

# Green Party calls on Labour leadership candidates to support electoral reform



3 April 2020

The co-leaders of the Green Party [have written to the Labour leadership candidates](#) to offer to work together during the coronavirus crisis and to call on them to back electoral reform. [1]

Ahead of Labour's leadership election result being announced on Saturday [4 April], Sian Berry and Jonathan Bartley have written to each of the candidates outlining the importance of cooperation during the current crisis.

The letter also calls on whoever is announced as Labour leader to embrace proportional representation in order to strengthen our democracy and build a more resilient politics for the future.

Berry said: "The coronavirus crisis has shown just how vital it is that politicians work together and a fairer voting system which encourages more collaboration would make sure this kind of cooperation happens across the board.

"First past the post seriously hinders the ability of parties to work together. We cannot continue to allow our democracy to be warped by a system where votes do not match who gets elected.

"So I urge the new leader of Labour to do the right thing, by backing a fairer proportional representation system and strengthening our democracy."

Modernising the system will remove hundreds of safe seats across the UK, and incentivise parties to be more representative in their choice of candidates and, crucially, policies.

Voters stand to gain from this no matter which party they support, as research from the University of Michigan shows countries using proportional representation outperform those using first past the post on measures of income inequality, quality of life, environmental protections, education and health. [2]

Berry outlined further benefits for voters, including that proportional representation can avoid situations where extreme views can be bulldozed through without proper scrutiny, because proportional representation creates a need for compromise and gives space to smaller voices.

Proportional representation offers stability from policy lurch, where a new Government spends time undoing the work of the previous party, as well as lessening the likelihood of quick-fix solutions to win temporary public support.

The letter states: "In Labour, as in our party, the majority of members support a proportional voting system [3], and no other socialist or social democratic party in any major developed country still supports first past the post.

"Whichever one of you is elected, we offer our support in the collegiate spirit these times deserve, and we would like to meet with you virtually as soon as you are able, to discuss both the immediate crisis and how we build a better politics for the future."

**ENDS**

**Notes**

**1**

<https://www.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/Letter-Labour-leadership-2020-04-02-SBJB.pdf>

**2**

Research cited is from University of Michigan lecturer Salomon Orellana's Electoral Systems and Governance: How Diversity Can Improve Policy-Making

**3**

*Three-quarters of Labour members want party to back proportional representation*, Independent, 17 Dec 2019

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/labour-party-proportional-representation-corbys-leader-pollsa9249196.html>

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## [Green Party calls for better data sharing to tackle Covid-19 pandemic](#)



31 March 2020

The Green Party is supporting calls made by the public health directors for NHS England to immediately release data collected through NHS England's 111 service to enable local health and social care systems to identify coronavirus hotspots. [1]

While current confirmed cases are collated only through test results at hospital, earlier data of those with symptoms is collected through the use of NHS 111 phone and online services.

Larry Sanders, the Green Party's health spokesperson, said this would enable local health and social care systems to be able to prepare better.

He said: "In the absence of population testing, the next best measure of where centres of infection may be forming could be shown by the rates of calls to NHS England by people experiencing symptoms.

"Data sharing between the key national Covid-19 response organisations and local health and social care systems is essential for adequate planning. And we are calling for the government to ensure that NHS England releases this geo-mapped data of symptomatic people to those working at the local level.

"The time gap between being infected and being tested could be at least two to three weeks, therefore symptomatic data at a local level would give an insight into likely health care and social care system demand."

People in hospital due to coronavirus will have had a period of virus incubation between two and ten days before symptoms start and then a further week of symptoms, having been told to remain at home and self-isolate for seven days to see how symptoms progress.

Sanders said:

"Hospital testing of Covid-19 is giving us 'out of date' data on the actual infection rates present in local communities. Directors of public health working at a local level would be better armed to know what is coming down the line with earlier symptomatic data collected by the phone and online services."

