

**Liberal Democrats Policy**

# **Education and Skills**

**From Upper Secondary through to Life Long Learning**

**Consultation Paper 111**



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

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

Comments on the paper, and requests for speakers, should be addressed to: Adam Pritchard, Policy Unit, Liberal Democrats, 8-10 Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AE. Email: [Adam.Pritchard@libdems.org.uk](mailto:Adam.Pritchard@libdems.org.uk)

Comments should reach us as soon as possible, and no later than 8 April 2013.

**Federal Policy Consultation Paper No. 111 © February 2013**

*Published by the Policy Unit, Liberal Democrats, 8-10 Great George Street, London SW1P 3AE.*

*Layout and Design by Christian Moon.*

ISBN: 978-1-907046-60-5

Printed by Sarum Colourview, 23-24 Henrietta Street, London WC2E 8ND

## Abbreviations

- AGCAS: Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
- BAME: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
- DLHE: Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
- EBACC: English Baccalaureate
- FE: Further Education
- GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education
- HE: Higher Education
- HEPI: Higher Education Policy Institute
- KIS: Key Information Sets
- NEETs: Not in Employment, Education or Training
- REF/RAE: Research Excellence Framework/Research Assessment Exercise
- RPA: Raising the Participation Age
- SIVS: Strategically Important and Vulnerable Subjects
- STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics



## 1. Introduction

1.1 Liberal Democrats recognise that skills are vital both to individual opportunity and the overall economic performance of the country. In recent years the UK has trailed some of our main competitors in the skills of the workforce, particularly in the intermediate levels, which puts our competitiveness in global markets at risk. This has led to an emphasis in policy on the sheer number of qualifications being gained in order to catch up, from Level 2 (GCSE or vocational equivalent) to degrees. However we need to find ways of giving people the right skills they will need to succeed in a modern workforce – for example through apprenticeships and adult learning.

1.2 This paper addresses a very wide area of education and skills, from upper secondary (after options are chosen aged 13) through 16-19, post 19 education and training, wider FE opportunities and HE, including the difficult issue of student finance. One thing has become clear in the policy working group's early evidence taking: we still need to find an effective skills framework that places the academic and vocational in a twin track structure understood by students, parents and employers.

1.3 Investment in education and training is a priority for our nation but taxpayer funding is scarce. We are determined to build an education and skills system fit for the 21st century: a system which simultaneously supports growth in our economy and yet is fair to parents and pupils, students and institutions and adults and employers. The taxpayer will play its part but adults and employers must do so too. From upper secondary education to lifelong learning we will develop a system of shared investment, flexible qualifications and easy progression so every citizen can realise their potential.

### 14-19 or 16-19?

1.4 In this consultation we want to know whether in England we should develop an integrated 14-18 phase of education where young people are examined at 18 or whether we retain a 16-18 system where young people are examined at 16 & 18. Do we support a single phase of 14-18 education and skills or the present break at 16?

*Q1. At what age should vocational education or other curriculum choices, which may involve a change in institution, become choices for children and families? At 14 or 16?*

### Participation Age

1.5 A key policy is to raise the participation age to the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or a single point in the year.

*Q2. Do you support RPA to 18<sup>th</sup> birthday? Or to single point in the year, e.g. the end of the academic year in which the student reaches 17 years (end of year 12 or 1st year sixth form for most school pupils), or to one of two fixed points in the year?*

### Young People at 18

*Q3. Given the requirement for all young people to remain in education and training up to their 18th birthday how can we ensure young people either:*

- a) At FE colleges are recruited into full time higher education and our universities;*
- b) Enter an apprenticeship;*
- c) Stay-in full time further education up to age 21 to achieve a Level 3 qualification with maths and English; or*
- d) Undertake a traineeship with or without a job?*
- e) What support is needed for those with specific learning difficulties for whom entering employment nor continuing in education at 18 may not be feasible?*

Machinery of Government

1.6 In England, there are three departments with a significant involvement in education and training from upper secondary education to lifelong learning, namely the Department for Education, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, and the Department for Work and Pensions.

