

Preserving Trial by Jury

The right to a trial by jury has been a cornerstone of our democracy for over 800 years.

But today, that fundamental right is under threat.

The former Conservative Government left our criminal justice system in a state of total dysfunction. Now, the Labour Government is taking a sledgehammer to the principle of jury trials instead of tackling the real problem: inefficiency. Their proposal to replace juries with judge-only trials for many offences is a short-sighted mistake that risks permanently damaging public trust in our courts.

Liberal Democrats are standing up to protect trial by jury.

Today, our members passed a clear plan to tackle the court backlogs without scrapping juries:

- **Protect the Right to a Jury:** Immediately abandon plans to expand judge-only trials and preserve the right to a jury.
- **Boost Court Productivity:** Implement an evidence-based strategy to reduce backlogs, including a “two trials a day” model in courtrooms across the country – a system proven during the pandemic to increase court productivity.
- **Fix Broken Infrastructure:** Cancel planned real-terms cuts to the justice budget and invest in repairing underused court buildings so they can be used effectively.
- **Renegotiate Court Contracts:** Tackle the failures in private contracts, such as prisoner transport, which currently cause 1 in 4 trials to be cancelled or delayed at the last minute.
- **Prioritise Victims:** Deliver a system where victims aren't left in limbo for years, ensuring evidence remains fresh and cases don't collapse due to unnecessary delays.

Read our new policy in full

By focusing on common-sense efficiencies – like making better use of underused buildings and addressing the 20% drop in court productivity seen since 2016 – we can deliver the swift justice victims deserve while keeping our most sacred legal protections intact.

Trial by jury works. 6 in 10 people express confidence in jury verdicts, compared to just 4 in 10 for the court system more generally. **Removing juries won't just fail to clear the backlog; it will alienate the public from the justice system itself.**

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[Driving Forward – Road to Access](#)

Learning to drive is more than just a rite of passage – it is a vital life skill. For many young people, a driving licence is the road to economic freedom, education, and independence.

But after years of Conservative mismanagement and continued inaction under Labour, the road to independence has become a dead end.

Average waiting times for driving tests have spiralled to over 20 weeks, with some learners waiting half a year just for a slot. This scarcity of test slots has enabled bots and resellers to snap up bookings and sell them back to desperate learners at inflated prices.

Combined with soaring average annual insurance premiums of over £2,000 and lesson costs exceeding £1,500, we are facing a crisis where too many are being prevented from learning to drive because of their income or where they live.

Today, Liberal Democrat members passed a new plan to clear the backlogs, end the rip-offs, and get the next generation moving:

- **Slash the Test Backlog:** Provide urgent investment to the DVSA to recruit and retain more examiners and expand test centre capacity in underserved and rural areas.
- **Launch a 'Young Drivers Support Fund':** Establish a national bursary scheme to subsidise lessons and test fees for low-income and disabled learners.
- **Ban the Booking Bots:** Implement identity-linked bookings and anti-bot protections to stop third-party touts from exploiting learners.
- **Fix the Insurance Rip-off:** Launch a formal review into car insurance for under-25s to improve pricing transparency and limit unfair age-based price hikes.
- **Modernise Training:** Update the driving test to ensure learners gain

real-world experience in night-time driving, motorways, and adverse weather.

Read our new policy in full

By helping young people get to work and study we are breaking down the barriers to opportunity.

For too many, the nature of rural geography, or the lack of safe cycling and walking routes or reliable public transport, means being able to drive a car is a necessity, not a luxury. It's also a requirement for many jobs. We will continue to champion better active travel and public transport, but we cannot allow a broken testing system and predatory pricing to stall the lives of young people.

