more support and tenure for post-doctoral researchers.
- Tackling the pay gap and attrition that occurs for women researchers.
- Resisting moves to concentrate research in a handful of universities and creating mechanisms to ensure that strategically important new research areas are supported.
- Developing with the banks a Career Development Loan scheme to assist students to undertake post-graduate study.

We will maximise opportunities for study at HE level, and reduce the long-term debt burden on students by:

- Abolishing tuition fees for all part-time and full-time HE courses.
- Improving access to Higher Education for under-represented groups by transparent and fair admissions criteria which take into account educational background when considering attainment.
- Reversing cuts to provision for study of Equivalent and Lower Qualifications.
- Reforming the existing bursary scheme to make it available more fairly across universities on the basis of encouraging study of shortage subjects, and rewarding good performance at University.

We will defend and strengthen academic freedom and free expression on campus by guaranteeing research and publication freedom and getting rid of unjustified and arbitrary restrictions - such as 'No Platform' policies - on lawful association and lawful free expression.

Introduction

1.0.1 Liberal Democrats aim to create a fair, free and open society, in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance and conformity. High quality education and training, which everyone can access, is crucial to social mobility. It helps people gain the skills, knowledge and aspiration to move out of poverty and contribute to the economy. It develops their intellectual capabilities so that they can overcome ignorance. It boosts their individual self-esteem so that they have the confidence to challenge conformity. Above all, it widens their horizons and opens up new choices and experiences to them.

1.0.2 Liberal Democrats believe passionately that a poor education limits life chances. We are angry about the barriers that stand in the way of widening participation in adult further and higher education. Liberal Democrats understand the struggle that many learners endure to complete adult further and higher education courses, and the extent to which they are put off by the costs of such courses. We want to reduce the overall cost of such education and training for the individual to make it more likely that students from all backgrounds are able to participate.

1.1 Participation in Adult FE and HE

1.1.1 Liberal Democrats recognise that the most effective way to increase participation in adult further and higher education is to improve educational attainment in schools, colleges and work-based learning before age 19. Policy paper *89 Equity and Excellence* is making proposals to tackle the underachievement which currently limits the likelihood of many young people, particularly those from poorer backgrounds, even considering adult further and higher education.

1.1.2 However, it is inevitable that some will not achieve their full potential during continuous full-time education and training by age 19 and will want to return to learning after a period in the labour market. It is imperative that there are viable routes back into learning for adults both for HE and adult FE, part-time and full-time.

1.2 Financial Support for Adult FE and HE Students

1.2.1 Living costs, and the psychological weight of borrowing large sums of money to pay for fees, can be overwhelming while at university, a significant deterrent to applying or continuing on at University and a distorting factor in career choice after graduation. Maintenance loans and grants barely cover the fees payable to halls of residence let alone additional living costs. The purchase of textbooks and other materials also poses an additional financial burden on many students. Many students resort to credit cards and overdrafts.

1.2.2 A combination of fee loans, maintenance loans and commercial debt means that by 2010 many students will be graduating with over £20,000 of debt. There are various sources of financial help, but they are complex and often difficult for students to access - one survey found that 65% of students do not understand the current bursary scheme,

for example. It is also true that children from poorer backgrounds generally have the least knowledge of the support available.

1.2.3 Today, adult FE students and part-time HE students are the poor relations of our education and training system. A fair and progressive adult education policy must recognise the financial pressures faced by these students and aim to reduce the financial burden placed on them.

1.3 Higher Education and Adult Further Education Funding

1.3.1 Liberal Democrats wish to assist more young people and adults to study in full-time and part-time higher education. We want more young people and adults to study in full-time and part-time adult further education. And we want more adults to undertake apprenticeships.

1.3.2 Adult students (25+) wishing to follow a level 3 Further Education course (such as A-levels or a BTEC) are expected to pay 50% of their tuition fees upfront and upfront fees also apply in part-time Higher Education. While upfront fees are no longer required in full-time HE, fees are now included in the loan scheme and so add to the long-term debts of graduates.

1.4 Adult FE and HE Students' Expectations

1.4.1 Today's HE and adult FE students rightly have high expectations about quality of teaching, contact time, the availability and quality of accommodation. A particular concern is that HE lecturers do not need to obtain any formal teaching qualifications and the quality of teaching is variable. All these issues need to be addressed to maintain the quality of adult education.

1.5 Adult Learners

1.5.1 Liberal Democrats recognise that poor performance at school shouldn't hold you back for life. All adults should be entitled to gain basic qualifications (Levels 2 and 3) and should not be deterred by cost of fees or lack of financial support.

1.5.2 Nearly a third of adults do not have a level 2 qualification meaning that we are nowhere near the target set out in the Leitch review of 90% of adults having this basic qualification.

1.5.3 If we are to remain internationally competitive and able to withstand the challenges of globalisation, the basic skill levels of the workforce need to improve.

1.5.4 The HE sector currently receives around £12bn of government funding compared with the £3.5bn awarded to the FE sector for adult skills. The maximum adult learner grant for full-time students is approximately £1500 with total funding available of no more than £100m. But a full-time undergraduate can receive a mix of loan and grant support of over £6,500, depending where they live, with total budget of £4.2bn available. Maintenance support for part-time adult FE and part-time HE students is very limited with no more than £100m available across both sectors.

1.5.5 If we are to support a flexible workforce and encourage more adults to up-skill this favourable bias towards the HE sector should be addressed.

1.5.6 Non-accredited and shorter courses often act as a bridge to bringing adults who have had a poor experience of the schools system back into education. The decline in the number of adult learners also needs to be reversed. This is exacerbated by the withdrawal through HEFCE of funding for Equivalent and Lower Qualifications (ELQs) studied at HE and FE institutions.

1.6 Widening participation in Adult Further Education and Higher Education

1.6.1 Widening participation (and increasing completion rates) in Higher and Level 4 education at any age - full-time or part-time - is a priority for the Liberal Democrats.

1.6.2 A third of undergraduates are part-time and are not currently entitled to the same support as full-timers. Whilst 11% of these students receive funding from their employers, such unfairness in the funding system needs to be addressed.

