

Investing in Excellence

**Policies for Education
in England and Wales**



Policy Paper 21

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Summary

Education is the key to equipping every single person with the knowledge and skills they need to lead free and fulfilling lives. It increases self-confidence, encourages independence and promotes initiative. It makes possible a tolerant and civilised society and provides the bedrock for economic success. That is why education is the Liberal Democrats' number one spending priority.

Liberal Democrats would invest an additional £2 billion in education. If necessary, we would put an extra penny on the standard rate of income tax to pay for this essential investment.

Our top priority is to provide early years' education for all three and four year olds whose parents want it. We also recognise that it is important to provide extra resources for schools to invest in books and equipment, reduce class sizes, and support pupils with special educational needs. We would extend opportunities for lifelong learning.

Making the Best Start

Liberal Democrats have long argued for an expansion of high quality early years' education. It is the first step to achieving high educational standards in later life. Early years' education would therefore have first claim to our extra investment. *We would provide high quality early years education for every three and four year old whose parents want it.*

Enabling Schools

Giving pupils the best start is essential; but, unless they can build on their early years learning, it will be wasted. Schools and teachers must have the tools they need to teach. Liberal Democrats would:

- Work to reduce all primary school class sizes to no more than 30.
- Upgrade school buildings.
- Invest in new equipment and teaching aids, including Information Technology, to ensure that each child has access to the best facilities.
- Replace the National Curriculum with a 'slimmed down' Minimum Curriculum Entitlement to enable all schools to develop more challenging curriculums.
- Establish Records of Achievement to allow each pupil from the earliest age to build up and store a set of nationally accredited qualifications backed by details of other achievements.

- Provide parents with clear information about the progress of their child and on the school the child attends.
- Reform the school inspection process and strengthen the links between inspection and advice.
- Improve procedures for dealing with failing schools.
- Place a *statutory* requirement on Local Education Authorities to produce statements on special needs within six months.
- Advocate a four stage plan for dealing with bad behaviour in schools with appropriate support both in and outside school.

A Framework for Schools

Liberal Democrats aim to improve the accountability and effectiveness of the education service. Wherever possible, power should be devolved to schools. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) would be responsible for those functions which cannot be undertaken by individual schools on their own, with central government responsible for those functions which cannot be undertaken by individual schools or LEAs. We would:

- Give all schools more independence and allow them to develop their own style and ethos.
- Develop 'light-touch' LEAs to work in partnership with local schools.
- Return Grant Maintained schools and City Technology Colleges to 'light-touch' LEAs and abolish the Funding Agency for Schools.
- Establish a clear framework for school governors setting out their roles and responsibilities.
- Involve parents, teachers and pupils in all aspects of education and extend Home/School Links and seek to develop Home/School partnership agreements.

Teaching Excellence

Liberal Democrats want to turn teachers into the envy of the professional world rather than the poor relation. We want to build a professional career ladder for teachers which encourages teachers to stay on and to teach in difficult areas, and provides for different skill routes for heads and deputies. We would:

- Establish a General Teaching Council which would control entry in to the profession and clarify and monitor professional standards of practice.

- Expand opportunities for Continuing Professional Development for all teachers to meet both school and personal career targets.
- Reform the salary structure of teachers to reflect achievement and responsibility through a programme of continually assessed professional development - not by years of service.
- Re-establish an independent Pay Review Body which would review entry salaries, the distribution of responsibility and payments for special skills.
- Ensure that repeated poor performance by teachers is remedied by retraining or re-deployment, wherever possible. We will not however shy away from dismissal or, in the most serious cases, de-registration from the GTC.

Learning for Life

Education should be a lifelong process. Liberal Democrats aim to widen access, improve the quality of courses and encourage parity of esteem between academic and vocational courses. We would:

- Give every person an entitlement to a period of re-training or education to be taken at a time of their choice during their adult life.
- Provide all 16-19 year olds in employment with the equivalent of at least two days a week in 'off the job' education or training.
- Create a Learning Investment Partnership to generate extra funds to improve quality and provide education and training to more students.
- Ensure that the fees of all students on approved courses in further or higher education, studying full-time or part-time, are funded by the state.
- Replace the Government's Student Loans scheme with a flexible and fair student learning repayment scheme.
- Introduce a qualifications framework encompassing all post-14 education and training in which individuals can build up credits in a range of academic and vocational disciplines.
- Establish a new Quality Council to ensure that all institutions provide high quality courses, review standards and develop a process of continuing improvement.

The Liberal Democrat Approach

“The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.”

Preamble to the Liberal Democrat Constitution

1.0.1 Liberal Democrats seek a society made up of self-reliant individuals able to take control of their lives, to make their own choices and to fulfil their own potential. Each person valued, each different and each respectful of all others. Each person entitled to be heard, each accepting responsibility for his or her actions and each contributing to the nation’s worth and self-confidence.

1.0.2 We are not born self-reliant: we have to be equipped for self-reliance. Education is the key to equipping every single person with the knowledge and skills they need to lead free and fulfilling lives. Education increases self-confidence, encourages independence and promotes initiative. It makes possible a tolerant and civilised society. It liberates and nourishes the brains and talents of our people, unleashes creative and artistic talent and brings about sustainable economic prosperity. Education must be made available to everyone because without it no one can escape from the three evils of poverty, ignorance or conformity.

1.0.3 We are sick and tired of hearing the Government claim it has ‘improved education’. Governments do not improve education: teachers do. Governments do not know how to teach: they should not set out to change the culture of

teaching. If that is needed, teachers must do it themselves. We must give teachers the tools and trust them to finish the job.

1.0.4 Education concerns most the people who receive it and it must be responsive to their needs. Our policies ensure that greater choice is made available to parents and pupils; that opportunity is not merely empty rhetoric but a reality for all; that excellence is not just an aspiration but the common expectation.

“Education is the key to equipping every single person with the knowledge and skills they need to lead free and fulfilling lives.”

1.0.5 It has become a cliché for politicians to declare that education is their first priority. It’s easy to be cynical about their comforting promises and warm words. So what is different about the Liberal Democrats? Why should anyone believe that we would do any better than the others? For us, education has not suddenly become a priority, it always was. It is at the core of our philosophy.

1.0.6 Liberal Democrats would give each child the best start in life by providing high quality early years education for every three and four year old whose parents want it. We would ensure that each child is taught in classes that are manageable and classrooms that are comfortable and well equipped. We would provide opportunities for adults to come back to update old skills or a second chance to learn new ones. In investing in education we invest in our country; we invest in our people; we invest in our future.

1.1 The Liberal Democrat Investment Plan

1.1.1 The funding of education remains a vital issue. We recognise that investment on its own will not improve the nation's education and training but, without it, it will never be improved. More important is how that investment is used. It will be necessary to set some priorities and to make hard decisions in the first year. All programmes take time to implement. Our immediate priorities would be as follows:

Top Priority

- Providing early years education for all three and four year olds whose parents want it.

Other Priorities

- Providing extra resources for schools to invest in books, equipment and Continuing Professional Development to equip teachers with the tools they need to provide high quality education.

- Reducing primary school class sizes.
- Supporting pupils with special educational needs.
- Extending lifelong learning opportunities to:
 - Provide all 16-19 year olds at least two days a week education and training.
 - Give every citizen an entitlement to a period of re-training or education at a time of their choice in their adult lives
 - Improve the quality of further and higher education.

1.1.2 Liberal Democrats make education our number one spending priority. We would invest in education in two ways. First, we would invest an additional £2 billion on education, paid for, if necessary, by putting an additional penny on income tax. Second, we would inject into the capital programme an extra £500 million to start to tackle the backlog of repairs.