1.7 Some argue that one department should be responsible for 16 to 19 schools and colleges, and entry into higher education. Others argue that with so many mature full time HE students, part time HE students and adult FE learners on benefits or with families dependent on in-work and out-of-work benefits, and the need to allow unemployed 18 to 24 year olds to study whilst on benefit, a single department responsible for adults from age 18 paying benefits and maintenance support should be created

*Q4. Should policies relating to young people in the UK remain split between three Government departments?*

*Q5. How can we provide something that is systemic and links up sectors of education?*

*Q6. Should there be cross departmental merging of budgets, with an inter-ministerial group*

*taking responsibility for policies relating to young people?*

## 2. Careers–Information, Advice & Guidance

2.1 Early advice given to schoolchildren about qualifications to enter HE is critically important. Every year, HE institutions turn away applicants who do not have the qualifications necessary for the course they have applied for when at school they were advised the qualifications they were studying were appropriate for the HE course. The sheer number and complexity of pre and post 16 qualification choices is enormous, meaning even HE admissions tutors can struggle to work out if an applicant qualifies. Either the variety of qualifications must change, a clear equivalency system is defined or guidance to pupils must improve to ensure the future aspirations of our young people are not undermined.

2.2 From September 2013 14-16 year olds will be able to study in full time FE. Many of them will

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*We would like to create a twin track and not a two tier system between FE colleges and schools*

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not be made aware of this or, for that matter, of the wide range of courses available in FE colleges because schools have a vested interest in filling their own sixth forms and therefore encourage them to stay on at school to study for their A-levels. We would like to create a twin track and not a two tier system between FE colleges and schools.

*Q.7 How do we get genuinely independent careers advice to young people (13 – 16yrs) delivered by schools and colleges?*

*Q.8 Should careers advice be funded by the state, local authority, be part of the National Careers Service or the school, or a creative alternative?*

*Q.9 How do we avoid problem of cherry picking or gaming the system by secondary schools?*

*Q.10 Should pupils & students be able to switch between FE colleges and schools? And if so, how?*

*Q.11 What is the best method for the delivery of careers advice to 16-19 year olds?*

*Q.12 What can be done to improve the quality of advice to those with protected characteristics, especially those from families with low participation rates in education and learning post 18?*

2.3 The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) is the professional association for HE careers practitioners. All member institutions have to follow the Matrix standard, a framework for the development of quality systems and accreditation in careers' guidance. Many FE Colleges also have an in-house careers' service with advisers accredited to the Matrix standard.

2.4 Graduate employability is measured annually through the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE), which is used to produce the Key Information Sets (KIS) for applicants. Rt Hon Alan Milburn, the Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility and Child Poverty, says too many employers are recruiting from "too narrow a range of universities and regions".

2.5 At present most funding for careers advice goes to internet and telephone based advice services. Some teachers lack technical knowledge of what industry is about and so perhaps exposing teachers to industry in the short term through encouraging people from industry to enter teaching as mentors.

*Q.13 What is the best method for the delivery of careers advice to 14-19 year olds?*

*Q.14 What can be done to better improve and support teachers understanding of the labour*

*market? Would a mentoring system from industry be helpful?*

*Q.15 Should there be one overarching body for Information Advice and Guidance for schools, FE and HE?*

### 3. Pre 19 in FE Colleges

3.1 More 16-18 year olds study in FE Colleges than remain at school, and an increasing number of 14-16 year olds attend either a part-time or full-time vocational course. Whether following an academic or vocational course, it is important that students under 19 should continue with English and Maths at any level that shows progression for them.

3.2 Whilst the EBACC does not form part of this working group's remit, we are considering vocational routes from 14.

*Q.16 Are twin track vocational & academic routes open to all 14 year olds?*

*Q.17 What requirement if any is there to study English and Maths at 14?*

*Q.18 What is the best option when considering a vocational and technical equivalent to the EBACC?*

*Q.19 Should we extend the Pupil Premium to a "Student Premium" based on numbers of disadvantaged 14-19 year olds?*

*Q.20 Following the removal of Education Maintenance Allowance, is the bursary the most adequate replacement and if not what support should be provided?*

*Q.21 Given limited resources should we extend Free School Meals to FE/14-19?*

*Q.22 Given the rise in the Participation Age to 18, should children still be formally examined at 16?*

3.3 Most secondary schools in the UK offer a sixth form provision. A number of these sixth forms are small and, therefore, can only offer a limited range of qualification. Some schools have attempted to reduce the narrowness of the provision by working together in partnership, enabling them to offer a broader & more flexible range of subjects and qualifications by sharing facilities and staff.