1.6.3 Participation in Higher Education in the UK is to a great extent determined by a person's social class or ethnicity. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds make up around one half of the population of England, but represent just 29% of young, full-time, first-time entrants to higher education. People from poorer backgrounds tend to be more risk-averse and are therefore more put off by financial difficulties and debt while studying, yet as we have seen, the alternative part-time 'earn as you learn' route is discriminated against.

1.6.4 Liberal Democrats want to break this link between social background and participation in Higher Education. We reject the simplistic 50% participation target set by the Government - which they are decades from attaining anyway - and will ensure that expansion takes place among under-represented groups, or in areas of study that are of maximum benefit to the country and the students themselves.

1.6.5 We also want more adults to achieve Level 3 qualifications - through full-time or part-time FE - and then progress into higher education - either full-time or part-time. As working lives become longer, it is critical that those who do not achieve Level 3 qualifications by age 19 have the opportunity to do so as adults and then progress on to higher education.

1.7 The Fee Cap for Full-Time HE

1.7.1 The cap on tuition fees in Higher Education institutions is due to be reviewed by the Government in 2009. Issues to be considered will be whether the current £3,300 fee should be raised significantly, and whether an overall cap should remain on fees or whether each institution should be given autonomy over fees. Liberal Democrats believe that full variability of fees will lead to distortion of students' decisions on what subjects and at what institutions to study on the basis of their social background and is therefore unacceptable.

Progression from 14-19 to HE and Adult FE

2.1 Increasing Attainment by Young People

2.1.1 Liberal Democrats recognise that the key to increasing participation in adult further education and higher education, both in terms of absolute numbers and of widening the social basis of participation to less advantaged social and economic groups, is to improve educational attainment in schools and colleges. Those who succeed in public examinations by age 19 in the great majority of cases proceed to HE or adult FE.

2.2 Progression from A-Levels into Higher Education by age 20

2.2.1 Recent research by the Sutton Trust shows that 82% of those with 2 A-levels go on to University. The progression rate is high even for poorer pupils entitled to free school meals if they achieve good A-levels.

2.2.2 It is clear from the same research that many able pupils are being let down by the education system and not fulfilling their potential at GCSE and A-level. 27,000 pupils who were in the top 20% of performers at age 11 (measured by the Key Stage 2 tests) subsequently failed to progress to University at 18 in 2004/5. This attrition rate of potentially able students is particularly high among children in receipt of free school meals.

2.2.3 It is also clear that it is unfair - and a regressive form of social engineering - to require the same entry qualifications from a student from a poor educational background as that required from a student who has benefited from excellent teaching and a home conducive to study.

2.3 Progression from Vocational Level 3 into Higher Education age 20

2.3.1 By contrast, only 47% of 19 year olds in vocational level 3 qualifications enter HE by age 20. We are determined that these young people are encouraged to enter higher education, including assisting young people combine earning and part-time HE study as well as studying full-time.

2.4 Linking 5-19 Policy to Adult Further and Higher Education

2.4.1 Policy paper 89 *Equity and Excellence* is making proposals to tackle the underachievement in schools and colleges which currently limits the likelihood of many of them even considering Adult Further and Higher Education. These will include greater options to undertake vocational qualifications in the 14-19 phase as well as ways of raising standards in schools, colleges and apprenticeships.

2.4.2 Nevertheless, there is more that could be done by universities, FE colleges, work-based providers, and government to encourage pupils to aspire to continue their education. The government has been supporting outreach work by Universities. However, this has tended to target school sixth forms and sixth form colleges which is too late in the day for many pupils who will already have written off Higher Education.

University outreach should target pupils in lower age groups to help to combat the attrition rate of promising pupils falling away during the 11-16 period, as well as those attending general FE colleges offering A-levels.

2.4.3 It is important to recognise the motivation for learning that comes from having clear objectives and the degree to which many young people today feel alienated from learning by a secondary school curriculum geared towards those aiming at going on to university. The Government has attempted to answer the problem by introducing the new Diplomas, but initial take-up has been very low and in the meantime choices in Year 9 are additionally complicated. Many students and their teachers know little about the world of work other than the experience of their immediate families. It is essential that pupils from age 13 and their parents have access to good quality information, advice and guidance from a source independent of their own school. The independent advice and guidance service commissioned by local authorities, as set out in policy paper 89 *Equity and Excellence*, should work with adults not in education, employment or training to identify training opportunities which can help them to become more employable.

2.4.4 Funding for school sixth forms, 16-19 further education and 14-19 Apprenticeships will be transferred to local authorities. Policy for 14-19 year olds is covered by policy paper 89 *Equity and Excellence*.

2.4.5 There is evidence that students from a poor educational backgrounds do just as well in HE and FE as those from better educational backgrounds with significantly lower attainment in public examinations. It is wrong that those HE institutions who publicise that their admissions criteria are fair because they take this into account are attacked and isolated for allegedly discriminating against those from excellent schools. We would expect all Universities to provide and publish differentiated entry criteria according to educational background in line with the evidence for fairness that exists.

2.4.6 We are interested in piloting a trial scheme whereby the best students from the lowest achieving schools are guaranteed a place in Higher Education and their performance is monitored compared to their peers to identify whether this achieves appropriate and sufficient fairness. We would start discussions with Universities and schools about the design of such a scheme.

2.4.7 Overall, therefore, Liberal Democrats will create a system which encourages progression in terms of:

- Academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels and vocational Level 3 qualifications into or full-time HE by age 20 including Foundation Degrees
- Vocational Level 3 qualifications and Advanced Apprenticeships into part-time HE by age 20 including part-time Foundation Degrees, and
- A levels, vocational Level 3 qualifications and Advanced Apprenticeships entering part-time and full-time HE by age 20.

2.5 Progression into Adult FE and HE after age 20

2.5.1 However much improvement is made in schools, it is nevertheless inevitable that some people will for whatever reason not achieve their full potential during their full-time education, and will need to return to learning after a period in the labour market. It is important that there are viable routes back into learning for adults both for HE and FE.

2.5.2 For 19 year olds who do not achieve a Level 2 or Level 3 by age 19, Liberal Democrats will build a system which encourages progression throughout life into:

- Adult FE at Level 2 and Level 3 into full-time and part-time HE.
- Adult Apprenticeships at Levels 2 and 3 and Adult Advanced Apprenticeships at Level 4 into part-time HE.