Making The Best Start

2.0.1 If every child is to realise his or her potential, we must give each child the best start. Early years education is the first step to achieving high educational standards in later life. Every pound spent on high quality under fives care and education reaps rewards in the future for both the individual and society.

2.0.2 In the last seventeen years of Conservative government too many parents and children have been let down. Two thirds of three year olds and a quarter of all four year olds are still not provided with any early years education. The Government's latest initiative - the nursery voucher - is an underfunded gimmick which will not meet the need there is. Liberal Democrats have long argued for an expansion of high quality early years education. We believe such an expansion will deliver educational, social and economic benefits to the nation. Liberal Democrats would:

- *Guarantee high quality early years provision for every three and four year old whose parents want it.* The majority of this programme could be in place within the lifetime of one Parliament (five years). It costs money to expand provision, train more staff, improve buildings and purchase teaching materials. *Liberal Democrats are committed to spending an extra £2 billion on education, to which early years education would have first claim.*
- *Promote a variety of early years provision.* We would support a range of organisations - public, private and voluntary - to ensure that choice exists. We would work to extend home education schemes for under fives.
- *Work for high standards in early years education.* We would establish criteria for care and for the curriculum, as well as for staffing and premises, including access to outdoor space, while allowing local flexibility. We would ensure that local provision is well co-ordinated, meets the required standards set by the Children Act and includes provision for those with special educational needs.

- *Provide a well co-ordinated approach to meet individual needs.* We would place a legal duty on Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to ensure that every three and four year old has access to high quality education. We would integrate services for the under fives under the umbrella of the Department for Education and Employment. LEAs would be required to make detailed proposals of expansion of provision to meet need in their Development Plans.

2.1 Provision for the Early Years

2.1.1 Liberal Democrats guarantee early education provision for every three and four year old whose parents want it. This provision would be for a minimum of five half days or equivalent per week for each child. We would place a statutory obligation on LEAs to ensure that this entitlement is met.

2.1.2 Parents are a child's first educators and their involvement is vital in deciding what form of provision is best for their child. They need to be fully informed of the choices available to them. LEAs would be responsible for explaining the various options, so that parents can do what is best for their child. We would encourage parents to be actively involved in the assessment and support of their child's development and progress.

2.1.3 As far as possible, children with special educational needs should be given enough support to enable them to attend mainstream groups. LEAs would take responsibility for planning, co-ordinating and developing a programme of provision for the unified education and care of under fives. The LEAs strategic role would include monitoring and support, including the extension of Home Learning schemes, and would tie in with the requirement to meet special needs.

2.1.4 The practice of admitting four year olds to reception classes would only be acceptable where

this does not undermine existing nursery education and where the minimum requirements for quality are met. We would improve staffing ratios in classes for 5 and 6 year olds. This would allow for more effective continuity at transfer and for the maintenance of links with parents.

2.1.5 With the introduction of Sunday retail opening and the development of more flexible forms of work, it is important that care provision is more widely available than just from Monday to Friday. We would ensure that employed parents and those on approved training courses could claim tax relief on the cost of child care by any approved child minder or nursery. In response to demand we would expand extended day care; the development of combined nursery centres and after-school care would be actively supported. (See Policy Paper 10, *Equal Citizens* (1995), for more details.)

2.2 Guaranteeing Quality

2.2.1 The key role for LEAs is to promote quality. Local advisory services must ensure that the curriculum provides worthwhile experiences for the children. LEAs would be responsible for maintaining a register of the providers of under fives education to ensure safety and would take the lead in meeting the duties of local authorities to under fives specified in the 1989 Children Act.

2.2.2 It is vital that quality controls are rigorous. The inspection system we propose for schools would apply to the education of under fives in all settings (state, voluntary, or private)

where there is receipt of state funding.

2.2.3 Under fives must not be taught in run-down, poorly-equipped facilities. Premises used for nursery education would be subject to the same audit by LEAs that we propose for all school buildings (see section 3.2) and would be expected to meet minimum space regulations (see section 3.2.3).

2.2.4 Liberal Democrats would ensure that early years education is of a high quality by:

- Retaining the current recommended staffing ratio of 1:13.
- Ensuring that any teaching class of under fives has one teacher and one qualified nursery assistant.
- Ensuring that teachers entering the profession and working with under fives are trained to graduate level as a minimum with a specialism in the early years. Appropriately trained staff would be available for other types of provision for the under fives.

2.2.5 Small and scattered communities in rural areas face particular problems. We would make available extra resources to provide mobile teams of qualified staff who can support early years education both in school and in other settings.

2.2.6 Some teachers with expertise in early years education would be deployed as advisers across all services for the under fives. Nursery schools would assist in providing work experience for secondary school pupils, as well as training placements and practical in-service training.

Empowering Schools

3.0.1 Giving pupils the best start is essential. Unless they can build on their early years learning, it will be wasted. Liberal Democrats want to provide every child with a broad educational foundation to build on for the rest of their life. This requires class sizes that are manageable, classrooms that are comfortable and well equipped and a curriculum appropriate to the needs of individual children. It needs proper monitoring of standards and additional support for those pupils with special educational needs.

3.1 Reducing Class Sizes

3.1.1 At present, many classes are far too large for satisfactory teaching and assessment. More than 1 million children are taught in classes of over 30. Of these, over 100,000 are taught in classes of 36 or more. As a consequence, learning suffers and bad behaviour exacerbates. Liberal Democrats believe that the younger the pupils are, the more time and attention they need from their teachers.

3.1.2 We would work to ensure that primary school registration classes normally contain no more than 30 pupils. Ultimately no primary school class should contain more than 30. This would require better use of current resources, more investment and more teachers. Only Liberal Democrats are prepared to provide the funding to achieve these goals, which are central to raising standards.

3.2 Investing in School Buildings and Equipment

3.2.1 The environment in which children learn and teachers teach is central to raising achievement. With so-called 'temporary' classrooms in permanent use, it is unlikely that either staff or pupils will give their best to education. Despite this, the Conservatives have done nothing to halt or reverse the massive deterioration in the quality of school buildings. Capital spending on schools is now, in real terms, roughly half what it was 20 years ago.

3.2.2 The state of Britain's schools is a national disgrace. The backlog of repair and maintenance just to make schools safe stands at £3.2 billion. Three quarters of a million children are taught in huts or mobile classrooms. Over 600 primary schools still have outside toilets. Whilst Local Management of Schools (LMS) has allowed schools to take action promptly to deal with minor repairs, major work has been left undone. The government has recently waived the recommendations for space in schools (both internal and external). This is a retrograde step. There should be minimum requirements for working and recreational space. We would reinstate the recommendations and review them with a view to setting minimum standards.

3.2.3 LEAs would be given responsibility for ensuring that all school buildings meet at least the same standards which are expected in the workplace, under health and safety legislation. We would require all LEAs to undertake a building audit of all schools, on a four yearly cycle, to identify necessary work. The audit would include details of risk assessment of security arrangements, disabled access to buildings and environmental aspects such as energy savings. Funds would then be set aside by central government for repairing serious shortfalls. It will take years to catch up with need: we would boost the capital programme to make a substantial start to refurbishing schools.

3.2.4 If standards are to improve, up-to-date equipment, books and teaching aids will be required. The Tories have shamefully neglected the basic resourcing of schools, but they never cease to complain about standards. Liberal Democrats are determined that these needs will be met and we would encourage schools to make use of their additional funding for this purpose.

