

# Frequently Asked Questions: Party Reforms

## THE PROPOSITION

What are the proposed reforms?

The introduction of a supporters' scheme. This is expected to be free of charge and supporters will have the right to vote in leadership elections.

Dropping the requirement for people to have been a member for a certain length of time before they can stand for selection. At present, members must be a fully paid-up party member for 12 consecutive months in England & Wales and nine consecutive months in Scotland before they can be assessed for approval to be Prospective Parliamentary Candidates. Removing the restriction of the party leader having to be an MP. All members and registered supporters would be able to choose from a wider pool of candidates.

This is arguably the most crucial point in British politics for more than 70 years. Why are we doing this now?

By engaging our supporters and growing our base, we strengthen our voice against Brexit. These proposals signal our openness to new people and will bring extra energy at a time of national crisis, reinforcing our efforts.

There is also political realignment, with the emergence of broad campaign groups involving many or all parties, such as the People's Vote and More United. Numerous parties have been labelled as 'centrist', 'moderate' or even 'liberal'. We need to be at the heart of that political realignment and show that the Liberal Democrats are the natural party for people fed-up of the extremes of British politics. The Liberal Democrats are changing British politics. We're opening up our party to new supporters and listening to our members about how best to do it.

Why have you sprung this on the party?

These proposals flesh out the strategy passed at the Liberal Democrat spring conference in Southport this year. We passed a motion that promised to "create a political and social movement which encourages people to take and use power in their own lives and communities" and to create "a much larger base of long-term, loyal supporters".

What data do you have to support this proposition?

A newly "open" Lib Dem party would be two to three times more popular than it is presently, according to research we commissioned from Data Sciences. The poll has a +/- 2% margin of error.

Is this just a poor man's Momentum?

No. This is a much more comprehensive set of reforms that will provide a home for those millions who are uncomfortable with the polarisation of British politics.

Momentum is a movement of the far left. We are creating a movement for people

from the centre who believe in a free, fair and open society and oppose extremism and nationalism.

We must not be afraid to try something new to attract moderate people who want a better politics.

Are these proposals set in stone?

No, this is a democratic party and the leader cannot impose his proposals on it. However, the leader has made a series of recommendations that he believes will open up the party and enthuse membership and supporters.

There will be a consultation session, led by Vince, at the annual conference in Brighton. There is a consultative fringe meeting at conference solely about the supporters scheme.

There is also a consultation of all members, which will be published on the Liberal Democrat website shortly after Friday's speech. It launches on 7th September and will close on 14th October. When the consultation closes, Vince will ask the Federal Board to commission an all-member ballot. Final proposals will be subject to a vote at conference.

## **SUPPORTERS' SCHEME**

Why is a supporters' scheme a good idea?

Anything that makes it easier for people from all backgrounds to get involved with the political process is good for democracy. By creating this free-to-join scheme, we bring together people in the liberal centre ground and build a movement that can become bigger than the Labour or Conservative parties.

We believe there are many people who do not like the idea of joining a party but would nevertheless be willing to signal their support for us, because they like what we stand for, particularly if they thereby gain a say over the election of the leader. Many local parties already have lists of people who help without being members.

Creating this category and giving them power over the leadership election strengthens the ties between them and the party and encourage further activism. It helps the party explain our message in greater detail to a larger number of people. It makes it easier for them to express their views to us, and thereby for us to gauge the mood of a larger proportion of the electorate.

Aren't you at risk of entryism?

There's a huge opportunity to get thousands of people to work with us. There is a risk, but as Vince says, you can't open a window without letting in some flies. Given we don't have any recent fights or extremes that threatened to split the party, it's unlikely that we would have tens of thousands of people who would want to disrupt a Lib Dem leadership election. Plus, all any 'entryist' supporter would be able to do is vote between genuine Lib Dems as candidates. Members would continue to decide who will get on the ballot

paper. We will be building in safeguards against entryism as part of the consultation process.

Aren't you diluting the value of being a member?

Members would still have considerably greater powers than supporters: selection of council and parliamentary candidates; the opportunity to be a candidate; speaking and voting rights at conference and in any party ballot; voting rights over local party, state and federal committees.

It's very easy to join the party, and you only need to pay as little as £12 a year. Are there really so many people out there who would become supporters but wouldn't pay £12?

The experience of our sister party in Canada and our research shows that creating a free-of-charge supporter scheme vastly increases the number of people it attracts. Removing any obstacle – even as simple as removing the need to enter card details – makes such a scheme far more effective.