2.5.3 Of course these different routes may be used in combinations. Getting into learning through Adult Community Education may encourage people to undertake formal qualifications through part-time HE; someone who left school at 16 may go back to get A-levels through an FE college and then go on to take a University degree. This paper sets out proposals to ensure that these routes are available to all which can take advantage of them.

Common Principles to the Liberal Democrat Approach to Adult FE and HE

3.1 Principles

The principles which underlie our approach are:

1. *A Climbing Frame for Learning* - we propose that an underlying credit-based framework for learning provides for each student a choice of 'pathways' to higher level qualifications and the opportunity at every stage to move sideways and upwards rather than just up a straight ladder. It means that at every stage there is the opportunity to mix academic and practical learning and to achieve success by following a variety of routes.
2. *A Level Playing Field* - it is right that if the state is providing free tuition up to a certain level for students pursuing one pathway, this should apply equally for all other pathways. Likewise, where maintenance grants are available to one set of students, they should be equally available, on a pro rata basis, to others. We need to treat full-time adult FE students in the same way that we treat full-time HE students. We need to treat part-time adult FE students in the same way as part-time HE students. And we need to expand massively opportunities for adults to achieve Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4 apprenticeships.

3.2 A credit-based framework for HE and adult FE

3.2.1 All courses should operate on a modular system with each course being given a 'credit rating'. At the Open University a degree requires the accumulation of 360 credits. The credit rating of courses depends upon their level and the time it takes to complete them - some of the longer courses rate 50 units, while some introductory courses rate only 10. Translated into a full time 3 year bachelor's degree this would require students taking courses which added up to 120 credit units each year.

3.2.2 Many universities and colleges already use such a system and the Government are seeking to standardise procedures through the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS). Our proposals would require all universities and colleges to accept the system, and the notion of credit accumulation. This would mean that students who left before completing a full degree course could retain 'credit' for the work they had successfully completed. It would also allow credit transfer, enabling students to move from one institution to another. This is a well-established principle in the US (even in 'Ivy League' universities) and countries such as Australia and Canada. A key, and crucially important, element is that, while the student may ask to attend any university, there is no automatic right of entry. As in the US system, it is up to each institution to decide whether to accept students.

3.2 Funding following the student

3.3.1 Under such a system funding would follow the student. Science courses would, as now, be recompensed more highly than arts courses and it would also be possible for payment to vary by location and institution where costs justify that.

3.3.2 Initially we expect most 18 year old students would, as now, opt to study full time and use their credits at one institution. Mature and part-time students are likely to be the first to seize the opportunities to ‘earn and learn’ that this system opens up. Over time there might be considerable changes with students opting, for example, to postpone study for a few years; opting out after two years (at the foundation degree level) and using their remaining credits to finance part-time or evening study; or opting initially for part-time study and then going full time. The system offers wide flexibility; the choice would lie with the student.

3.3.3 A further advantage of this system is that it would be easier to equalise the treatment of part-time and full-time HE courses. Regulation of part-time course costs for HE would be an essential feature of the policy. Our proposals in 7.2.4 reinforce this by putting state financial support for part and full-time HE on the same footing.

3.3.4 It is currently the case that funding for exactly the same course is different when supplied through an FE college rather than a Sixth Form. One of our key principles is equity of funding between different learning platforms. This is addressed further in policy paper 89 *Equity and Excellence*.

3.4 Scrapping the Learning and Skills Council

3.4.1 The FE sector is currently regulated by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) along with all post-16 education. With the raising of the education leaving age to 18, responsibility (and funding) for 16-19 education is to go back to local authorities, leaving the LSC with responsibility only for post-19 or adult education. Yet funding for post-19 is to be routed on the one hand, via Train to Gain (T2G), through employers, and on the other to individuals through the re-vamped Learning Accounts. The Government has announced that from 2010 the LSC will be replaced by the Skills Funding Agency whose main task will be to direct funds to these ‘demand-led’ requirements. As is explained later, Liberal Democrats have serious doubts about the cost-effectiveness of the Train to Gain proposals, whereas we support in principle the ideas behind individual learning accounts.

3.5 A New Council for Adult Skills and Higher Education

3.5.1 This means there will be two large quangos involved in post-19 education and skills funding - the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Liberal Democrats do not believe these are both necessary. Instead, we would create a Council for Adult Skills and Higher Education (CASHE) with responsibility for all post-19 education and skills funding (and a total budget of over £9 billion). The budgets for adult skills and higher education within CASHE would be ring-fenced however, and there would be a separate board to oversee research funding. As set out in 4.2.1 below, the SFA’s supervisory function over FE colleges would be removed with a final power of intervention lying directly with the Secretary of State. A new funding council will also help in greater cohesion in the planning of the expansion of foundation degrees and other qualifications delivered through FE colleges.

3.6 Adult Learning Accounts

3.6.1 CASHE will be responsible for exploring post-18 adult learning accounts to support the credit-based approach to Adult FE and HE outlined in 3.2. However, we are conscious of the radical nature of the decision to merge adult LSC funding with HEFCE to

create CASHE. Only when CASHE is fully operational should consideration turn to the question of whether or not to route funding through adult learning accounts.

3.7 Local Authorities, CASHE and Welfare to Work policy

3.7.1 The Liberal Democrats believe that a single funding agency for 5-19 provision - Local Authorities - and a single agency for adult skills and higher education - CASHE - will simplify the education and skills system in England. We fully acknowledge the importance of the link between skills policy and welfare to work policy. But rather than merge adult LSC funding - or the Skills Funding Agency - with Jobcentre Plus, we expect Local Authorities and CASHE to work closely with Jobcentre Plus to minimise 16-18 youth unemployment and the NEET group (see policy paper 89 *Equity and Excellence*) and ensure unemployed and workless adults receive the funding they need for adult skills and higher education opportunities.

Further Education Colleges

4.1 The Role of the FE College

4.1.1 We see the role of the FE college as meeting the education and training needs of the whole community broadly from age 14 onwards. It should be an ‘open-door’ institution encouraging all to step inside either to participate in its own educational offering or to be helped and guided towards other types of study. Its bias would, as now, be towards vocational education, offering courses on both a full and part-time basis. As a community college, it would/should also aim to meet at least some of the needs for leisure learning.