*Q.23 Should there be incentives to encourage school sixth forms to increase collaboration and offer a broad and more flexible range of curriculum and qualifications? Or is it better to replace school sixth forms with dedicated sixth form or tertiary colleges, fed by several schools which would otherwise have small sixth forms? Or should small*

*sixth forms be encouraged to work more formally in federations?*

*Q.24 Should there be a recommended minimum class size for sixth forms?*

## 4. Apprenticeships

4.1 Apprenticeships can offer a very satisfactory route into not only more practical careers such as engineering but also into such careers as accountancy and the legal profession and the caring professions. It has the advantage also, in these days of tuition fees, of enabling the young person to 'earn and learn' at the same time.

4.2 For these reasons the Coalition have put much emphasis on apprenticeships, and it is why

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*Enabling the young person to 'earn and learn' at the same time*

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we celebrate the increase in numbers (up to 450,000 from 200,000 in 2009) and why we are anxious to see more people working for Level 3 (A level equivalent) apprenticeships and moving on to higher (4&5 or technician) levels.

4.3 Most recently, the Coalition have introduced a pre-apprenticeship 'traineeship' grade to enable those who have left school with poor (or no) qualifications to participate in a programme which prepares them to move into and hold down an apprenticeship.

*Q.25 Should we introduce a new system of 14 to 15 vocational training with work placements for those for whom it is appropriate?*

*Q.26 Should there be a pre apprentice qualification for the traineeships for 16 – 18 year olds be seen as equal to level 2 qualification? If so, should we phase out completely the Level 2 apprenticeships and only offer a Level 3 and above grade?*

*Q.27 How do we guarantee apprenticeships are of a high quality?*

*Q.28 Should we streamline funding and support for those Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETs) into apprenticeships?*

*Q.29 What is the clear framework for funding higher level apprenticeships, should it be sector led or employer led? Is the framework flexible enough?*

*Q.30 How do we fund more 18+ apprenticeships over and above the current state contribution in a time of limited public funds? With a national insurance contribution holiday for*

*employers or a statutory training levy? Or are there other ways we could fund this?*

## 5. 19–24 Further Education

5.1 We are determined to maximise education and training opportunities for all people up to the age of 24. Full time education with

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*We are determined to maximize education and training opportunities*

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maintenance support is a better option than youth unemployment. Should we develop a system of free education and training for all 16-24 year olds seeking a first level 3 qualification, backed up by maintenance support? The key gap in the current system is the lack of maintenance support for full time students in education.

*Q.31 Should there be an extension of maintenance support for 18/19-24 year olds up to first Level 3 qualification, akin to Higher Education students?*

*Q.32 What role should employers have in determining provision and providing funding?*

## 6. Adult FE 25+

6.1 With a continued decline in jobs for low or no-skills manual jobs, and a steady increase in the requirement for higher skills in the economy, it is likely that most people in the workforce will need to increase their skills and qualifications during their working lives. In addition, the day of a single career path and working for one employer is significantly reducing. Workers in the modern economy may well have multiple careers over their working life.

6.2 Apart from the needs of the workforce, learning for its own sake throughout life is recognised as beneficial on a number of levels.

*Q.33 What policies need to be introduced to allow adults after age 25 to progress into HE and adult FE throughout their working lives and participate beyond state pension age to improve their wellbeing and quality of life?*

*Q.34 What role should employers have in determining provision and providing funding for skills of their employees?*

*Q.35 Could FE funding for over 25s be brought into a broader structure via the HE funding system, eg loans for fees & smaller loans for necessary equipment?*

## 7. General FE

7.1 The following questions cover the wider FE spectrum, rather than referring to one of the age group covered in earlier sections.

*Q.36 How do we get a stable well qualified teaching staff in FE colleges, for both academic and practical courses?*

*Q.37 Should funding for FE include incentive element/payments by results for placing students in permanent work and keeping them there?*

*Q.38 To whom are FE colleges accountable and what are the rewards if they are succeeding or support/sanctions if they are failing?*

*Q.39 Should FE teachers teach exclusively in areas they have training in?*

*Q.40 Should the Government provide emergency grants for the establishment of special courses in FE colleges in areas where a particular employer/industry has collapsed?*

*Q.41 How do we find a suitable balance of local FE college governors/board members given that Colleges have to provide for the needs of students going into local industry and commerce, those kinds of employment only found in other places and those going on to higher education?*

*Q.42 How does a student judge the quality of a course and how it compares to other institutions?*

*Q.43 To what extent should be encouraging new providers in the pre-16 education system, 16 to 19, and adult further education?*

## 8. Higher Education

8.1 Diversity of provision within the Higher Education sector is increasing (HEPI, 2012), but this diversity should not equal inconsistency in quality and standards. A diverse system should meet the needs of students from a wide variety of backgrounds, offering modes of study, courses and institutions, which meet the needs of students and industry.