3.3 The Minimum Curriculum Entitlement

3.3.1 All children need a broad and balanced curriculum which combines academic and practical activities; covers the humanities, sciences, technology and the arts; and develops creativity and social understanding. The National Curriculum introduced in the 1988 Education Act is over-prescriptive and leaves little room for a school to develop its own character and take advantage of local variations. The present system is restricting innovation and development because it ignores the living element of a curriculum.

3.3.2 Liberal Democrats would replace the current National Curriculum with a Minimum Curriculum Entitlement (MCE). All children from the ages of five to sixteen would be entitled to receive it, whether they study in a state, independent or voluntary school, or in the home. It would be a child's guarantee that their programmes of study would allow them to transfer between schools, undertake national examinations and give them a sound grounding in all aspects of the curriculum.

3.3.3 Under a slimmed down curriculum and a more flexible and properly resourced system of LMS, schools would find it easier to develop more challenging curriculums. Schools would no longer be constrained by very detailed prescriptions which stifle initiative. They would be enabled to put behind them the obsession with 'box-ticking' attainment targets and concentrate on the quality of programmes of study. They could develop their own specialities, so long as they fulfilled the requirement of the Minimum Curriculum Entitlement for all pupils. The Minimum Curriculum Entitlement would:

- Include skills in spoken and written English, maths, science, citizenship, information technology and, at secondary level, a modern foreign language.
- Extend the teaching of a modern foreign language into primary schools wherever this is practicable.
- Allow each school to produce its own detailed curriculum in consultation with the LEA.

“Under a slimmed down curriculum and a more flexible and properly resourced system of LMS, schools would find it easier to develop more challenging curriculums.”

3.3.4 The school inspection process that we propose (see section 3.7) would monitor how schools are delivering the MCE and how they are developing curriculums in subject areas not covered by the MCE such as the arts and the humanities. Schools would be strongly encouraged to build links into the curriculum from local industry and business, and to exploit the local environment as a teaching resource (for example by going into the workplace).

3.3.5 An understanding of various religions, and of non-religious views of life, can enable children to respect others and to understand differences without prejudice. Liberal Democrats would ensure that religious education syllabuses take account of all the principal religions practised in the country. Pupils should become well informed about all the main traditions of belief in our society.

3.3.6 Assemblies, which may have a religious character, can be useful in terms of binding the school together. However, the recently introduced requirement for daily assemblies of a 'broadly Christian character' has not, in the opinion of most headteachers, proved workable. We would:

- Reform it and increase the freedom of schools to hold assemblies which can reflect the religious and other traditions of the community they serve.
- Retain the right of parents to withdraw their children as at present.

3.4 Information Technology

3.4.1 Information Technology (IT) provides the opportunity to transform the learning process. It could lead to a top-quality, multi-chance network of lifelong learning, in which education takes place at home, at work, even at leisure, and in which a school is less a building where schooling takes place, but more the centre of an education network available to every age group.

“Records of Achievement would enable each pupil to build up and store a set of nationally accredited qualifications backed by details of other achievements.”

3.4.2 Cuts in education spending have left schools unable to keep up with the revolution in information technology. They often struggle with inadequate resources and a lack of qualified staff. Substantial investment is needed in capital equipment, with a rolling programme of maintenance and replacement, to address these issues. The key task for government is to set the framework of policy in which the information society can flourish - and within which access for all is made a priority. Liberal Democrats would:

- Ensure that sufficient funds are made available for schools to have and maintain the minimum level of equipment regarded as necessary for the effective use of IT, and that initial and continuing teacher training takes account of IT.
- Establish a standing committee, with members drawn from industry, government, LEAs and the teaching unions, to advise on the minimum standards necessary and to give advice to schools on the likely developments in the technology and how they could be incorporated into the curriculum.
- Work with the telecommunications industry to ensure that each school has access to digital communications in order to allow multiple access to the Information Superhighway.

3.5 National Records of Achievement

3.5.1 Liberal Democrats aim to provide the best possible education for every individual pupil. This requires careful monitoring of the progress of each child throughout his or her schooling. The Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs), established at the ages of 7, 11 and 14, will not achieve this. They do little to draw attention to an individual pupil's needs and testing 7-year olds has proved to be time-absorbing, bureaucratic and uninformative. They have become vehicles for returning to a restricted curriculum and for highlighting the achievements of the bright at the expense of the average and below average. Little information of use to parents has been produced.

3.5.2 *We propose to give every individual pupil a Record of Achievement.* This would enable each pupil, from the earliest age, to build up and store a set of nationally accredited qualifications backed by details of other achievements. It would detail the progress a pupil makes in their school life. We would instruct the Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority to develop a ‘bank’ of approved tests. On the model of the Associated Board instrumental examinations, teachers would enter pupils for the test when they judged that they were ready. Successful pupils would be awarded certificates confirming their achievements. These would be stored in their Record of Achievement. Schools would be able to publish their successes in their prospectus. A system similar to these proposals is already well established in Scotland where it has pleased teachers, parents and pupils.

3.5.3 We accept that the ages of 7 and 11 are important stages in a child's education because they often mark transfers to a new school. We would specify that at transfer the Record of Achievement should involve a more detailed assessment of the child's progress to date, including any special needs and plans for the future, in which the child and parents would be involved. A similar process would take place at 14 (see section 6.1).

3.6 Information for Parents

3.6.1 Liberal Democrats believe that parents should have access to information on the progress of their child and on the school the child attends. Our proposals for Records of Achievement (see section 3.5) would provide parents with nationally moderated information about the attainment of their children. This goes much further than is currently available and would be provided by schools in a way that can be easily understood by parents and employers.

“Liberal Democrats would alter the school inspection process and re-establish a link between inspection and advice.”

3.6.2 Parents are quite right to want more information about the school. Currently, the Government requires LEAs to publish league tables of examination results but it refuses to accept that these tables should reflect the 'value added' approach. Liberal Democrats would:

- Provide parents and the public with access to clear information, including details of the progress a school makes in its development plan, the qualifications pupils had gained and the improvements the school had made year on year.
- Ensure a 'value-added' approach to measuring achievement, demonstrating progress through the certificates which pupils gain.
- Guarantee at least one report per year, detailing pupils' progress. Parents should also be able to make judgements on schools, by visiting schools both on 'open days' and on informal occasions.

3.6.3 Liberal Democrats endorse the right of parents to educate their children at home so long as a satisfactory educational programme can be agreed with the LEA. We would provide more information and greater support, such as access to local school and college facilities, to parents who decide to educate their children from home.

3.7 School Monitoring and Development

3.7.1 School inspections report on: the quality of education provided by the staff; the standards achieved by the pupils; the efficiency and effectiveness of the school's management; and the adequacy or otherwise of resources. The inspection system should celebrate success and share good practice as well as tackle failure. However, tackling failure and assisting schools to act upon inspectors' recommendations requires a clear link between inspection and advisory services. Government cuts in recent years have weakened the LEA advisory services and broken the link between advice and support.

3.7.2 Liberal Democrats would alter the school inspection process and re-establish a link between inspection and advice. We would:

- Arrange for each inspection team of Ofsted trained inspectors to be led by an HMI (replacing Registered Inspectors).
- End the current "bidding" system for inspections and pay all inspectors on a nationally agreed salary scale.
- Extend the inspection cycle from four to six years while strengthening arrangements which enable headteachers, governors, the LEA and the Secretary of State to call for an interim inspection.
- Require each school, as part of its Institutional Development Plan (IDP), to include details of its own proposals for self-review. Such proposals should show how the school intends, among other issues, to tackle concerns expressed in any inspection report and how it intends to use funds for in-service development and for advisory support to meet these aims.
- Require LEAs to monitor the implementation of each school's IDP, including its self review process and use of funds for in-set and advisory services. (LEAs may also provide advisory

services but schools would be allowed to buy advice from other sources.)