4.1.2 The local FE college would also:

1. *Overlap with schools 14-19 provision* - directly collaborating with local secondary schools in providing courses, particularly those leading to vocational qualifications (at Levels 1,2 and 3) from institutions such as City and Guilds and other professional bodies. FE Colleges also have an important role in providing ‘second chance education’ from basic skills to GCSEs and A Levels for those young people who for one reason or another do not wish to study at school.
2. *Work with local employers* - to support apprenticeships and other work-based learning initiatives (although as with the Government’s proposals, the assumption is that in this market the FE College is in competition with private sector trainers). A clear pathway needs to be established from the new Diplomas into apprenticeships with those aged 14-16 being clearly identified as having junior apprenticeships, post-16 Level 2 as Modern Apprenticeships and Level 3 as Advanced Apprenticeships, and likewise the latter being seen to lead to Level 4 studies via Foundation Degree or HND.
3. *Work with universities to provide HE* - at the top end the FE sector has for a long time overlapped with the HE sector and this is set to increase as the numbers taking two year Foundation Degree expands. Some colleges will develop their own degrees but many will, as now forge links with different universities to offer a range of courses across different sectors. In doing so, colleges will increasingly become an important bridging mechanism into HE, especially for mature students and those who wish to study part-time from home, but looking for a more personal form of tuition than enrolling on remote or correspondence course.
4. *Provide a key plank in basic skills and language (ESOL) training* - given the relatively large proportion of those in the adult workforce who lack basic literacy and numeracy, as community learning institutions colleges are and should be central players in meeting this challenge. Within some ethnic communities this is a matter of language teaching as well as basic skills.

4.2 Self Regulation of Colleges

4.2.1 The world we envisage is one in which colleges compete (as they do today) for students and the student would carry current funding with them, whether that comes from local authority, company or individual. We see no reason therefore to retain the

LSC. Colleges are already self-governing corporations subject to company law. We would propose that the relationship between the colleges and CASHE (see paragraph 3.5.1 above) is similar to that currently existing between HEFCE and the universities, namely allocating funding to the institution but leaving the detailed decisions on how to spend it to the individual colleges. Central Government would, as they do with schools (or for that matter companies), lay down the general responsibilities of the governing board and, via Ofsted, maintain quality control. While colleges would be ultimately accountable to the Secretary of State who would, as now, retain powers to close them down, they would be essentially self-regulating institutions, responsible for their own affairs.

Adult Further Education, Adult Apprenticeships and Adult Skills

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 In addition to the general principles across adult education set out in chapter three, the key themes of our approach to FE and Adult Skills are:

- *To give Incentives to Life Long Learning* - all individuals are encouraged to pursue learning throughout life both in order to maintain and upgrade skills and capabilities and because they get enjoyment and fulfilment from doing so and in turn contribute positively to society.
- *Demand-led Employer-based Learning* - it is important that training undertaken through employers can fit within the national funding and credit accumulation framework and thus provide an incentive to both employer and employee to promote/pursue further training.

5.2 Funding for Adult FE

5.2.1 At present, the state meets all fee costs up to an initial level 2 course, all the costs of an initial level 3 for those aged up to 25, and half the costs of initial level 3 courses for those over 25. Very little is available in the way of maintenance grants for FE courses, with means-tested Adult Learner Grants of up to £1500 available in a limited number of cases.

5.2.2 We believe the case for additional support for level 3 FE courses is strong. On the level playing field principle, there seems no good reason why the support available for FE students should be so much less generous than for HE. This would also help to increase completion rates.

5.2.3 We therefore propose:

- Fee costs for first level 3 qualifications to be fully met by the government for those over 25.
- Maintenance grants to be available to adult first level 3 FE students at the same level and on the same means-tested basis as for HE students (with a pro rata rate for part-time FE students).

5.3 Adult Apprenticeships

5.3.1 While supporting the view that there should be no age bar on entry into apprenticeships and that curriculum choices at 14 should leave the maximum flexibility for later career decisions, we nevertheless share the view that for those young people for whom learning by doing comes initially more easily than learning by reasoning, an apprenticeship offers a highly satisfactory route into a career. We support the argument that a full apprenticeship should be seen as the full Level 3 training, not, as today, accepting a one or two year Level 2 qualification as sufficient. Perhaps modern equivalents of the old terms 'journeyman' (Level 2) and 'craftsman' (Level 3) might

make a return. We would also support the notion of a 'master' (Level 4) qualification for the experienced craftsman involved with apprentice training.

5.3.2 The big problem with apprenticeships lies not in the lack of demand for them from young people but in the reluctance of employers to provide apprentice training places. In the 1970s, Britain trained some 700,000 young people through apprenticeships, today it is less than 200,000 of whom less than 25% are training to Level 3. The Leitch target, accepted by the Government is for numbers to reach 400,000 with 50% going through to Level 3. But funding does not match these aspirations - employers are expected not only to meet the wage costs of young trainees but also to meet at least 50% of their training costs (see 5.4.1 below).

5.3.3 We would encourage a diversity of accredited (transferable) units for apprentices to take. In consultation with the apprentices themselves, trainers, and the National Apprenticeships Service (NAS), employers should be able to craft their own apprenticeship for their own apprentices, or to find outside support for supporting their apprentices in this way.

5.3.4 Would-be apprentices should be able to apply through a national application system, similar to UCAS, direct to employers. This would be run by the NAS. Like FE and HE institutions, employers will wish to advertise when they have places available.

5.3.5 While we support the NAS in developing accreditation, we fear there is a danger of over-prescription. The NAS should rather establish some core principles and standards. In particular, the transferable key skills element of apprenticeships should be emphasised as they will stand workers in good stead in a rapidly developing labour market where job-specific skills may become obsolete. The NAS should also have a key role in promoting apprenticeships.

5.4 Redirection of Train to Gain Funding

5.4.1 The Government's Train to Gain (T2G) programme will meet all the training costs (unlike Adult Apprenticeships) and some wage costs of existing employees who embark on Level 2/3 qualifications, creating all kinds of perverse incentives. Early assessment studies of the T2G programme have unsurprisingly indicated a high level of 'deadweight' in the scheme, that is government money is being used to subsidise training which employers would have carried out on their own anyway. As the T2G budget is anticipated to rise from approximately £500m this year to £925 million by 2009/10, this does not seem a wise or justifiable use of public money.