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Author:

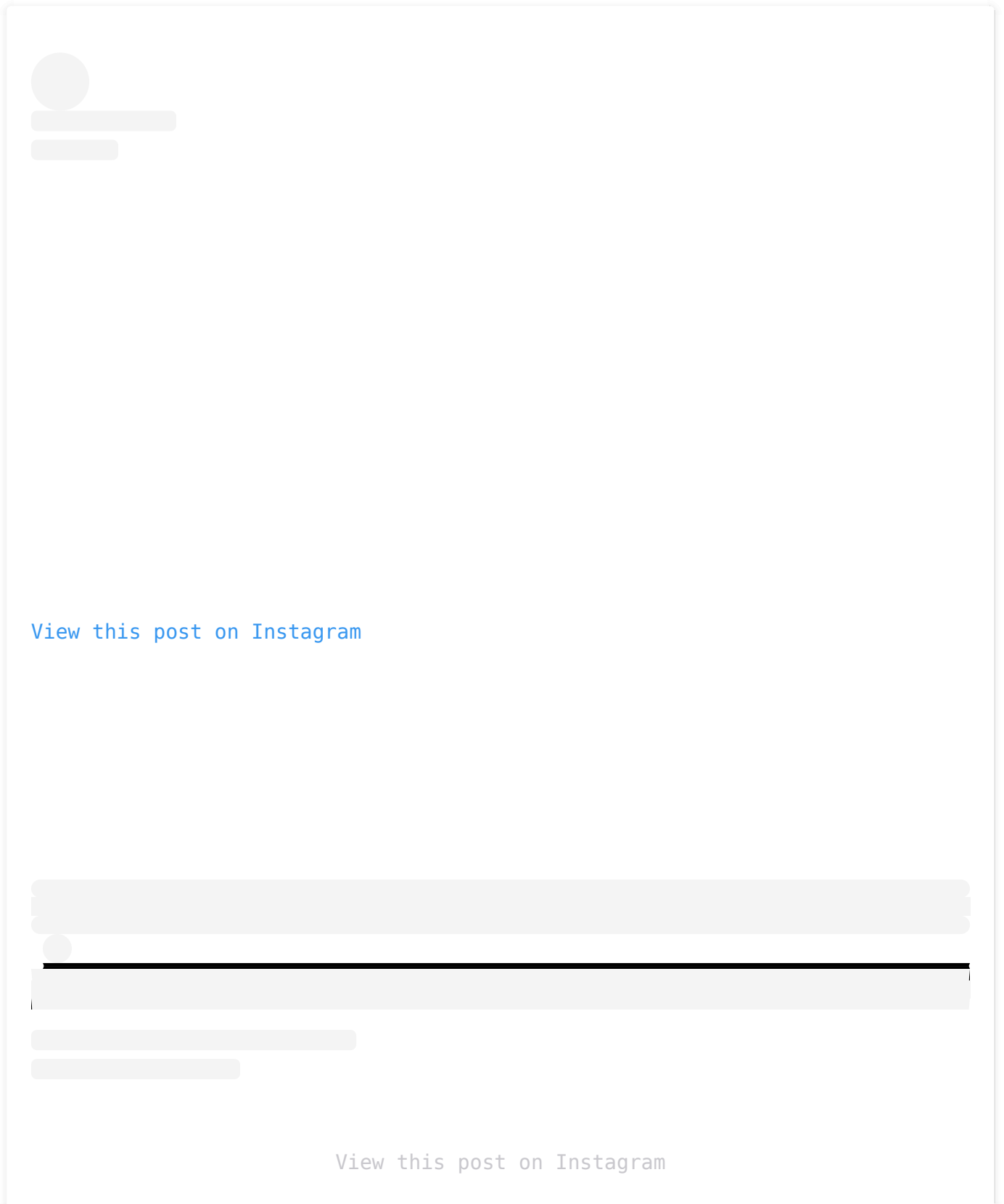
[Protecting Children Online](#)

Tech companies have for far too long treated children as data to be mined rather than young people to be protected. They have let harmful content roam free on their sites from perpetuating negative body image to amplifying extreme and violent content. They have built addictive algorithms designed to keep children endlessly doom-scrolling at the expense of their mental health.

The Government's response to this has been disappointing. Rather than taking firm action, they are giving themselves the power to potentially act later, instead of implementing the sensible policies we have long called for. This includes failing to fully implement our proposal to immediately raise the age of data consent to 16, which would ban social media giants from harvesting children's data to feed them addictive, algorithmically generated content.

We also have serious concerns about how much power this Bill puts into the hands of just one person. As it stands, a single government minister could decide which social media platforms to ban using secondary legislation, which bypasses full parliamentary scrutiny. We raised the very real concern that a future government of any political stripe could use these sweeping powers to control or categorise platforms without proper oversight.

