

A Better Start in Life for Every Child

A child's first few months are crucial for their development. Studies show that children from poorer backgrounds are already months behind their classmates on their first day of school.

So early years education is the best possible investment we can make in the future.

It matters for parents too. Well-paid parental leave helps parents to spend more time with their kids. Affordable and flexible childcare gives parents choice over their lives. It helps them to return to work if and when they want to, and it fights against the huge gender pay gap.

Liberal Democrats have long been fighting for a fair deal for families. We increased the number of free hours when we were in government and proposed a substantial, well-funded expansion of high-quality childcare in our 2019 manifesto.

Rishi Sunak doesn't understand what families want. He wants to do childcare on the cheap, cutting ratios and underfunding nurseries by billions. Parents won't thank him for more free childcare if their local nursery can't afford to stay open.

So Liberal Democrats will fix the mess he's created. We will pay childcare providers properly and ensure the most disadvantaged families benefit.

Plus, we'll revolutionise parental leave, by doubling pay and helping more families, particularly dads, to take more time off to be with their children.

Our Vision: Transforming Parental Leave and Early Years Education

Today, Liberal Democrat members have backed a new policy developed by our expert working group to transform parental leave and early years education:

Childcare and Early Years Education

- Re-affirming our long-term commitment to delivering free, full-time childcare for all children from age two and those with working parents from nine months.
- Reviewing payment rates for childcare providers to ensure they genuinely reflect the costs of delivering high-quality childcare and early years education.
- Investing to close the attainment gap by:
 - Giving disadvantaged children aged two to four with an additional five free hours a week.
 - Tripling the Early Years Pupil Premium to £1,000 per year.
- Boosting the number of childminders by simplifying regulation whilst retaining high standards.

- Developing a career strategy for childcare staff, including a comprehensive training program so that most childcare staff working with children aged two to four have a relevant Early Years qualification.

Parental Leave & Support

- Giving all workers, including self-employed parents, a day-one right to parental leave and pay.
- Giving all families up to a year of paid parental leave. Each parent will get six weeks of use-it-or-lose-it leave, with 46 weeks of parental leave to share between themselves as they choose.
- Doubling parental pay (after the initial six weeks) to £350 per week.
- Increasing paternity pay to 90% of earnings, with a cap for high-earners.

Toddler Top-up

- Introducing a new “toddler top-up”: an enhanced rate of Child Benefit for one-year-olds to give all parents extra support, no matter whether they decide to go back to work straight away or not.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

- Providing extra funding for local councils to halve the amount that schools pay towards supporting the costs of a child with additional needs, from £6,000 to £3,000.
- Introducing a new National Body for SEND to fund support for children with very high needs, helping to end the postcode lottery in SEND provision.
- Emphasising identifying and supporting children with SEND in the new training programme for early years staff.

Liberal Democrats will provide families with childcare that is flexible, affordable and fair, transform childcare and boost SEND support, to give every child the best possible start in life.

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Author:

Munira Wilson keynote speech: Booster classes for millions

In her keynote speech at Autumn Conference in Bournemouth, Munira Wilson MP accused Rishi Sunak of letting down these children by “pulling the plug” on school-based tutoring. The National Tutoring Programme ends this year.

Analysis shows that more than one in seven teenagers fall behind with English or Maths at secondary school. These 64,000 students meet government reading and maths standards at age 11 but then fail either GCSE English or Maths at age 16.

She compares Sunak to Mr Bumble from Oliver Twist for consistently rejecting cries “for more” investment in education when he was Chancellor. Sunak rejected bids from Government advisers and officials for greater investment in COVID catch-up lessons, free school meals and new school buildings.

Instead, **Liberal Democrats are calling for tutoring to become a permanent fixture in England’s schools**. Schools, sixth forms and further education colleges would receive £390 million a year for intensive small-group sessions for students who have fallen behind in class.

Pupils would receive tailored support over 12 weeks in English, Maths, Science, or another academic subject. Schools and colleges would select pupils who receive tutoring, prioritising children from low-income backgrounds, with low prior attainment or with additional needs.

Schools and colleges could use their own teaching staff, recruit tutors themselves or choose from quality-assured external providers. Classroom teachers and parents would work together to identify the subjects where the tutoring is most needed.

A survey by Public First found that more than 7 in 10 parents whose children received tutoring at school said that it raised their child’s attainment. The Government’s ‘what works centre’ for education says that small-group tutoring boosts pupils’ progress by four months on average.

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Bring Back the Industrial Strategy

The Liberal Democrats want to reverse this picture. We know **the UK has huge potential for sustainable economic growth**, which in turn will create good jobs, fund vital public services and build strong communities.

Adopting an industrial strategy is essential to achieving that goal. Yet in 2021, the Conservatives scrapped the UK’s industrial strategy and disbanded the independent body overseeing it.

Business organisations labelled the move a “**short-sighted step that ministers**

will come to regret". Businesses view the industrial strategy as a stabilising force that creates certainty for investment and long-term incentives.

Other major economies understand that, and have adopted ambitious industrial policies. For example, the US passed the Inflation Reduction Act which sets out major incentives to develop green industries. And Europe is responding by supporting its own manufacturing sector.

So today, the Liberal Democrats are calling for the development of a new industrial strategy. This strategy would tackle the big challenges of our time: supercharging the green economy, boosting living standards, addressing regional inequalities, and creating the conditions for sustainable growth.