5.4.2 Liberal Democrats would therefore redirect £400m T2G funding into adult apprenticeships, meeting the full training costs. We believe that this would enable us comfortably to meet the Leitch 2020 targets. We recognise, however, that in the short-term during the current recession it may be difficult to find enough employers willing to offer apprenticeships, and would therefore take advice from our proposed Council for Adult Skills and Higher Education (CASHE) as to how far to use these resources in the FE college sector until the labour market recovers. We would also use resources from T2G to increase funding for Adult Community Education and to increase Adult FE provision in colleges.

Higher Education

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Innovative universities are an essential part of a liberal society. In addition to high level teaching and research, and the development of advanced skills and expertise, they provide an activity that is essential for a genuinely open society: the development of new ideas and creative thinking. So Liberal Democrat universities policy must have two central aims. First, universities must offer an arena for new ideas and thinking that may question established wisdom. This cannot always be measured by financial outcomes. For this reason it is important that universities and other Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) retain considerable autonomy and intellectual freedom. Second, high quality teaching must be provided both to aid individual self-development and, as a consequence, to advance the country's economic goals.

6.1.2 British universities are very successful by international standards. 17 out of the top 100 universities in the world according to the Times Higher Educational Supplement Rankings 2008 are British. This a far higher number than any country other than the United States. Liberal Democrats understand that this in part due to the relatively high level of resource per student in British universities compared to most European countries, and this level of resourcing needs to be maintained and improved. Many universities are increasing their efforts to raise funds from alumni and business, and this is to be encouraged.

6.2 Structures

6.2.1 Our vision is of a diversity of institutions in the HE and FE sectors to meet the multiple demands for post-school education and training required in the 21st century. Such a society needs a large number of people with the broad capabilities and technical skills of graduate level, namely equivalent to a level 4 NVQ qualification which embraces both the 2 year Foundation (old HND) and the 3 year honours degree. The credit-based framework outlined in 3.2 and 3.3 will help us achieve this vision.

6.3 Teaching, Research and Innovation

6.3.1 There is a widespread public perception that university lecturers spend most of their time lecturing, but the reality is very different. Many are involved in significant pastoral and administrative roles, but for many academics, the challenges and satisfaction of research make higher education an attractive career. Moreover, academic research underpins our innovative capacity, and some universities earn as much from research as from teaching. A distinctive feature of teaching in higher education is that most of it is carried out by those who are also active in research. The dialogue between university teacher and student is thus informed by interest in cutting-edge research and scholarship as well as teaching.

6.3.2 Yet there are tensions in this relationship. Very few university staff have teaching qualifications and many seek to maximise the amount of time they spend on research, knowing that it is through success in this that they will best advance their careers and raise extra funds for their department. As a result much class teaching, as distinct from

lecturing, is undertaken by post-graduate students, while students are increasingly demanding more contact time with lecturers and more consistent quality of teaching. The introduction of fees has changed the relationship between students and university, as students increasingly view themselves as consumers of education. We believe that several reforms need to be made to teaching and research.

6.3.3 First, HEFCE (in future our proposed CASHE) should reward institutions which require new teaching staff to hold a Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, and which give their staff adequate time to study for such a qualification. Second, we believe that promotions at all levels should be dependent not just on research but should also reward those who make a significant contribution to teaching and administration.

6.3.4 QAA, HEFCE/CASHE and UUK need to work to develop a common recognised qualification which should first be introduced as an element of PhD programmes to train all new entrants to university teaching before ultimately being extended to all those teaching in HE. There also needs to be ongoing professional development available to all lecturers.

6.3.5 Some strategically important subjects are faced with closure because the teaching funding does not cover the costs of running the course. It is essential that each region of the country offers courses of strategic importance, especially since many students choose to or need to study close to home. We would establish a Strategic Subject Teaching Fund within HEFCE of £10m to provide bridging support for those strategically important departments facing closure until a long-term solution is identified.

6.3.6 There is concern in Higher Education about restrictions on research freedom and freedom of speech. Such freedoms are of particular importance in academia and on campus. We would:

- Guarantee academic and research freedom in governance and contractual arrangements within the usual constraints of funding and peer-review
- Remove the unlawful and counter-productive policies of 'No Platform' which seek to place unnecessary and arbitrary limits on otherwise lawful association and expression.
- Require that all publicly funded research - including non-classified Government commissioned work - is published, subject to the constraints of commercial confidentiality and quality.

6.3.7 Under-funding of teaching in HE has meant that higher education institutions are increasingly reliant on the use of casual, hourly-paid lecturing staff, with consequences for the quality of teaching experienced by students. Many hourly-paid lecturers lack basic access to facilities (desk space, computers, administrative support, printing and photocopying). All this can have an adverse impact on the quality of courses. We therefore need to improve the career structure for fixed term staff. We believe that institutions should work towards the conversion of hourly-paid posts onto proper part-time contracts that cover the full cost of work carried out.

6.4 Opportunities Post-Graduation

6.4.1 Post-graduate numbers in British universities have risen by over 200,000 since 1995, to 559,390 of which 185,000 are overseas students. 316,320 of these are part-time students. We would expect part-time numbers to increase substantially over time as current graduates seek to maintain and upgrade qualifications.

6.4.2 Masters degrees used to be seen primarily as a preparation for teaching or doctoral degrees, but today they are increasingly seen as vocational/technical post-degree training and a pathway to a non-academic career. For this reason, sources of funding are very limited. The state has traditionally subsidised the training of those going on to teaching via the PGCE. Likewise those pursuing specialist medical training on top, for example, of a nursing degree, are funded by the NHS. The research councils have also traditionally funded a limited number of studentships to allow the development of research skills through taking a master's degree prior to a PhD. But the general position is that where a postgraduate degree is required as a vocational qualification - such as in law or accountancy - then either the student themselves (if necessary via a commercial bank loan) or their employer should meet the cost.