For the campaigners, charities, and thousands of parents crying out for change, the Government's plan simply isn't good enough.



That is why we put party politics aside and voted for a cross-party amendment

to ban harmful social media for under-16s. This was not an endorsement of the Conservative approach; it was a rejection of the Government's current, inadequate plans. By voting this way, we are telling the Government to think again, return to the table, and listen to our calls for a smart, future-proof strategy that is led by evidence, not the whims of a single individual.

Ahead of the debate, **we also tabled our own amendment to advocate for a film-style age rating for online platforms, including social media.** This would mean platforms would be required to age-gate content at an appropriate level according to a new Ofcom framework looking at the addictiveness of their platform design, the impact on children's mental health, and the harmfulness of the content they host. The default age for social media would be 16, and the burden would be on Big Tech to prove their platforms are safe before that rating could be lowered. For sites hosting violence or pornography, the age would be set even higher.

Although our approach, **supported by over 40 children's charities like the NSPCC,** was not selected this time, we are not giving up. As this Bill continues through Parliament, we will keep fighting for a common-sense approach to online safety that puts the wellbeing of children above everything else.

Munira Wilson MP

Spokesperson for Education, Children and Families

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Author:

[Our plan to fix the student finance system and support graduates](#)

Right now, the student finance system simply isn't working.

Graduates are paying more, for longer, on terms that keep changing. Repayment thresholds have been frozen. Interest rules have been altered. The repayment period has been extended to 40 years for some borrowers. Successive governments have quietly moved the goalposts, and young people are left picking up the bill.

At a time when rents, mortgages and food bills are rising, graduates are being squeezed even harder.

That's not fair. And it's not sustainable.

We know trust has to be rebuilt

The Liberal Democrats paid a heavy political price for making promises on tuition fees we couldn't keep. We've learned from that.

That's why we are not making unrealistic pledges. We are setting out a pragmatic, costed and achievable plan that would make a real difference to graduates now, while also fixing the system for the long term.

Our plan: Unfreeze repayment thresholds and put money back in your pocket

We would urgently reform the system to reduce monthly repayments by reversing Labour's freeze on repayment thresholds.

For example:

- A graduate earning £35,000 would see their monthly repayments **cut in half within three years**.
- They would get an immediate boost of around £100 next year.
- Over the lifetime of their loan, lower earners could save up to £5,000.

We would achieve this by:

1. Ending the repayment threshold freeze

Instead of freezing the salary level at which you start repaying, we would raise it in line with average earnings, so as wages rise, you keep more of what you earn.

That's how the system was originally designed. It should never have been constantly undermined by successive Conservative and Labour governments who since 2015 have repeatedly frozen thresholds and changed the terms of people's loans, meaning graduates are left with soaring bills.

2. Stopping governments from constantly changing the rules

Graduates should not wake up to find the government has changed the terms of their loan.

We would create an **independent watchdog** to oversee student loan repayment terms, including thresholds, interest rates and repayment conditions, so governments cannot keep moving the goalposts.

Rewarding public service

We also want to recognise people who dedicate their careers to serving our communities.

Under our plans nurses, doctors, teachers, police officers and armed forces personnel could have part of their student loan written off after 10 years of public service.

This would help tackle the recruitment and retention crises in the NHS and schools, while rewarding those who commit to public service.

When experienced staff leave early, it costs taxpayers hundreds of thousands of pounds in training and agency costs. Retaining even a modest number of professionals would save some of this money and strengthen our public services.

Bringing back maintenance grants

The Conservatives scrapped maintenance grants for the poorest students.

We would restore **£3,500 a year in maintenance grants** for disadvantaged students, so young people from lower-income backgrounds face fewer barriers to go into higher education and graduate with less debt.

Fixing the system for good

Short-term changes aren't enough. The system needs long-term reform that lasts beyond one Parliament.

That's why we are calling for a **Royal Commission** to build a cross-party consensus on a fairer, more stable student finance system, including looking at fairer interest rates and how to stop constant political interference.

A fairer deal for graduates

The current system has drifted away from its original design and become more punitive over time.

Our plan would cut repayments, protect graduates from political meddling, reward public service and restore maintenance grants for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We cannot undo the past. But we can learn from it, and act now to make things better.