- Require LEAs to disseminate information to schools about good practice in school management, subject teaching, consultancy, training and other services.

3.7.3 Liberal Democrats would develop the role of Ofsted and make it more accountable to Parliament. We would:

- Require Ofsted to inspect, monitor and report on the work of LEAs.
- Introduce in Parliament an annual debate on the work of Ofsted with a vote upon its report.

3.8 Pupils with Special Needs

3.8.1 All pupils, whatever their educational needs, should have equal access to educational opportunities. 'Special Needs' is in danger of becoming yet another euphemism for learning disability. Most experts agree this term should embrace the needs of very able pupils with special talents for academic work, for music, art or sport as well as disabled children.

3.8.2 Liberal Democrats welcome the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (SEN), whilst noting that it fails to address the needs of very able pupils with special talents. Experience has shown that all pupils with special educational needs, and their parents and teachers, are suffering because of the Government's failure to provide sufficient funds to support the requirements of the Code of Practice. We would:

- Provide funding for pupils with special educational needs in addition to the delegated schools budget.
- Ensure that resources follow individual special needs pupils to reflect any costs incurred in relation to their statements.
- Revise the Code of Practice to take account of the needs of very able pupils.

3.8.3 Liberal Democrats would involve pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools

wherever possible. Some pupils will continue to need special facilities, including residential schools. With such a wide range of special educational needs, it is essential that the widest possible choice in provision is available. This requires a range of educational and training opportunities in integrated, specialist or residential settings. LEAs could establish Special Needs Bursaries to fund places for children in independent schools where facilities may be more appropriate to their individual needs.

3.8.4 We would place a statutory requirement on each LEA to set up its own SEN Service to:

- Maintain a register of children with learning disabilities within its area.
- Provide an earmarked resource for each child in its area, based on need.
- Ensure that disabled people entry to any school named within their statement, and advise schools on how to meet each pupil's individual needs. Schools would be able to use earmarked money to purchase services for such children from other sources, including other LEAs.

3.8.5 In drawing up statements of special educational needs, it is important that parents are involved and that the statement starts from an assessment of the individual pupil. Where agencies, such as social services and the health authority, work with the LEA on drafting the statements, they would be expected to share the responsibility for the issue of the statement. Schools should call on parents' and pupils' experience to devise means of eliminating physical or institutional constraints, such as advice on medication, on lifting and on physical capability. Wherever possible other pupils should be involved in helping to overcome a pupil's disability. In this way integration will become accepted as normal and an important step will be taken to break down the stigma of disability and fear felt by many about it.

3.8.6 Liberal Democrats are concerned about the lack of proper provision for the large number of pupils who have special needs, but not of a severity to warrant a formal statement. There is a danger that some children will be statemented when it is inappropriate, in order to secure them funds. We would reinforce the Code of Practice so that

schools, having quantified the need and detail of the provision required, could apply for funds to the LEA's SEN Service. In this way, available resources would be clearly directed towards those who need them most, rather than submerged into the LMS funding formula.

3.8.7 Liberal Democrats are committed to lifelong learning. Since the education process can often take considerably longer for some students with learning disabilities, it is vital that we establish an entitlement to education beyond 19, and an entitlement to two years' additional education or training for those disabled as adults. Our proposals in section 3.5 for Records of Achievement and in section 6.1 for a post-14 qualifications framework would enable pupils with learning disabilities to progress at their own pace.

3.9 Dealing with Bad Behaviour

3.9.1 There has been an alarming increase in pupil exclusions and in the number of pupils showing serious emotional, behavioural and disciplinary problems. Liberal Democrat proposals for Home/School Links as set out in section 4.4 would establish the responsibilities of pupils and parents as well as their rights. We advocate a four stage plan which allows schools to have as much room for manoeuvre as possible:

- The problem should first be dealt with, as far as possible, within the classroom. Teachers need special support in developing their skills and strategies for this.
- It may be appropriate at the next stage to exclude pupils from the classroom for short periods, but to sustain their education at the school, perhaps in a special unit there.
- If the problem persists, it may become necessary to exclude them indefinitely from the school and to sustain them in a unit, either at the school or elsewhere, creating a special educational plan for them, but this is to be regarded as a last resort.

- Return the pupil to school and classroom as soon as appropriate.

3.9.2 When a pupil is excluded from a school the governors must be kept informed of what is happening. When this occurs, the pupil's funding must be transferred back to the LEA at the time of the exclusion. Both parents and schools have an interest in the process which may not be identical. The rights and responsibilities of each need to be established at the various stages.

“Liberal Democrat proposals for Home/School Links would establish the responsibilities of pupils and parents as well as their rights.”

3.9.3 Liberal Democrats recognise that schools need to work in conjunction with the parents as well as with the Social Services, the Police, Probation and Youth Services to tackle the problems of disaffected young people. Worrying trends toward violence need to be stemmed. We would:

- Take measures to instil good behaviour through our early years education policy programme.
- Actively promote teaching on citizenship and community responsibility from an early age.
- Require every school to develop a policy on appropriate behaviour agreed formally with teachers, pupils and parents and enforced by staff using proper guidelines and policies of listening to victims, witnesses and bullies.
- Encourage schools to set up peer-led schemes for dealing with bullying, as has been successfully implemented in several pioneering schools (e.g. through drama.)
- Promote programmes in which various agencies are invited to work with pupils and teachers to enable both to gain an understanding of the problems and to develop solutions.

A Framework for Schools

4.0.1 Liberal Democrats aim to establish a framework for schools that will meet the needs of all pupils. We would give schools greater freedom to develop their own style and ethos in order to enhance diversity and choice. We want to develop ‘light-touch’ LEAs to work in partnership with local schools. We would improve local accountability, involving parents, teachers, pupils and the wider community in all aspects of education.

4.0.2 The Tory rhetoric of 'parental choice' has been used to justify a reduction in the role of Local Education Authorities (LEAs), but it is not clear what new choices are being created. For many parents, 'parental choice' has not resulted in parents choosing schools but in schools choosing pupils. Diversity of provision within a school, rather than creating false choices between schools, is the way to achieve excellence for all. Liberal Democrats would:

- Develop 'light-touch' LEAs to work in partnership with local schools.
- Give all schools more independence and allow them to develop their own style and ethos.
- Return Grant Maintained Schools and City Technology Colleges to 'light-touch' LEAs and abolish the Funding Agency for Schools.
- Establish a clear framework for school governors setting out their roles and responsibilities.
- Involve parents, teachers, governors and pupils in all aspects of education.

4.1 The Role of LEAs

4.1.1 The 1988 and 1993 Education Acts gave hundreds of new powers to the Secretary of State, centralising education and distancing decision

making from local schools. A plethora of unaccountable quangos now makes decisions on all aspects of education ranging from the allocation of funding to what books must be read in the classroom. Wherever possible, powers should be devolved to schools. LEAs should be responsible for those functions which cannot be undertaken by individual schools on their own, with central government only responsible for those functions which cannot be undertaken by individual schools or LEAs. Thus we see an important strategic role for new, reformed, 'light-touch' LEAs. These are:

- *Long term strategic planning to determine the provision of places and to respond to changes in local demography.* This includes the allocation of funding between the different education sectors, establishing the funding formula for Locally Managed Schools (LMS) and the administration of admissions policy. We would introduce legislation to overturn the 'Greenwich judgement' which restricts LEAs in relation to admission policies.
- *Continuous monitoring of standards and the development of high quality provision.* School improvement will come largely from what happens within schools themselves. There should therefore be a strong system of school self-evaluation, validated by LEAs. LEAs would have the power, on the recommendation of inspectors (see section 3.7), to intervene where quality is not being maintained. They could appoint extra governors or, ultimately, an Educational Association to run the school. Similarly, Ofsted should be able to recommend the intervention of the Secretary of State when LEAs are not discharging their function properly. We would extend the role of Ofsted so as to monitor how LEAs are discharging their duties.
- *Arbitrating in disputes between pupils, parents, staff and governors.* The Secretary of State should, however, act as a 'court of final appeal'.