On a different data sharing issue for those working in two tier authorities – specifically the shires – Public Health England is providing the totals of reported coronavirus cases at a first tier local authority level only.

Gina Dowding, Lancashire County Councillor and former NHS Health promotion officer, said:

"It would be useful to have this data at district council level. It is essential that those people working flat out to plan the local response to the epidemic are given as much information as possible. This government has big data, it is now time to release it for the common good."

ENDS

**Notes**

**1**

<https://www.hsj.co.uk/public-health/public-health-directors-plea-for-111-data-to-track-coronavirus/7027261.article>

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## [Green Party launches petition for all school staff to be tested for coronavirus](#)



26 March 2020

- Greens call for school staff still working to be prioritised for testing
- Petition set up to urge government to provide testing for key workers – currently stands at more than 6,750 signatures
- Vix Lowthion: “We need to ramp up testing in general, but it is vital we start with our key workers”

Teachers and school staff working on the frontline of the coronavirus crisis deserve to be protected from the disease and should be prioritised for testing, the Green Party has said.

While most of the country has been encouraged to stay at home, many teachers and support staff are still going into school each day to educate the children of other key workers.

The Greens have now set up a petition [1] calling on the government to ensure that teachers, school staff and all other key workers are tested for coronavirus as a priority, not just for their protection and the safety of their families, but also to help prevent the spread of Covid-19.

At the time of publication, the petition had gained more than 6,750 signatures.

Green Party education spokesperson Vix Lowthion, a secondary school teacher on the Isle of Wight, launched the petition this week.

She said:

“It was right to close schools to the general public, and it was also right to keep them open for the children of key workers. The logical and compassionate next step is to ensure all teachers and school staff are prioritised for coronavirus testing.

“Staff still going to school are on the frontline of this crisis and deserve

protection. They need to be tested, not just for their own safety, but also to help prevent the spread of coronavirus.

“We need to ramp up testing in general, but it is vital that we start with our key workers.”

ENDS

## Notes

1

The “Test our teachers for Covid-19” petition is available here:  
<https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/testourteachers>

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# Call for Ghostbusters-style home testing for Covid-19



25 March 2020

- Doctors call for Ghostbusters-style mobile teams of health workers in full personal protective equipment to administer home tests
- Call for Health Secretary Matt Hancock to listen to medics working on the frontline as well as backroom advisers
- Testing availability is ramping up, potentially enabling a pilot followed by rapid rollout, in line with WHO advice to “test, test, test”.

Green Party co-leader Sian Berry has joined with children’s doctor Alex Armitage to call for mobile teams to deliver home tests for Covid19.

The virus is set to “overwhelm” the NHS, Dr Armitage warned this week in a video for the BBC’s Panorama, with cases rising at an alarming rate and each day’s number of deaths higher than the last.

With growing levels of NHS staff absence, Dr Armitage has already made an urgent call for tests for healthcare workers, to show clearly whether they have the virus and need to self-isolate or if they can get back to work.

Huge numbers of new tests are starting to become available, so Dr Armitage

said the UK could finally start to follow World Health Organisation advice to 'test, test, test' in the wider population.

He and Ms Berry hope to see community health workers testing people for the virus at home in Ghostbusters-style teams wearing full personal protective equipment.

The scheme was developed by Edinburgh GP Dr Sam Watt, who had the idea while watching Ghostbusters with his son after a shift at work.

Dr Armitage said: "The first priority must be to protect our doctors, nurses and health staff from this highly infectious disease and we can't do that if infectious people are coming into hospitals and GP surgeries for a test.

"If we're to save as many lives as possible, we need our heroic health workers to get out there in full protective gear and start collecting samples from people in their own home, so we have a true picture of the problem.

"We want people to know who they're gonna call – an NHS home testing hotline – to get help from our Ghostbusters-testing team.

"They will then visit you at home, perform a test, and set up remote monitoring so health workers can review your progress – and they will get you to hospital if needed."