6.4.3 Professions such as law (the average cost of fees is over £10,000), university lecturing, teaching, finance, librarianship, psychology/psychiatry/counselling (£4,000 - 7,000 for MSc stage) all require extensive post-graduate study. There are huge anomalies between what is funded and whether employers will pay for qualifications. Other professions such as journalism are increasingly asking for post-graduate qualifications and/or unpaid internships. Banks offer career development loans and graduate loans but only as commercial lenders to those who meet their credit rating requirements. This can exclude many young people from poorer backgrounds, even when they have no history of bad debts or personal irresponsibility. The net effect is the closing off of many sectors of employment, particularly to those who have built up large amounts of debt during their undergraduate studies.

6.4.4 We therefore propose that the government should develop with the banks an accredited Career Development Loan system which would address some of the problems with the current arrangements. The loans would not be state-subsidised in terms of interest repayments like the undergraduate loan scheme. However it would make loans available to people from poorer backgrounds who might not otherwise be able to secure commercial loans.

6.5 Excellence and innovation in research

6.5.1 Liberal Democrats endorse the concept of the dual support system (currently based on the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)) and the seven Research Councils (in response to specific grant applications), whereby HEFCE, or in future our replacement CASHE, fund research. We believe that this is vital to keep teaching and research together, and to support innovative proposals. We also support the multiple streams of funding from the research councils, charities etc. because we believe it is healthy to have a diversity of funding sources.

6.5.2 We are sceptical, however, about plans to concentrate research in just a few 'research' universities. We do not think there is convincing evidence of economies of scale and there are obvious dangers in shutting out the unorthodox. Some support for 'blue sky' research and bright researchers across the sector is essential. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) which will replace the RAE is currently being developed, and we are encouraged that the limits of metrics-based assessment appear to have been

recognised for the arts, humanities and some social sciences. We would work closely with relevant subject area associations to ensure that any such measurements in REFs are judged to be meaningful by academics.

6.5.3 The current system for allocating HEFCE research funding based on RAE ratings allows excellent departments to be supported regardless of the overall level of achievement in a university. We believe that this is right. However, it is still difficult for Universities or the UK as a whole to grow new excellent research capacity in less well-developed or innovative areas. We therefore propose a Strategic Research Capacity Fund of up to £100 million to be re allocated by HEFCE from current research funding by a process of peer review in open competition for research proposals in areas judged - on the basis of international expert advice - by the Government to be of strategic importance and not well developed.

6.6 The Home market

6.6.1 The UK has a problem with too many doctoral students dropping out of subjects after their doctorate because of a paucity of post-doctoral posts and a shortage of skills to enable them to compete with doctoral students from abroad. Liberal Democrats would therefore seek to reduce the number of doctoral programmes in appropriate subject areas, but keep funding within the same subject area to instead ensure that those programmes which remain offer more preparation for career-building, for example through funding the equivalent of an additional year of training. The extra year would be used - spread throughout the study - to learn new research methods, get additional exposure to industry where this is not already a component, spend time teaching their subject in state schools, doing public engagement and spending time attached to different research groups to identify potential career opportunities.

6.6.2 Despite providing the bulk of the laboratory work, including much unpaid teaching, post-doctoral students in Britain suffer from relatively poor pay and job security compared to graduate peers in the professions. Such researchers, especially women are particularly disadvantaged by a lack of tenure, poor salary progression, the difficulties of moving cities or countries in search of new short-term positions and the 'publication gap' that exists for those with breaks in research due to caring commitments. As a result post-doctoral research posts account for most of the massive attrition that occurs for female post-docs between graduation and tenured academia.

6.6.3 We will urge employers and research funders to investigate the barriers to career progression for young scientists and women scientists, arrange for post-doctoral positions to be merged longitudinally to allow for more job security and require that teaching or students and training of lab staff is specifically remunerated. We will provide additional bursary funding to assist more of the best women scientists to stay in research careers, and require the Equality and Human Rights Commission pro-actively to enquire into women in science.

6.7 The international market

6.7.1 The UK higher education system competes in two international markets. The first is the research market. In this, the UK's ability to bring the best researchers to its institutions and to keep British staff in the UK is determined by a range of factors. These principally include international reputation of the institution, the level of academic salaries, and the provision of time specifically for research.

6.7.2 While many UK researchers work overseas, especially in the US, many also return to the UK to senior posts at a later stage in their careers and there is no evidence to date of a serious brain drain from the UK. On the other hand the UK has benefited from a large number of young academics from Eastern Europe and SE Asia seeking post-doctoral training in Britain and filling some of the less well remunerated posts in research and many of these also return to their home countries later. Given the age profile of the research community in Britain, it is essential, if we are to maintain our position as a leader in academic scientific research, that bright young people are attracted by a research career. This means making sure that science and engineering are seen as exciting subjects to study and that post-graduate studentships are sufficiently generous to encourage entry into an academic career. It also means that in the longer run, and allowing for the intangible benefits of an academic career, the level of academic salaries has to be more competitive with other occupations.

6.7.3 The second international market is that of overseas students. There has been a growing reliance on overseas fees amongst some universities. British universities as a whole receive £4 billion in fees from foreign students. However, international student recruitment is a complicated and volatile area of activity - especially as China and India increase their own provision. A recent study by HEPI revealed that four out of five universities have seen a drop in the number of overseas students - and their fees - since 2005. The sector could be facing a financial black hole - and possible job cuts - because of the decline in the number of foreign students studying in the UK. One factor in this is major increases in fees for student visas, and the difficulties more broadly created for foreign students and visiting academics by the Government's immigration regulations.

6.7.4 Equally, British universities have a high reputation for both teaching and research, and it is this which brings foreign students and researchers to Britain. In relation to teaching, quality control (and the regulation of the use of the title university) is important and the Government recognise this. Universities themselves also need to maintain a balance of commitments. If foreign students are coming to Britain to enjoy the British student experience, many expect to meet British students and not just other overseas students. Moreover, in so far as universities are funded by the British state both for teaching and research, they should be seen to be meeting the needs of British as well as foreign students. Nevertheless, the new visa requirements are making it increasingly difficult for both students and researchers to come to Britain.

6.7.5 It is vital to retain and develop the reputation of British universities abroad. Poor student experience at some institutions will adversely affect the reputation of the sector as a whole. Equally, Britain has benefited enormously over the years from the welcome it has given to visiting scholars and students. It is extremely short-sighted to close down these opportunities.