4.1.2 LEAs would maintain responsibility for those non-statutory services, such as youth facilities, as at present. They would also be able to offer other services but it would be left to individual schools to choose whether to purchase such services. Similarly, schools may wish to share services such as peripatetic music teaching and mother-tongue teaching.

4.1.3 Liberal Democrats would enhance the provision of education in rural areas: loss of rural schools leads to the general impoverishment of the fabric of country life. We support co-operation between schools in rural areas, particularly those forming clusters or federations and we believe that these schools should seek to involve local people with relevant expertise as a valuable supplement to trained teachers. (See Policy Paper 5, *Reclaiming the Countryside* (1994) for more details.)

4.1.4 Liberal Democrats are in favour of schools developing their own style and ethos to meet individual pupils' curriculum needs. However, we are opposed to selection on the grounds of ability or the use of parental interviews that shut off access to schools. We therefore oppose the Conservatives' plans for the wholesale expansion of grammar schools. However, whether or not a selective system is appropriate for a community is, ultimately a matter for the community, not Whitehall to decide. We would therefore leave it up to each local community, through its LEA, to assess the impact of grammar schools on local educational provision and to act accordingly. Our proposals on the possible use of advisory referenda for public consultation on local issues are set out in Federal White Paper 6, *Here We Stand* (1993).

4.1.5 All the major faiths continue to maintain a key interest in education. In many parts of the country, particularly in rural areas, church schools make up a major part of educational provision. Liberal Democrats believe that the Government should begin a dialogue with all the major faiths about the role they wish to play in education over the coming decades. We welcome the rejection by the churches of the Government's attempts to create a 'fast track' to move their schools into the Grant Maintained sector.

4.1.6 Where any of the major faiths wish to establish publicly funded voluntary schools, they must demonstrate substantial community support. Such schools must provide the Minimum Curriculum Entitlement and satisfy the LEA that their programmes of study are acceptable. The decision as to whether such provision is viable would rest with the LEA in each area. There should be a final right of appeal to the Secretary of State. The DfEE should publish, after the widest possible consultation, the criteria on which such schools would qualify for voluntary aided or controlled status. The criteria should require an acceptable curriculum which included delivery of the Minimum Curriculum Entitlement.

4.2 Local Management of Schools

4.2.1 Local Management of Schools (LMS) is now well established, a policy which Liberal Democrats helped pioneer in Cambridgeshire. We would ensure all LEAs developed a 'hands-off' approach, leaving schools to decide on their own priorities. We would significantly increase funding for education and resource LMS adequately. Schools must remain free to make their own choices as to how to spend this increased funding, whether on staff, equipment or in some other manner.

4.2.2 LMS gives most LEA schools an autonomy similar to GM schools. Since we are committed to increasing the funding of all schools and granting them all greater control over their own budgets, there is no reason why any school should remain outside the democratic accountability of 'light-touch' LEAs. Hence, we would free GM schools from remote bureaucratic quangos and bring them within the family of local schools. This would leave the Funding Agency of Schools without a function, so we would abolish it. The issue of GM schools that were formerly voluntary aided should be discussed by all the partners involved at the local level - school, diocese, trust and LEA. We would not prevent schools from returning to their former status.

4.3 School Governors

4.3.1 LMS places a lot of responsibility on governors. It makes enormous demands on their time and commitment. Their accountability, however, remains ambiguous. Equally, they are often confused as to the resources available to them to discharge their considerable duties. Liberal Democrats support the introduction of a Government endorsed guide to principles and procedure for governing bodies which will clarify the respective roles of heads and governors. The governing body's role should include:

- Controlling school budgets, staffing, and meeting health and safety standards.
- Establishing a schools' style and ethos.
- Creating an institutional development plan, including the preparation of an environmental policy, and ensuring that the headteacher implements the plan.
- Ensuring through the Home/School Links (see section 4.4) that the schools' aims and plans are communicated to parents and discussed with them regularly.
- Integrating the school within its local community.

4.3.2 Governors must be valued for the job they are doing. They are increasingly under pressure as they are asked to take a larger role in the development of schools. We would extend support to governors by setting minimum standards for training for school governors. This training would be available from the LEA's professional development unit.

4.3.3 Liberal Democrats believe that parents and staff governors should be elected by their respective 'constituencies' for four year terms using a fair voting system. Parent governors would be expected to resign at the end of the term of office during which their youngest child leaves the school. Former parent governors would of course remain eligible to serve in another capacity.

4.3.4 Governing bodies are responsible for the hiring and firing of staff. At present if they elect to lay off staff then redundancy payments are met by the LEA. We believe that governors must work in partnership with the LEA when considering staff redundancies.

4.4 Involving Parents, Teachers and Pupils

4.4.1 Parents care enormously about the quality of education that their children receive. For this reason, most parents are more interested in participating in their child's learning than in participating in their school's administration. One of the key new partnerships we need to establish in education is that between the parent and the teacher, with parents re-emphasising at home what teachers are seeking to achieve in the classroom. That is not to undervalue the work of, for example, Parent Teacher Associations, which play an extremely important role. Nor is it to undervalue the equally important role of parent-governors. We believe that parents should play a much greater role in the education process. The home, after all, is not just the earliest influence on all our learning experiences, but also the most important.

4.4.2 Liberal Democrats would encourage all schools to produce a Home/School Link statement setting out the importance of a partnership between school, parents and pupils. To make Home/School partnerships work, every school will need a Home/School Links member of staff, acting as a bridge between home and classroom, parent and teachers, and who can give parents guidance about what they could be doing to help their children learn. This could involve help within the school, but would focus primarily on what they would do to help in the learning process at home - for example, providing a given amount of time each week with reading, or agreeing a statement of behaviour to be expected from the pupil. Such agreements would have to be arrived at freely between the school and parents if they are to succeed. We would, however, require inspectors to assess how well Home/School Links were developed as part of the inspection process. (See section 3.7)

4.4.3 The standard of education provided in a school matters most to its pupils, yet pupils rarely have any say in how a school is managed. We would encourage secondary schools to establish student councils to develop a dialogue between pupils and school management teams. Liberal Democrats remain committed to pupil representation on governing bodies. Pupil representatives should present the views of the student council to the governing body and should report back decisions. The decisions of governing bodies should be made available to both pupils and parents.

4.4.4 The staff - and ultimately the headteacher - must have full control over the day-to-day management of the school and responsibility for the implementation of governors' decisions. Whatever decisions are taken by the governing body depend upon the goodwill of the staff for implementation. Consequently, the staff must be fully involved in any decisions affecting the school's management. Staff governors should report back to their colleagues and other staff. In return for this autonomy, headteachers must report regularly and in full to governing bodies and should be held to account.

4.5 Community Education

4.5.1 Liberal Democrats want to harness all community facilities - whether public, private or voluntary - for the benefit of all. We believe that schools can and should provide educational and social facilities to more than just their pupils. Likewise, the very experience of learning goes much beyond what educational institutions can provide.