Dr Watt's "Edinburgh Method" could be trialled as a pilot scheme before an accelerated roll-out across the country.

The Edinburgh Method is aimed at catching the virus in the very early stages, when evidence shows isolation can be most effective. It also has the potential to significantly ease pressure on NHS inpatient beds, a vital commodity in the struggle against the virus.

Once people have tested positive, they can stay at home and be remotely monitored by health workers in a "virtual hospital ward" using existing telemedicine technology. If patients deteriorate, they can be brought to hospital for intensive care.

Dr Armitage urged Health Secretary Matt Hancock to listen to frontline NHS doctors, working in a rapidly developing situation.

He said: "Coronavirus has created a situation that no one in Britain has had to deal with in living memory.

"We need new ideas in order to get through this.

"Innovation shouldn't just happen in the government's back offices, it needs to come from medics like Dr Watt, who are on the front line of the pandemic."

Sian Berry said she is looking for solutions to lead Britain out of the pandemic, minimising the deaths and lasting lung damage caused by the disease, and thinks mobile testing units are a "necessary and vital" idea.

She said: "Knowing who does and does not have the virus is essential for stopping the spread, which is currently happening so fast our NHS will not be able to hold back the tide at current rates.

"The belated decision to lock down Britain is welcome but we can still do more to protect our key workers from infection.

"We need people to stay at home and follow NHS advice – and developing a plan now for now mobile testing units will work in the community could be one more way of holding back the spread."

ENDS

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## [New nurses on frontline of coronavirus battle face up to £62,000 of debt](#)



24 March 2020

New nurses and midwives will be stepping on to the frontline of the coronavirus crisis with up to £62,000 of debt following the scrapping of the NHS bursary, Green Party peer Natalie Bennett has highlighted in a speech in the House of Lords today.

Bennett, a former leader of the Green Party and peer since October 2019, has now urged the government to provide exceptional grants of £15,000 to the nurses and midwives who are finishing their course this year after missing out on the bursary which was scrapped in 2017.

According to government figures, the change will have seen a student nurse or midwife take on debts worth up to £61,812 in tuition fee loans and maintenance loans for living costs.[1]

Bennett said:

"Most of the nurses and midwives who are finishing their courses early and stepping in now to provide crucial services in this crisis belong to the cohort exceptionally hit by debt.

"They carry tuition debts of nearly £28,000 and many will have had to take out loans for living costs, up to £34,000 for those living in London.

"I ask, no I beg the government to recognise these women and men who will be risking their lives for us in the weeks and months ahead and at a minimum to make an exceptional grant of £15,000 each to bring them into the same position as new students getting grants of £5,000 a year."

In December, the government announced a new grant of £5,000 a year for new nursing and midwifery students from September 2020. [2]

Bennett asked the government in a written question before the Coronavirus epidemic whether it would be compensating this cohort. It said no.

ENDS

Notes

1

Figures provided by the House of Lords Library in response to a question by Natalie Bennett.

#### Tuition Fees Loans

A student starting a course in the 2017/18 academic year would have been able to take out a tuition fees loan of up to £9,250 per year. At the end of a 3-year course beginning in 2017, these students may have taken on a maximum of £27,750 of student loan debt in order to pay tuition fees.

#### Maintenance Loans for Living Costs

Following the end of the NHS bursary, student nurses and midwives were able to apply for maintenance loans for living costs. While the amount borrowed varies depending on a student's circumstances, in the 2018/19 academic year, the maximum amounts of maintenance loans available per year were:

- £11,354 for people studying in London
- £8,700 for people studying elsewhere
- £7,324 for people living at home while studying

On average, in 2017/18, students took out an income contingent maintenance loan worth £5,590. In 2018/19, this increased to £6,150 (Department for Education, [Student Support for Higher Education in England 2019](#), 21 November 2019, p 1).

2

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nursing-students-to-receive-5-000-payment-a-year>



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