

F20 Electing Diverse MPs

Conference notes:

- I. The Liberal Democrats' commitment to eliminating all prejudice and discrimination based upon race, colour, religion, age, disability, sex or sexual orientation, and opposition to all forms of entrenched privilege and inequality.
- II. The need for the country's elected bodies and party structures to reflect the diversity of the society we live in.
- III. The insufficient diversity among the party's past and present representatives in the House of Commons.
- IV. The efforts made to date to increase diversity amongst the party's Westminster candidates, including the Campaign for Gender Balance and the Leadership Programme, which led to more than half of all candidates in target or held seats being women.
- V. The definition of under-represented groups in guidance to political parties in the Equality Act 2010 as inclusive of women, BAME, LGBT+ and disability.
- VI. With regret that despite the success of measures taken recently, there has been a limited impact on the proportion of individuals elected from under-represented groups and low socio-economic backgrounds.
- VII. That whilst selection of candidates is a matter devolved to the state parties, the Federal Party supports actions that are already being taken in England, Scotland and Wales to improve diversity amongst Liberal Democrat candidates and elected representatives.

Conference acknowledges that:

- a) The party's list of approved Westminster candidates does not fully reflect the communities we aim to serve.
- b) The party at all levels needs to ensure that candidates from under-represented groups are attracted to apply and then selected to stand for elected office.
- c) To have a more diverse set of MPs, the party must concentrate its efforts to increase the number of diverse candidates in the most winnable Westminster seats.

- d) Proposals will be coming forward on wider party diversity, including in party structures and local government, as part of the Federal Executive-led Governance Review to the Autumn Federal Conference.
- e) Our use of zipping in past EU elections shows that positive action can be very effective.
- f) Scottish Liberal Democrats do not allow seat selections to proceed unless 40% of the short-list is female, and that seats have been asked to re-advertise where their efforts to increase diversity were not deemed sufficient, and welcomes Scottish Leader Willie Rennie's working group which is considering measures to improve gender balance in future elections.

Conference recognises that:

- i) The party is required to consider the provisions of the Equality Act 2010, including Section 104, which permits political parties to take proportionate positive action to reduce inequality in the party's representation in Westminster, but does not allow shortlists for candidate selections to be restricted to individuals with protected characteristics other than by gender and disability.
- ii) In percentage terms, the largest single under-represented group is women, who make up 51% of the UK population.
- iii) Individuals may have more than one protected characteristic which should be taken into consideration in any intervention.
- iv) There can be minorities who are under-represented even within under-represented groups and that this should be taken into consideration in any intervention.
- v) Liberal Democrats continue to value candidates from over-represented groups, and will ensure that training and support is available for them.

Conference therefore resolves that to increase the proportion of Liberal Democrats from under-represented groups in the House of Commons the Liberal Democrats will:

- A. Continue and extend support for individuals seeking approval or selection as Westminster candidates from under-represented groups, thus building on the work that has been done in the past including the Leadership Programme.
- B. Create a '2020 Candidate Diversity Task Force' to co-ordinate and monitor party-wide efforts to actively recruit parliamentary candidates from under-represented groups from both inside and outside the Party. This will include a focus on recruiting candidates with more than one protected characteristic and from minorities who are under-represented even within under-represented groups. The Task Force will work

with ALDC and our cohort of councillors, recognising that, whilst local government is important in its own right, it can also be a good recruiting ground for potential Parliamentary candidates. It will report to the Federal Executive, working with the Diversity Engagement Group as appropriate. The Task Force will have one representative each from the three state parties, the Federal Executive, ALDC, EMLD, LDDA, LGBT+, LDW, Liberal Youth and PCA and be led by a Candidate Diversity Champion appointed by the Leader and the President. The Federal Executive Report to Conference will include updates on the work of the Candidate Diversity Task Force.

- C. Through the work of the 2020 Candidate Diversity Task Force and Candidate Diversity Champion, in association with SAOs, AOs, ALDC and parliamentary candidates, examine the party's approval and selection processes, and the role of PPCs after selection, to identify barriers that may exist for under-represented groups, including those identified in the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Selection, as well as disadvantaged groups including those from a low socio-economic background. Solutions will be proposed to overcome these barriers; to seek to make proposals to increase diversity at all levels in the party; and to bring forward proposals on how to address the emotional, practical and financial challenges facing candidates from under-represented groups.
- D. Campaign to amend the Equality Act 2010 to remove the restrictions on shortlists for candidate selections for people from under-represented groups.

Conference recommends that:

- 1. Any local party should be able to vote for an all-women shortlist or an all-disabled shortlist, or reserve some spaces for candidates from other under-represented groups.
- 2. As a minimum the three state parties should follow the Canadian Liberal Party practice of requiring the relevant Local Party to provide documented evidence to their region or state (as relevant) of a thorough search for potential candidates from under-represented groups before being granted permission to start their Westminster selection process; this should apply in those seats where the Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate received more than 15% of the vote in the 2015 General Election but the seat is not held by the Liberal Democrats.
- 3. In Scotland, Wales and each Region of the English Party, take measures to move towards a slate of candidates that reflects the diversity of the state or region, in line with the Leader's ambition of having at least 50% women candidates and at least 10% BAME candidates across Great Britain and set out to each Local Party the options they can take to improve diversity, including the use of 'banding', and the potential to reserve places on shortlists for people from under-represented groups within the terms of Section 104 of the Equalities Act. State Parties should report on the implementation of each of these measures.

4. If any sitting MP elected in 2015 decides not to contest the next General Election, his replacement should be selected from an all-women shortlist.
5. In Scotland, Wales, and each Region of the English Party where there are two or more non-held seats which gained 25% or more of the General Election vote in May 2015, the regions should designate as a minimum of one seat not held by a Liberal Democrat MP to select its candidate from an all-women shortlist. Where these seats are affected by boundary changes, the party's rules on re-running selection processes will apply.
6. In addition to the one seat identified in 5. above, where the Liberal Democrat parliamentary result at the 2015 General Election was in the 10% of seats which had the highest percentage vote without returning a Liberal Democrat MP, the selection shortlist for the 2020 General Election should, subject to sufficient applications, include at least two candidates from under-represented groups.