- 1. Rebuild business and investor confidence** by committing to fiscal responsibility, respect of international treaties, and the creation of a stable business environment.
- 2. Effectively communicate the objectives and tools of the industrial strategy** to industry, to provide clear signals for investment and business decisions.
- 3. Create broad access to training and skills**, by scrapping the lower 'apprentice's wage' band and boosting the takeup of apprenticeships.
- 4. Set up effective incentives for R&D investment**, decarbonisation, and the takeup of digital technologies, especially among SMEs; and ensure that the UK's regulatory, R&D and tax frameworks are geared towards fostering innovation.
- 5. Set up a plan for investment in key infrastructure** to enable the industrial strategy, covering areas including rail, building insulation, the national grid and EV charging.
- 6. Create a thriving manufacturing sector** by investing in the skills of the future; promoting net-zero transport and energy efficiency; harnessing affordable clean energy; and adopting an ambitious international trade policy.
- 7. Power scale-up companies**, especially outside of London and the South East, using innovative ways of crowding-in private-sector investment, drawing from successful international models such as the French Tibi scheme.
- 8. Reestablish the Industrial Strategy Council (ISC)** and put it on a statutory footing, to ensure vital oversight, monitoring and evaluation of the industrial strategy for the long-term.
- 9. Explore new ways to improve interdepartmental work** on cross-cutting policies, such as giving the Cabinet Office more powers to coordinate and implement industrial strategy.

Read the motion in full

The UK faces significant challenges, from the ongoing legacy of the pandemic,

to the climate crisis, energy shortages, and a stalling economy. It's time for a proactive stance, to ensure the UK is not left behind. **This new Liberal Democrat policy sets out a vision for the sustainable economic growth we need to create good jobs, fund public services and strengthen local communities.**

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A Fair Deal for Our Armed Forces Community

These are people who have put their lives on the line in defence of our liberty and our democracy. Yet sometimes the Government can't even get the basics right in return, like access to decent housing.

The families of service personnel are too frequently an afterthought. Spouses only receive important information about their lives – where they are moving to for example – secondhand, through their serving partner. Clearly, all members of the armed forces community should be treated as individuals with aspirations of their own.

And we will all be familiar with how some veterans fall through gaps in support and are all too often unable to get the help they need – especially for those who suffer from mental ill health.

For female service personnel, the prevalence of sexual harassment and misogyny faced in the armed forces is simply unacceptable. This issue has not been adequately addressed, reflecting a lack of moral courage within parts of the armed forces, in spite of good intentions across the services.

This unfair treatment is damaging retention and recruitment of the best talent for our Armed Forces, impacting ultimately on the last guarantee of our freedoms. **Liberal Democrats firmly believe that it's time for a fair deal for our armed forces personnel, veterans, and their families.**

That's why today Liberal Democrat members have passed a new policy to ensure a fair deal for the armed forces community.

1. **Strengthening the Armed Forces Covenant:** Placing a legal duty on government departments to give due regard to the Armed Forces covenant.
2. **Improving Housing:** Rigorously reviewing maintenance contracts for Ministry of Defence housing and establishing a minimum quality standard for Single Living Accommodation.
3. **Empowering Families:** Establishing a centralised information hub for families of service personnel. Reaching an agreement with the European

Union for reciprocal access to spousal employment for families of service personnel.

4. **Promoting Diversity:** Reviewing Armed Forces recruitment processes to boost diversity within the Forces, ensuring that steps are taken to foster a more inclusive environment.
5. **Protecting Women:** Implementing the recommendations of the Atherton Report on Women in the Armed Forces.
6. **Stronger Defence:** Cancelling the Conservative Government's ill-advised cut to the Army.

Read the motion in full

This community – made up of service personnel and their families who have dedicated themselves to protecting our liberties, must be given the respect and support they deserve.

No more sewage-filled homes, no more mental health service gaps, and no more lack of access to essential information.

This is a commitment to a fair deal for 1.8 million veterans, a commitment to standing with 150,000 serving personnel and their families, and a commitment to honouring their sacrifices. And I'm proud that our party is leading the way in giving this community a fair deal.

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Combating human trafficking & modern slavery

The unsettling truth is that modern slavery cases are on the rise here in Britain. An estimated 100,000 victims of modern slavery currently reside in the UK.

We all share a moral responsibility to confront and eradicate modern slavery.

Yet too often, the plight of its victims is overlooked and ignored by a Conservative Government that should be their defender.

Time and again, the Conservatives have let survivors down. They have

dismantled crucial protections enshrined within the Modern Slavery Act, and abandoned their commitment to establish a single enforcement agency. They have perpetuated unfounded claims that individuals are “gaming” the modern slavery system. And they have left the UK without an Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner for over a year.

This cannot stand. **Liberal Democrats are unwavering in our determination to combat human trafficking and modern slavery.**

Our commitment begins with immediately reversing the Conservative Government’s rollbacks, and extends to creating a new system designed to prevent exploitation, bring traffickers to justice, and provide survivors with the support they so rightfully deserve.

- **Justice for Survivors:** Better resourcing for the criminal justice system to bring more traffickers to justice, and establishing a civil remedy that empowers survivors to seek redress from their traffickers.
- **Support and Protection:** Giving survivors the support they deserve. This includes access to legal aid, protection from detention or removal, and the right to work after three months in the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).
- **Worker Protection:** Establishing a powerful new Worker Protection Enforcement Authority, focused on proactive intelligence-led enforcement of labour market standards and a firewall that separates labour standards enforcement from immigration enforcement.

Our new policy also underscores the importance of overhauling migration rules to prevent exploitation from happening in the first place:

- **Safe and Legal Routes:** Creating safe and legal routes for sanctuary in the UK, curbing the demand for people smugglers.
- **Sensible Migration Rules:** Removing arbitrary salary thresholds so that employers and employees are less reliant on temporary worker visas.

Read the motion in full

Modern slavery is an affront to our values and a stain on our society. It is our collective duty to end this exploitation and cruelty.

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