6.7.6 We therefore propose:

- Developing a voluntary British Council accreditation scheme based on the model currently used for inspection of English for Speakers of Other Languages Schools.
- Working with the British Council and exam authorities to improve relevance and quality of the International English Language Testing System for university entrance.

- Developing visa proposals to counter government policies making it very difficult for universities to sponsor visiting fellows and making student visas more expensive and harder to obtain.

Student Finance

7.1 The Background to the Existing System for Full-Time HE and Liberal Democrat Policy

7.1.1 Before 1998, no tuition fees were payable by students for full-time undergraduate courses. The government provided a subsidised loan scheme for maintenance and some means-tested grants. However, in 1998, fees of £1,000 a year were introduced for most undergraduates. These had to be paid up front. At the same time, maintenance grants (as opposed to loans) were withdrawn.

7.1.2 Currently, full-time undergraduate and PGCE students can apply for a maintenance loan through their local education authority. The LEA then assesses the application and determines the amount that the student is eligible to borrow. The LEA takes account of many issues, but principally: the family's income; whether the student will be living at home, away from home, or in London; and disabilities. 75% of the full loan (around £3,000) is available to all students in England and Wales, with only the final 25% being means-tested (taking the total available up to just over £4,600 for those studying outside London and £6,475 for those living away from the family home and studying in London).

7.1.3 Loans are provided by the Student Loans Company and do not have to be repaid until the April of the year after students have completed their course and are earning £15,000 a year. The interest rate is updated annually and is tied to inflation. It is applied only to maintain a constant value of the outstanding loan, as the 'buying power' of the pound changes and not to provide 'earned interest'. The loan is normally repaid using the PAYE system, with 9% of the graduate's gross salary over £15,000 automatically being deducted to pay back the loan. There is no particular schedule for clearing the debt, but, if it has not been cleared 25 years after repayment began, or the student turns 65 years old, the remaining debt will be cancelled, if the borrower has fully met their repayment obligations and not defaulted at any time when they should have been repaying.

7.1.4 There is also a means-tested non-repayable grant available. The grants for 2008/09 are:

Household income	Amount of grant
Up to £25,000	Full grant - £2,835
£30,000	£2,002
£35,000	£1,260
£40,000	£998
£50,000	£524
£60,005	£50
More than £60,005	No grant

It was announced in November 2008 that for the following year the cut off point for a partial grant will be £50,000 per year.

7.1.5 The Higher Education Act (2004) made significant changes to the fees system from 2006. Those with sufficient private funding can still pay tuition fees upfront but everyone - regardless of their income - is now entitled to take out a loan to pay their fees. For those who take out a tuition fee loan, the Student Loans Company pays their fees direct to the place of study. The student, once they have graduated or left their course, has to pay back on the same terms as the maintenance loan. Universities are now required to sign a special agreement with the Office for Fair Access and, in return for an undertaking to provide a minimum bursary of £300 for all students who qualify, they may now charge tuition fees of up to £3,070 (and these will rise with inflation). Students who began their courses prior to academic year 2006/07 are entitled to borrow additional loans to cover their tuition fees (which remain at the old rate). That means that students will no longer have to find fees while they are studying, but will end up with an additional £9,000 plus of debt to be paid off above and beyond their maintenance debts. Students graduating in the summer of 2009 will be the first to begin payments under this new regime, starting in April 2010.

7.1.6 Liberal Democrats strongly opposed the introduction of fees in 1998, and abolition of fees for full-time HE students has been a major plank of our general election manifestos since then. The 2005 manifesto committed £1.2 billion to fund this pledge. However, we have not previously made a commitment to abolish fees for part-time HE students, who still pay upfront fees.

7.2 Scrapping Tuition Fees

7.2.1 While fees for full-time HE students are now repayable as part of the loan scheme, they still represent a significant burden on students. Taking maintenance loans and fee loans together, many students will be starting their working lives with a debt of over £20,000. This will create serious problems for people at the age when they want to settle down, start families and get on the property ladder. Scrapping fees would greatly reduce that level of debt.

7.2.2 We also know that people from low income families are more risk averse when it comes to getting into debt, and so fees are a barrier to widening the social basis of participation in HE. Liberal Democrats do not in any case believe the state should be encouraging people to get into a lifetime of debt.

7.2.3 We have considered other ways of using the resource available in order to address student poverty problems, for example through a more generous grant system and changes to the loan repayment scheme, but one of the major problems with the existing support systems is their complexity. Abolishing fees has the advantage that it is a simple solution which does not rely on students having to 'work the system' to benefit. Consequently, Liberal Democrats believe it is right both in principle and in practice to scrap tuition fees for a first degree-level qualification.

7.2.4 It is right that part-time students should be treated equally in regard to tuition costs. We will therefore also abolish fees for part-time students studying for a first undergraduate level degree.

7.2.5 This does not mean that Universities will lose funding, as the income they currently receive as a result of fees will continue to be paid by the government.

7.2.6 We will reverse cuts recently made in funding for Equivalent and Lower Qualifications (ELQs), in particular to fund lower qualifications and community learning.

7.2.7 We will expand the tuition and maintenance arrangements for Level 3 Adult FE students (see 5.2.3 on Adult FE).

7.3 Subject and Performance Bursaries

7.3.1 Although this would not require additional resources, we would also reform the bursary scheme so that instead of being assessed on the basis of each university separately, the funding is allocated to each University on a per capita basis. The total funding for existing bursaries is approximately £300m. National guidelines would then be developed for the award of subject and performance bursaries, although implementation would be left to Universities themselves. These bursaries would be awarded on the basis of:

- a) Strategic subjects (to be determined on the basis of independent advice from bodies such as the Royal Society and the British Academy); and
- b) Academic performance while at University, to be determined by the University, who could give the bursary in terms of benefits such as books, equipment, travel grants etc. rather than cash if they so chose.

7.4 Breaking the Vicious Cycle of Teacher Shortage and Participation in the Shortage Subjects

7.4.1 The UK is held back by a lack of specialist teachers of STEM and other key subjects leading to low take up of these subjects at school and shortage of the best graduates in those subjects. This in turn leads to a shortage of specialist teachers in schools, and colleges and the cycle repeats.