This is a bold yet deliverable plan to ease the cost-of-living pressure on

graduates today, while building a fairer system for tomorrow.

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Author:

[Get Britain Growing Again](#)

Liberal Democrat Treasury Spokesperson and Deputy Leader Daisy Cooper MP has today unveiled a radical plan to 'Get Britain Growing Again to end the cost of living crisis'.

Liberal Democrat deputy leader said "we don't just need to get rid of this anti-growth Chancellor, we need to get rid of the anti-growth Treasury."

The new powerful Department for Growth would have a clear mandate to boost long-term prosperity and end the cost-of-living crisis. It would have responsibility for setting taxes, along with putting together a growth strategy, deciding on strategic national infrastructure projects and setting fiscal rules.

Read Daisy's speech in full

We Liberal Democrats believe that we should talk up our country.

We are one of the world's leading economies. Our financial and professional services sectors make us a trade superpower. And we are uniquely placed in having the combined advantage of language, law and location.

We have strong institutions. Dynamic markets. Universal public services.

We have world-leading universities, creative industries, and life sciences. We are the third largest market for artificial intelligence. And we have awesome entrepreneurial people.

Our United Kingdom is an amazing country and has enormous potential.

But we can never take this for granted. And we must accept that we are stuck in a rut. Stuck in a doom loop of low economic growth. And that is a big problem.

Economic growth matters.

We need to Get Britain Growing Again to end the cost of living crisis.

We need to Get Britain Growing Again to rebuild our public services.

We need to Get Britain Growing Again to invest in the climate transition and create the well-paid climate jobs of the future.

If we don't Get Britain Growing Again then we're trapped: trapped paying more and more, but with less and less.

It's why everyone is working harder and harder. Paying more and more in tax. And getting less and less in return.

So Getting Britain Growing Again must be any government's number one goal.

Now, the Labour government says that its number one mission is growth.

But too many of its policies are anti-growth.

Even next month's Prime Minister Wes Streeting thinks there's "No growth strategy at all"

Labour has made lots of mistakes. But for me, one of the worst – is that they knew for months they would win the General Election, but they just weren't ready.

No plan. No vision. No change.

Instead, their government – like governments before them – reverted to 'Treasury brain'.

The Winter Fuel Payment fiasco. A short-term Treasury tax-grab driven by the desire for immediate bankable cuts.

The jobs tax. A short-term Treasury tax-grab with no regard for the crushing impact on employment, investment or growth.

The family farm tax and the attack on family businesses. Short-term Treasury tax-grabs by the Chancellor that could lead to some of the most resilient long-standing British businesses being broken up and sold off.

The list goes on.

But this isn't a new problem.

For too long, political parties without a vision for growth have allowed the Treasury tail to wag the political dog.

And it must stop.

For decades, everyone has identified this as a problem.

The Treasury does too much. Fiscal policy, economic policy, and controlling government spending. In most other countries, these roles are split up.

The Treasury enables governments to go for **short-term tax grabs that suit political cycles over the need for long-term growth.**

The Treasury is disconnected from the real economy. Despite holding all the economic power, the Treasury isn't responsible for policies on business or trade.

This leaves British business jumping through hoops, speaking to three, four, five different government departments before they can get an answer.

In short – the Treasury is over-centralised. It drives short-term thinking. And it simply isn't designed to deliver long-term economic growth.

Some think it can be tweaked here and there. Some want to centralise it even further by putting some of its power in the hands of the Prime Minister.

We have a more radical plan.

Today I can announce that we Liberal Democrats don't just want to get rid of this anti-growth Chancellor. We want to get rid of this anti-growth Treasury.

As part of our plan for government, we would break up the Treasury – and replace it with a new powerful Department for Growth.

A new Department for Growth with a mandate to boost long-term prosperity, improve living standards and end the cost of living crisis.

The Department for Business and Trade would be merged into this new growth department, recognising the central role of British business in driving growth.

And a smaller Department for Public Expenditure would be set up to oversee departmental spending and ensure value for money.