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*A diverse system should meet the needs of students from a wide variety of backgrounds*

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8.2 Part-time students continue to increase, and at some HE institutions outnumber fulltime students. Although there was a sharp increase in mature students (especially those following part-time courses) over the last decade, their numbers now appear to be declining. Many HE institutions work with employers or groups of

employers to provide specialist courses for their staff.

8.3 In 2012 the government introduced a new student number controls system for entry into higher education at English institutions. These have been revised for 2013, with applicants achieving ABB+ at A level (including selected equivalent qualifications) will not count towards an institution's student number population. The purpose of these changes is to encourage greater competition and student choice.

*Q.44 Do we want HE to prepare people for work or do we want to give them as broad an education as possible? Are the two incompatible?*

*Q.45 To whom are HE colleges accountable and what are the rewards if they are succeeding or support/sanctions if they are failing?*

*Q.46 Are the government's attempts to create a market in HE skewing the system?*

*Q.47 Are there any measures in Julian Huppert MP's paper 'Developing a Future - Policies for Science and Research' which you feel could benefit Higher Education more widely?*

*Q.48 How do we encourage more people from low socio economic backgrounds and families with no (or little) tradition of higher education to attend*

*university? In particular, how do we support those with very low levels of engagement, eg young people who have been in care, and certain BAME groups?*

- a) How can we encourage these prospective students to apply?*
- b) Should we relax entry qualification criteria?*
- c) What should the Government and the HE institutions do to prepare and encourage these students and their parents?*

*Q.49 What measures should be taken to preserve strategically important and vulnerable subjects (SIVS), including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and Modern Languages? Should a strategic distribution across regions be considered? What influence should the labour market have on any strategy?*

*Q.50 What steps should be taken to increase the ability of applicants to make an informed choice regarding a course and institution, both qualifying subjects for admission and future career paths?*

*Q.51 Should a national campaign be funded to help raise awareness of the student funding system and more generally the benefits of a Higher Education?*

*Q.52 How could institutions be better supported to attract international students, whilst ensuring immigration is controlled?*

*Q.53 What role does Government have when a public or private institution finds itself in financial difficulty? Should a University be allowed to appoint an administrator (Bankruptcy)?*

*Q.54 To what extent should we be encouraging new providers in Higher Education?*

8.4 Resources for UK postgraduate students are extremely limited, with prospective students having to raise funds for high levels of fees and continuing maintenance outside the current student finance system.

*Q.55 What can be done to support UK students undertaking post graduate qualifications? Should banks increase the size of the Career Development Loan, still only £10,000?*

8.5 There are clear criteria for assessing and incentivising research excellence (REF/RAE) in Higher Education.

*Q.56 What measures should be taken to incentivise excellence in teaching?*

*Q.57 How do we ensure research funding is distributed fairly to institutions?*



8.6 Now that more than 45% of 18-30 year olds participate in Higher Education, which is more than double a generation ago, Governments have been addressing the difficult issue of funding first undergraduate degrees, both the costs of the courses and maintenance support.

*Q58 How well or badly is the new system of student finance just implemented this academic year working so far?*

*Q.59 Should the new system continue: with a maximum tuition fee of £9,000 pa rolled into a loan repayment, so there is no upfront cost to the student; the loan repayment starting when the graduate is earning more than £21,000 pa (which is written off after 30 years if not repaid); and which provides scholarships and bursaries for students from low income families?*

*Q.60 The present system is a hybrid, part loan repayment, part graduate contribution. Should we move to a purer graduate contribution to cover the cost of fees, and continue with maintenance loans? What extra support would be necessary for students from low income backgrounds?*

*Q.61 Should we follow the New Zealand system, restricting the number of places in Higher Education, thus reducing the cost to the state?*

*Q.62 What other models of funding can the student and the country afford?*

## 9. Broader Life-Long Learning

9.1 With an ageing population and the state pension age for many rising above 67 in the next decade life-long learning will be central to longer working lives and the wellbeing of our citizens.

We need a new approach to making learning accessible in later life.

*Q.63 How can we harness new technology to make life-long learning accessible for all?*

*Q.64 How do we help citizens fund learning through later part of their lives?*

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