7.4.2 Rather than a 'Golden Hello' which does not offer incentives for a graduate to stay in teaching, we propose that those graduates who go on to teach their shortage subject in state schools and colleges (or who work in other specified sectors) will have their student loans repaid for a set number of years.

Annex 1: Statistics

Applicants for Admission, UK Higher Education Institutions: 2005-07

Entry Year	2005			2006			2007		
	<i>Appls.</i>	<i>Accep.</i>	%	<i>Appls.</i>	<i>Accep.</i>	%	<i>Appls.</i>	<i>Accep.</i>	%
Total	522	405	78%	506	391	77%	534	413	77%
Men	239	188	79%	229	181	79%	214	190	79%
Women	283	217	77%	277	210	76%	295	224	76%
% Women	54%	54%		55%	54%		55%	54%	
UK domiciled students	445	360	81%	432	346	80%	454	365	80%
Overseas students*	75	45	58%	74	45	61%	80	49	61%
% from abroad*	15%	11%		15%	12%				

* Includes EU domiciled and non-EU domiciled applicants.

Sources: Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS), 2003-2008.

Student Numbers at UK Higher Education Institutions: 1994/95-2006/07

	1994/5	2006/07	% increase
<i>Undergraduate</i>	1,231,988	1,803,425	46%
full-time	946,919	1,208,645	28%
part-time	285,069	91,925	108%
<i>Postgraduate</i>	335,325	559,390	67%
full-time	129,711	243,070	87%
part-time	205,614	316,320	54%
All students	1,567,313	2,362,815	51%

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Learning and Skills Council Planned Outputs (numbers of learners):

Budget Line	2008/09	2009/10
Block A - Participation of which for planning purposes:		
School Sixth Forms	383,000	372,000
Academies	16,000	27,000
16-19 FE	786,000	786,000
16-18 Apprenticeships	213,000	223,000
Entry to Employment	75,000	75,000
Total Youth Participation	1,474,000	1,484,000
Adult Learner Responsive Sub Total of which for planning purposes:	1,626,000	1,469,000
Foundation Learning Tier	370,000	373,000
Skills for Life	839,000	866,000
Full Level 2	125,000	133,000
Full Level 3	121,000	123,000
Developmental Learning	551,000	271,000
Employer Responsive		
Apprenticeships	243,000	254,000
Train to Gain (includes FE NVQs)	900,000	949,000
Employer Responsive Sub Total of which for planning purposes:	1,143,000	1,203,000
Foundation Learning Tier	10,000	9,000
Skills for Life	357,000	382,000
Full Level 2 (Excluding Apprenticeships)	689,000	702,000
Full Level 3 (Excluding Apprenticeships)	118,000	130,000
Apprenticeships	243,000	254,000
Developmental Learning	12,000	12,000
Safeguarded Adult Learning	630,000	605,000
Total Adult and Employer Responsive including Safeguarded Adult Learning	3,399,000	3,277,000
Total European Social Fund Learners	124,000	117,000
<i>Of which estimated additional ESF learners</i>	<i>50,000</i>	<i>47,000</i>

Source LSC Grant Letter 18 November 2008

Annex 2: Consultees

The following external witnesses gave evidence to the working group:

The Association of Colleges

The National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education

The Local Government Association

The Confederation of British Industry

Universities UK

The Association of University Administrators

The 1994 Group

Association of Teachers and Lecturers

University and College Union

National Union of Students

Prof Ewart Keep, ESRC Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organisational Performance

Kevin Finnigan, Principal of Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College

Glossary

Further Education: Education and training delivered outside academic schooling, for example through FE Colleges or apprenticeships- often vocational, but can also include academic qualifications such as A-levels delivered through FE colleges.

HEFCE: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is a non-departmental public body of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, which has been responsible for the distribution of funding to Universities and Colleges of Higher and Further Education in England since 1992

Higher Education: Academic education at degree level or higher.

Higher Education Institution: Institution which teaches Higher Education degrees, in most cases a University but includes some Colleges of Higher Education

Leitch Report: 'Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World Class Skills', published in December 2006 which examines the UK's long-term skills needs.

The report recommends that the UK commits to become a world leader in skills by 2020. It advocated increasing skills attainment at all levels by 2020 so that:

- 95% of working age adults have basic skills in both functional literacy and numeracy - rising from 85% and 79% respectively in 2005
- More than 90% of adults are skilled to GCSE level or to vocational equivalents - rising from 69% in 2005
- The number of Apprentices in England is boosted to 400,000 each year, with improved quantity, quality and esteem for intermediate skills
- More than 40% of adults are skilled to graduate level and above - up from 29% in 2005

Level 1 Qualification: Basic skills, equivalent to GCSE Grades D-G, BTEC Introductory Diploma

Level 2 Qualification: Equivalent to 5 A-C grade GCSEs; 16-18 Apprenticeship.

Level 3 Qualification: Equivalent to 2 A-levels; Advanced Apprenticeship.

Level 4 Qualification: Equivalent to first degree, Certificate of Higher Education.

QAA: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) was established in 1997 to provide an integrated quality assurance service for United Kingdom higher education. The main activities of the QAA are to ensure the quality of education delivered in UK Universities and other institutions of Higher Education. This is done at an institutional level, using periodic reviews. These reviews involve the production of self-evaluation documents by the institutions, and audit visits of the institution by QAA auditors.

Train to Gain: Train to Gain (T2G), is a UK government funded initiative to deliver vocational training to employed individuals in the UK, primarily those in the 25+ age band who do not already have a Full Level 2 Qualification, via the Learning and Skills

Council (LSC). Qualifications gained are mostly NVQ levels one and two. The purported idea of the service is to offer skills advice and match business needs with Further Education and training providers. Train to Gain is designed to maximise on the effectiveness of the Skills Brokerage - Skills Brokers liaise with employers to identify their skill needs and then provide a matching service with appropriate training providers.

UUK: Universities UK began life as the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom (CVCP). It is a body which brings together Universities to discuss and lobby on issues of common interest to the Sector.

Investing in Talent, Building the Economy

Investing in Talent, Building the Economy

Policy Paper 90

This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.

Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.

Working Group on Adult, Further and Higher Education

Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every statement or every proposal in this Paper.

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