This new Department for Growth would focus minds on what growth could help us achieve:

- Stronger economic growth would finally be recognised as the only sustainable, long-term solution to end the UK's cost of living crisis.
- Investment in our NHS, renewable energy and defence would not be seen as a cost but as the way to build a healthy workforce, develop strategic competitive advantage and Get Britain Growing Again.
- And it would finally force all other political parties to explain why

they refuse to pull the biggest growth lever we have: a better trading relationship with Europe that could rip up red tape and raise £25 billion a year to fix public services and end the cost of living crisis.

And the Department for Growth could help re-set the relationship between government and business too:

- It would end the tyranny of short-term tax grabs trumping long-term growth.
- It would be a single point of contact for business and investors: one "Team UK" where business and investment is aligned with national priorities.
- It would align tax policy to economic growth – **so something like the jobs tax could never happen again.**

In splitting up these functions into different departments, we would be following the lead of other major economies: like Ireland, America, Australia.

But we wouldn't stop there.

For centuries, the UK government has been too London-centric. "Whitehall" is short-hand for "calling the shots".

We Liberal Democrats are the only political party with MPs that span from the highlands and the islands of Scotland down to the tip of the South West, so we know, we see the differences in economic growth between the South East and everywhere else.

So we think it's time for change.

Under our plans, the new Growth Department wouldn't just have a focus on getting growth beyond London.

The new Growth Department would itself be based outside London – in the heart of the UK's second city, Birmingham.

And this would send a strong signal – because a significant indicator of the imbalance in our economy is the yawning gap between the UK's capital city and every other city and all other parts in the UK.

As a clear example, if we could close Birmingham's productivity gap with London from 37% to 20% this alone could add around £12bn a year to the size of our economy.

That's a bigger boost to GDP than the India, Australia and New Zealand trade deals combined.

And all things being equal, it could lead to roughly £4bn a year in additional tax revenue. That's enough to build two brand new hospitals every

year; or recruit an extra 80,000 teachers; or even boost the Government's entire farming Budget by more than 50%..

It's clear as day that the challenges are piling up.

Falling living standards. Broken public services. Rising inequality. And the constant cost-of-living pressures – grinding people down, pushing businesses to the brink.

The two old parties have failed the British people. The British public are now asking whether anyone knows how to fix it.

Well we do – and the answer is to Get Britain Growing Again.

Creating a new Department for Growth in Birmingham would be just the first step.

We Liberal Democrats know that there is a big job to do.

We know that there is a **huge gap between where we are as a country and where we know we could and should be.**

Like everyone else, we feel **proud and patriotic** but also **fed up and angry.**

We're the 6th largest economy in the world yet **for most people, life is too hard and too expensive.**

The **next generation of young people** could always expect they would have a better life than the generation before but **that promise for today's young people has been ripped away.**

With so many economic shocks – from the financial crisis, Brexit, Covid, and the Mini-Budget, to Russia's full invasion of Ukraine, and Trump's tariff wars – **almost everyone under the age of 40 has spent their entire adult lives with the UK economy in a state of perma-crisis.**

Some like Nigel Farage and his party seek to exploit it.

They only want to break institutions – not fix them. Others want to hoard power in Westminster for themselves – not spread it around the country for communities.

And the Conservatives are shamelessly chasing Reform – saying plainly that moderates are no longer wanted in their party.

Well – as our party leader Ed Davey has said – moderates are welcome in ours.

And our message to them is clear:

Our future liberal economic vision is rooted in the values that have guided us for almost 200 years. We defeated the protectionist Corn Laws. We opposed the trade barriers of Brexit. We're standing up to Trump's tariff wars. We are the party that champions **international trade, fair markets, innovation and dynamic enterprise.**

We are the party that established the **welfare state: we rolled out the old age pension and free school meals, and conceived of the National Health Service.**

We are the party which in government, lifted **millions of people out of paying tax** altogether.

We are the party that established the **Green Investment Bank** and the **British Business Bank** to back new climate technologies and British start-ups.

We see **wealth creation and social justice – not as an either or – but as two sides of the same coin.**

We want to **Get Britain Growing Again to end the cost of living crisis.**

Above all else, we believe in our bones that we can once again give people a sense of hope.

Hope we will Get Britain Growing Again.

Hope we will End the Cost of Living Crisis.

And hope that the UK's future will be built, by all of us, for all of us, together.

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