4.5.2 Many community resources are under-used at present. School playing fields often remain unused for the duration of long school holidays, while college computer laboratories are used only by college students. The more informal educational services (the Youth Service and voluntary organisations, such as the Scouts and Guides) do

not complement curriculum activities, and *vice versa*. There is too little awareness of the services provided by libraries and museums or the opportunities available through amateur dramatics, music clubs and other voluntary pursuits.

4.5.3 Community education is central to our approach to learning. We would encourage schools to make use of community facilities as far as possible and communities to make use of school facilities. Indeed, many facilities can be developed and managed in tandem. For example, sports halls can be built on school premises and used by the school during the school day and by the wider community in the evening and weekend. (See Federal Green Paper 28, *All to Play For* (1992) for more details about Liberal Democrat policies on Sport).

4.6 Independent Schools

4.6.1 Liberal Democrats aspire to a situation where the standards in all state schools are so high that parents do not feel compelled to use the independent sector. In the meantime, we want to encourage independent schools to work in partnership with LEAs with the aim of opening up their facilities to the wider community. Partnership agreements could involve independent schools buying in services from LEAs and, similarly, LEAs purchasing facilities from independent schools. To enhance the opportunities for partnership, Liberal Democrats would:

- Extend charitable status to all schools and not confine it to the independent sector.
- Oppose the imposition of VAT on independent school fees.
- Phase out the Assisted Places Scheme but allow LEAs, if they so wish, to set up locally determined partnership schemes such as Special Needs Bursaries or Arts and Sports Initiatives, to support pupils at independent schools.

Teaching Excellence

5.0.1 Liberal Democrats believe that the key to raising standards in our schools is to improve the quality and professionalism of teachers. We reject the simplistic notion that by prescribing what may be taught we will inevitably achieve higher standards. All the education reforms in the world will not make up for poor teachers and all the inspection reports in the world will not create good teachers.

5.0.2 Liberal Democrats want to build a professional career ladder for teachers which encourages good teachers to stay on and to teach in difficult areas, and provides different skill routes for heads and deputies. We would:

- Establish a General Teaching Council (GTC) which would control entry to the profession and clarify and monitor professional standards of practice.
- Expand opportunities for Continuing Professional Development for all teachers to meet both school and personal career targets.
- Reform the salary structure of teachers to reflect achievement and responsibility through a programme of continually assessed professional development - not by years of service.
- Re-establish an independent Pay Review Body which would review entry salaries, distribution of responsibility and payments for special skills. It would ensure that recruitment is based on competition with other professions and that progression is related to achievements.
- Ensure that repeated poor performance by teachers is remedied by retraining or re-deployment wherever possible. We will not however shy away from dismissal or, in the most serious cases, de-registration from the GTC.

5.1 A General Teaching Council

5.1.1 Liberal Democrats have long argued for a professional body, along the lines of other professions, such as the General Medical Council for doctors. It would oversee and promote the professional status of teachers and provide them with a voice at all levels within the community. We would establish a General Teaching Council to:

- Retain a register of those qualified to teach.
- Advise on matters ranging from teacher supply and training to teacher appraisal.
- Negotiate with and advise the DfEE on the reforms proposed and their implementation.

5.1.2 The GTC would comprise all those with a legitimate interest in education, including representatives of LEAs, parents, governors, and higher and further education. The majority of its members would, however, be drawn from the teacher associations. The existing Teacher Training Agency would effectively become the executive arm of the GTC. The key tasks for the GTC would be to:

- Agree the curriculum for the BEd and PGCE examinations and set academic standards of entry to the teaching profession.
- Establish Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programmes to update and enhance the skills of all teachers throughout their professional lives.
- Research and publish documents on issues that concern the profession.

5.1.3 To register with the GTC, rigorous standards would be established. All teachers

entering the profession would have to be educated up to the equivalent of a degree level (either through BEd or PGCE) and would have achieved one year's practice that has been accredited as part of our Advanced Vocational Qualification (AVQ) programme (see section 5.2). Teachers would be required to continue to complete successfully CPD programmes to retain their registered status.

5.2 Lifelong Learning for Teachers

5.2.1 Liberal Democrats would encourage LEAs to develop their employees, including teachers, along the lines of the Investors in People scheme. The aim of the Investors in Teachers scheme would be to support the professional development of each teacher and to ensure that it is related to the overall school development plan. We would establish a framework of professional qualifications for all 425,000 teachers to pursue, with different skill routes for heads and deputies.

5.2.2 Teachers have an urgent need for good quality on-going development to keep them abreast of changes in their subject areas. The new learning opportunities offered by IT and the dramatic changes in the curriculum have often been neglected by teachers, who find themselves under ever increasing pressure. Although teachers' employment contracts now include 5 professional training days a year, much of the training on offer is of poor quality and of little relevance. We would revitalise professional expertise and restore teacher morale by:

- *Requiring the GTC to establish a framework for schools to review the strengths and weaknesses of all teachers.* Teachers would be encouraged to contribute to identifying their own training and development needs.
- *Doubling the entitlement for all registered teachers to a minimum of 10 days CPD.* This could include training in management and leadership, counselling, special educational needs and pastoral care as well as in subject knowledge and teaching methods.

- *Providing teachers with Advanced Vocational Qualifications training programmes* where appraisal of personal potential and need in the sector requires it. Accreditation would be given for successful attendance.
- *Providing those identified as poor teachers with proper training to help them come up to an acceptable standard.* If poor performance persists then dismissal will follow. Liberal Democrats will ensure that the legal "hire and fire" rules can be used clearly by the LEA or governing body. Where dismissal is due to gross misconduct or gross professional incompetence a report will be made to the GTC, who may withdraw or suspend registered status.

5.3 Career Advancement and Pay

5.3.1 We believe that teachers deserve proper recognition of their work, especially at a time when so many extra pressures are being put on them. We are determined to ensure fair and just increases in salary and structure. We would charge the Review Body with the task of assessing realistically the need for improved salaries and pay structures.

5.3.2 Once entry salaries have been set we would expect salary progression to be based largely on increases in skills, increases in responsibility and in limited cases on outstanding performance in scholastic or social target achievements. The Review Body would be required to consult with the GTC before reporting on the desirability of this, and how it should be implemented. Exam results should not be the sole simple indicator of the quality of a teacher. Increments for skills and responsibilities would be awarded only if required accredited training (AVQ) had been completed and revised job descriptions agreed.

5.3.3 The Review Body would also consider conditions of service, such as the amount of non-contact time provided to teachers, and also the need to ensure that the pay structure allows for appropriate management structures in schools.

Learning for Life

6.0.1 Education should be a lifelong process, one that should not end at 16, 18 or 21. Learning should be a lifelong experience. It is a resource that all individuals will need at increasingly frequent periods throughout their lives. If we are to create a highly skilled, highly paid workforce, Britain must invest in education for life. Otherwise, our economy will continue to slip into the dead-end low cost/low productivity route chosen by the Conservatives.

6.0.2 Over the last thirty years, there has been an explosion in the number of students in further and higher education. Today, nearly one in three young people go on to university. In the early 1960s, fewer than five per cent did. Liberal Democrats welcome the expansion of the tertiary sector and believe it will continue in the future. Many more people are going back into education to update old skills and to learn new ones. The development of credit accumulation and transfer schemes provides wider opportunities and enhances student choice.