The barrier to joining an organisation is often psychological rather than financial.

## **REMOVING THE 12-MONTH RULE**

Why remove minimum membership time to stand for election?

This would see the federal party catch-up with local government where there is no such requirement. Typically, members are at their most enthusiastic when they first join the party and we want to make sure that we don't present any obstacles to their immediate progression. Plus, these time limits are completely arbitrary.

Wouldn't this mean that we lack a proper assessment of the standards of candidates?

No, we already have a robust and lengthy approval process which would continue to make sure we have high calibre candidates. The choice of candidate also remains in the hands of party members – if they don't like them, they don't have to select them.

Again, isn't this opening up the party to entryism?

No. Any such individuals would have to join the party, go through the same checks, and accept all the rules applicable to parliamentary candidates.

But why should we trust defectors from other parties who have spent their careers opposing us?

There are many members of both the Labour and Conservative parties who are deeply unhappy over their leaderships and the extreme nature of their parties, particularly over Brexit. They are often more aligned with our views and, if they can prove that, there is no reason why we should not welcome them.

## **OPENING UP THE LEADERSHIP TO NON-MPS**

Is this an admission of defeat, that with 12 MPs the party does not have enough talent in the House of Commons to form a leadership?

Vince has highly talented colleagues who would clearly make excellent leaders

or have already previously fought impressive leadership campaigns. But there is nothing wrong with widening the pool for the party to choose from and it will also engender a lot of interest and excitement.

But is it an admission that you will either be wiped out or still have very few MPs after the next general election?

No, our recent record shows there is a steady recovery. We have a membership of around 100,000, have the most net gains and vote share increases in local government by-elections over the past year, gained four councils and 78 councillors at the local elections, and put 20% on our vote at the Lewisham east by-election.

But it is illiberal to block people from standing for the leadership just because they have not followed the unusual career choice of entering Parliament. There are also plenty of leaders across business society, be it charity, business or in the community and we must welcome that talent.

We're opening the field to other great leaders who share our values.

If the leader is from outside the House of Commons, who would be the

Prime Minister if the Liberal Democrats win the next general election?

We're an ambitious party, but the reality is that this is a big step in building the party rather than forming an immediate government. It should also be remembered that when a general election is called there are no MPs. If we win enough seats to form the government, then a leader who was previously not an MP could become one of them.

Would anyone pay any attention to a leader not based in the Commons?

There are leaders who aren't MPs who have nevertheless commanded significant media interest, including Nigel Farage and Ruth Davidson.

Does the leadership candidate need to be a member of the party?

Yes.

## MISCELLANEOUS

Where did these reforms originate?

Our party strategy was passed in March and we have been talking to people inside and outside of the party about how to deliver this. We've met extensively with En Marche.

We have been working with Tom Pitfield and his firm, Data Sciences, on a number of projects, including modernisation of our operations, since the general election. Pitfield was formerly Justin Trudeau's chief digital strategist and his firm has also worked with En Marche. Over the past year, our conversations with Pitfield and the analysis by his firm led us to develop 'Project Ozark'.

What happened in Canada?

Thanks to the decision to create a new, free supporter category for leadership votes in 2012, the Liberal Party of Canada saw nearly 300,000 members and supporters join the party by the end of the subsequent leadership contest in April 2013.

This helped propel the party from first to third.

Wasn't Canada all about Trudeau? You don't have someone like that do you?

There is no 'one size fits all' to creating a movement. But we are learning the lessons from Canada, France and even the USA and working out how to make this fit to the UK model.

We don't have anyone in mind. Also, Trudeau in fact emerged as an unfancied candidate from a field of nine, so it was not 'all about' him but a result of the reforms themselves.

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## [Vince Cable's speech: Building a Liberal Democrat Movement](#)

We returned this week from Parliament's long summer recess.

I used the break to give some thought as to the role my party should be playing in the British political system.

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## [Letting fees to be left behind!](#)

Letting fees are an **unfair cost** pushed onto tenants by greedy landlords.

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## **Ed Davey: The immigration system is broken. Here's how we'll fix it**

In an interview with *The Guardian*, I set out our ambitious plan to fix the UK's broken immigration system, end the Conservatives' hostile environment and celebrate the positive impact immigration has had on the United Kingdom.

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## **Which Lib Dems have made the biggest difference to you?**

Over the weekend, member Ruby Chow started a thread on Twitter asking Lib Dems who the top ten most important people in the party were to them.

**What followed was a thread full of love for Lib Dems across the country who have encouraged, supported or inspired others.**

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