6.0.3 There are still, however, major inadequacies. The Government has failed to fund this expansion properly. Standards are at risk and buildings are crumbling. Books and equipment are in short supply. Staff and students are becoming increasingly demoralised. Too many training courses for young people lack rigour. There is still too wide a divide between the academic and the practical. Without urgent action, these problems will deteriorate further. Liberal Democrats have published proposals that would build a tertiary education system for a new millennium (see Policy Paper 18, *The Key to Lifelong Learning* (1996)). Our aim is to :

- *Provide life chances for all.* We would give every person an entitlement to a period of re-training or education to be taken at a time of their choice during their adult life. We would ensure that the fees of all students on approved courses are funded by the state.
- *Widen access and facilitate expansion.* We would create a Learning Investment Partnership

to generate extra funds to provide education and training for more students.

- *Deliver high quality courses.* We would establish a new Quality Council to ensure that all institutions provide quality courses, to review standards and to develop a process of continuing improvement.
- *Encourage parity of esteem between academic and vocational courses.* We would introduce a qualifications framework encompassing all post-14 education and training in which individuals can build up credits in a range of academic and vocational disciplines.
- *Replace the Government's Student Loans scheme with a more flexible and fair system of student financial support.* We would abolish the parental contribution, extend support to part-time students and to those in the FE sector. Students would not have to rely on commercial banks and would pay back progressively through the National Insurance system once their incomes reached a certain level.

6.1 Post-14 Provision

"I see great advantage in students who are approaching 14, when they need to be taking decisions about their last two years of statutory schooling, beginning to take responsibility for managing their own learning. In particular, with the help of careers advisers, teachers and employers, they should be thinking through where they want to be at 16 and beyond, and how to achieve this."

Sir Ron Dearing, Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds, 1996

6.1.1 Liberal Democrats welcome the proposals by Sir Ron Dearing and propose a framework of qualifications to encompass all post-14 education and training. All qualifications in the framework would be allocated to Ron Dearing's four levels; Entry, Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced. We would introduce a National Certificate at Intermediate and Advanced level and consult further on the introduction of one at Foundation level. We would also introduce a National Advanced Diploma to recognise achievements in studies, both in depth and in breadth.

6.1.2 The qualifications framework would build on the work already in hand on course modularisation, and on credit accumulation and transfer schemes. It would allow students to build up credits in a range of academic and vocational disciplines in a way that marks their achievements rather than their failures. A part-time student, for example, could accumulate credits which have value in their own right whether or not sufficient to justify a National Certificate, National Advanced Diploma or a degree. As the credits would be part of a unified qualifications framework, each could be identified as having a particular value in relation to others.

6.1.3 The advantage of this broader, more flexible system is that it allows students to proceed at their own pace. It would allow students with learning disabilities to enrol at an appropriate stage in their development without the need to conform to age groups. Young adults who leave school at an early age would find it easier to return.

6.1.4 We propose to establish a new National Qualifications Council (NQC) to oversee the development of the post-14 national qualifications framework. Learning in schools, colleges and universities, learning by correspondence and at a distance, and learning in the workplace would all be accredited.

6.1.5 Students would embark on the post-14 programme with a range of qualifications already gained at primary school and in the first three years of secondary school (see section 3.5). Liberal Democrats would incorporate the current structures of GCSE, GNVQ and A Levels into the

proposed qualifications framework. We would maintain - and where appropriate raise - the standards of the modular elements of these current qualifications. Liberal Democrats, however, unlike Dearing, would remove the titles of these qualifications to ensure rapid acceptance of the proposed National Certificates and the National Advanced Diploma as the "gold standards". Liberal Democrats attach considerable importance to both assessment under examination conditions, with the disciplines of learning and preparation it imposes, and to continuous assessment which should show that students can work independently over a period of time and meet a series of deadlines. Thus assessment would be by examinations or by a combination of examinations and course-work, as approved by the NQC.

6.1.6 With the integration of education and training and an increase in the number and variety of courses on offer, all institutions will need effective internal and external quality monitoring procedures. Currently, the funding councils are responsible, in part, for monitoring quality. Liberal Democrats believe that it is unhealthy for one body to be responsible for both funding and quality. We would separate the two functions and establish a new Quality Council to:

- Ensure that all post-16 education and training institutions provide courses of proper quality.
- Review standards and develop a process of continual improvement.
- Ensure value for money and cost effectiveness in post-16 education and training courses, and to commission studies of value for money.
- Develop, in conjunction with institutions, a fully national system of credit accumulation and transfer, registering students if they wish to undertake courses from more than one institution.
- Award qualifications to those students on Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes (CATS). Both an individual institution and the Quality Council could award degrees to students accumulating credits at different institutions.

6.2 A Learning Investment Partnership

6.2.1 Creating a first class education system that widens access and raises achievement cannot be brought about on the cheap. It requires new investment. Liberal Democrats are committed to investing an additional £2 billion into education, to be paid for, if necessary, by putting a penny on income tax. We would commit some of the additional £2 billion to tertiary education, but we admit that this alone would not cover the cost of all the improvements we want to make.

“Liberal Democrats would increase the level of state funding in tertiary education.”

6.2.2 Therefore, Liberal Democrats propose a Learning Investment Partnership for non-compulsory education and training based on the principle that all three beneficiaries in education - the Government, employers and the individual learner - should contribute to its cost.

- *Government Contribution:* Liberal Democrats would increase the level of state funding in tertiary education. We propose that the state should fund the tuition costs for all approved courses up to and including first degree level, including part-time courses. We also would direct state funding into student maintenance.
- *Employers' Contributions:* Liberal Democrats would introduce a 2% remissible Education and Training Levy on company payrolls to ensure that companies make an investment in education and training.
- *Individual Learner Contributions:* Liberal Democrats believe that if we are to widen access and maintain and enhance quality, individual students will have to make a repayment of some of their maintenance support. Students would pay back through the national insurance system when their earnings reach a certain level and at a rate they can afford.

6.3 Further Education and Training

6.3.1 Liberal Democrats want to expand Further Education. It provides valuable academic and vocational learning in itself and prepares people from all sorts of backgrounds - young and old - to go on to higher education or into the world of work.

6.3.2 Despite the fact that the number of students in the FE sector has soared in recent years, we still lag some way behind our international competitors. In Germany, for example, 93 per cent of 17 year olds are in full-time education or training; in France this figure is over 87 per cent; while in the UK it is just 55 per cent. Liberal Democrats would like to see every young person receive some form of education or training to equip them with the skills they need to succeed. We would therefore:

- Encourage school-to-work programmes and apprenticeships for school leavers by building new partnerships between the educational sectors and the world of work.
- Guarantee all 16-19 year olds in employment the equivalent of at least two days a week in off the job education or training by requiring all employers to release their employees aged 16-19 for these days.
- Give young people aged 16 to 19 who choose not to stay on at school and who do not find a job a guarantee of training by local TECs.

6.3.3 In the last few years the FE sector has increased its links with the HE sector, firstly through the development of access courses, which prepare students without the normal entrance qualifications for university, and secondly, by running - via 'franchise' agreements - some, usually first year, degree level courses. This blurring of roles between further and higher education has led to calls for a unified funding mechanism for all non-compulsory provision. Liberal Democrats reject this. While we want to encourage greater co-operation between FE and HE, we recognise the distinct role and mission of the FE sector.

6.3.4 As with schools, Liberal Democrats wish to extend the principle of local management to include post-16 education, whether undertaken in tertiary, further education, sixth form or community colleges. We would therefore maintain the independence of FE colleges. We would, however, ensure that staff, the student body, local LEAs and the local community, including those from the business community, are represented on the governing bodies of further education colleges.

6.3.5 We also believe that there is a need for democratic input into strategic planning. Liberal Democrats would establish a Senedd for Wales and enable democratic regional assemblies to be established in England. We would place responsibility for the Further Education sector within that tier. Until such a tier is established, we would transfer the powers of the national Further Education Funding Council to the nine regional committees with membership comprising representatives of the colleges, of LEAs, of employers and of TECs.

“Our objective is to give everyone the chance of lifelong education and training by extending opportunities for adult education.”

6.3.6 Liberal Democrats propose that funding for further education should come through *Capital funding* and *Core funding* channelled through regional government. *Current funding* which ‘follows the student’ would be paid by the local authority in which the student lives. Where students combine courses from institutions with different funding bases, course costs would be contributed *pro rata* by the different funding authorities as appropriate.

Improving Training

6.3.7 Rapid technological and economic change mean that people will need a wide range of skills, among them the ability to communicate, to assess, to adapt and to work with others. School leavers must have a broad educational foundation but

employers must also provide good quality training and development for their employees.

6.3.8 Liberal Democrats are committed to involving more people than ever before in adult education. Our objective is to give everyone the chance of lifelong education and training by extending opportunities for adult education and training. Our proposal for a more flexible system of learning would help enormously in giving people the opportunity to update old skills, or a second chance to learn new ones. We would:

- Give every citizen an entitlement to a period of re-training or education at a time of their choice in their adult lives.
- Introduce a Citizen’s Service to give people the opportunity to do one or two years’ community service. This would be properly accredited.
- Require all companies to disclose their expenditure on training in their published accounts.
- Require all employers to incorporate a commitment to suitable, work-related training in the individual contracts of all employees.
- Introduce a remissible Education and Training Levy equivalent to 2% of companies’ payroll, minus their approved expenditure on training, with a minimum payment of zero. Firms would not be able to make deductions unless they offered training opportunities of approved quality to all employees. We would provide a mechanism for employers to contribute to their employees’ Individual Learning Accounts (see section 6.5.2).

6.3.9 TECs should receive more secure funding so that they can plan for the long term, but they must be more accountable to the business and local community for their expenditure of public funds. The names and addresses of board members, and regular reports of TEC activities and plans, should be widely publicised and accessible to the communities they serve. Regional and local authorities should establish joint committees to which TECs in their area should be answerable. Once they were more accountable, TECs would

receive the Training Levy proceeds. Liberal Democrat policies on training are explained in detail in Policy Paper 9, *Working for Change* (1994).

6.4 Higher Education

6.4.1 The first steps have been taken towards opening up access to higher education, but there is still some way to go to catch up with our competitors. Japan, France, the United States, and Germany all produce more graduates and skilled technicians than we do.

6.4.2 The manner in which higher education is being expanded, however, is having a damaging effect on quality. There has been a significant worsening in staff-student ratios. Lecture theatres are over-crowded. There are insufficient computer and library facilities. Support services are inadequate. Lecturers have been demoralised by the constant 'moving of the goal posts'.

6.4.3 Liberal Democrats would provide the tuition fees for all approved courses up to and including degree level, including part-time students. We would introduce a Student Fee Entitlement, available to anyone accepted on to a higher education course. It would pay for the equivalent of one year's study and would be renewable, subject to academic progress, for up to a maximum of four years. Funding for fees would be based on the agreed actual costs of courses as set by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC), with agreed differentials to reflect the varying cost of providing the modules studied. Part-time students, such as those studying through the Open University, who are not currently funded for the cost of their fees, would also qualify for a Student Fee Entitlement on the same basis.

6.4.4 Large numbers of students from the EU and former Eastern bloc countries already come to this country's universities at both graduate and undergraduate level. Liberal Democrats welcome this and would work with the education authorities of other countries to increase the opportunities for British students to study abroad.

6.5 Student Financial Support

6.5.1 The student maintenance support system is in a crisis. More than 40,000 students drop out each year, the majority for financial reasons. One in three students do not get the full parental contribution element of their grant. Over a third of students do not get their grants paid on time. One in ten have to wait longer than a month. Most students get their income from three sources - the student grant, the student loan and parental contribution. Many students - particularly part-time and mature students and those on postgraduate courses - are not eligible for either mandatory grants or loans. It is widely acknowledged, however, that even the three combined do not provide students with adequate resources. The National Union of Students estimates that most students are still left with an annual shortfall of £1,000 which has to be made up by borrowing from banks or by working part-time.

6.5.2 Liberal Democrats would replace the current system with a more flexible and fairer system. We would establish Individual Learning Accounts in which the state would make a contribution, but students needing more could debit their account and pay back later. Within defined limits, the level of the debit could be decided by the student, not the government. We would:

- Abolish the parental contribution. Liberal Democrats believe that all people over the age of 18 should be treated as economically independent.
- Extend support to all students over the age of 18 regardless of whether they are in part-time or full time education, or in the further or higher education sector.
- Allow students to take out more from their ILA now so they do not become dependent on banks or parents while studying.
- Replace the Student Loans scheme with a fair 'income contingent' student learning repayment scheme. Under our proposals, students would pay back through the National Insurance system, but only when their incomes reach a certain level.

The more students earn, the sooner they pay back.

6.5.3 Individual Learning Accounts could also be used to build up learning 'Entitlements' to pay for additional education and training at a later date. This would create a mechanism to bring about a lifelong learning culture. We would investigate ways in which individuals and organisation could make tax-free contributions into Individual Learning Accounts.

6.6 Vocational, Educational and Employment Guidance

6.6.1 Liberal Democrats believe that careers services should not just be about finding jobs - but also about lifelong advice for further education and training. In a changing employment market where individuals will be retraining and learning throughout their lives, careers services in universities and elsewhere will have a pivotal role to play. No longer will they deal almost exclusively with advice about specific jobs but they will also have to advise about further training and qualifications.

6.6.2 In 1993, the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act transferred the duty of providing careers services from LEAs to the Secretary of State. Since then, many of the services have been contracted out to the private sector. This has led to concerns about both the quality and accountability of the service. Liberal Democrats would:

- Ensure that provision is free for all those who are unemployed, in full time compulsory education, or studying for a first qualification.
- Set up collective responsibility for the service through public sector and private sector share-holding of the provider companies.
- Return the money for school based careers advice back to LEAs to be delegated to schools for them to purchase the service they require.

Our new inspection service (See section 3.7) would ensure that standards are maintained and that the best advice and guidance is made available to all pupils.

- Explore ways of using new technologies such as the Internet to disseminate information and advice on education and training and expanding the Training Access Points scheme (TAPs) by increasing the number of computer terminals in job and careers service centres.

6.6.3 Provision for adults, who are not statutory entitled to free careers advice, must be improved. Under our proposals, companies wishing to buy education and training guidance for their employees would have the cost offset from their training levy. Any other individual would be free to purchase guidance from the same providers if they wish.

6.7 Supporting Research

6.7.1 Liberal Democrats see a strong research base as the essential underpinning for an innovative economy and a creative society. It provides the seed-corn for new ideas and an essential training ground for highly skilled personnel. It has, however, suffered from many years of underfunding. We would seek to increase investment into research funding.

6.7.2 We believe that teaching and research complement each other and would retain the 'dual support' system, with Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) money available to provide general support for the less targeted 'blue sky' element in research and for research relating to the improvement of the quality of teaching. We would create a new research council for the Humanities but otherwise retain the present Research Council structure. We would, however, return the Office of Science and Technology, currently part of the Department of Trade and Industry, to its former independent status, giving it overall responsibility for the government's science and technology activities.

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 and the Welsh Liberal Democrats 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. If approved by Conference, this paper will form the policy of the Party in England and Wales.

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.

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

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