

# Rebuilding Trade & Cooperation with Europe

At this dark moment, our security depends on urgently forging a relationship that works with our closest neighbours. Countering the grave threat posed by Putin means we must stand tall with our European allies instead of needlessly antagonising them, while working closely together on issues like energy security, trade and helping Ukrainian refugees.

The Conservatives are simply incapable of making the choices that will improve people's lives.

We cannot afford to be disunited in the face of Russian aggression. For too long, our ties with Europe have been defined by petty squabbling and the government's overly ideological approach. British people and small businesses who are tangled in red tape are paying the price and they deserve better.

It's time for a different approach. **The Conservatives' dogmatic approach has damaged our standing on the world stage, our relationships with our closest neighbours, and our economy.**

The Conservatives are simply incapable of making the choices that will improve people's lives.

**Liberal Democrats want a way forward which works for Britain – that cuts down red tape, reduces costs for businesses and makes people better off as a result.**

Europe represents our closest neighbour and our largest trading partner.

British people and small businesses who are tangled in red tape are paying the price and they deserve better.

The blunt reality is that fine-tuning and tinkering on the edges of our trading relationship with Europe will not be enough. It will not provide the stability which will boost the British economy.

Today Liberal Democrat members have endorsed a four stage roadmap to establish the UK's future trading relationship with Europe, benefitting British businesses and families. It starts by acknowledging that ties between the UK and Europe have been deeply damaged by years of haggling and will have to be forged in a new way gradually over time.

The four-stage plan is as follows:

- Taking immediate action to improve links with our European neighbours,

including building closer ties in education by reforming the government's Turing scheme.

- Further steps to build confidence and establish stronger relationships with Europe, including seeking cooperation agreements with EU agencies, returning to Erasmus Plus and seeking to reach a UK-EU agreement on asylum seekers.
- Deepening trade with Europe, including by negotiating greater access for our world-leading UK food and animal products to the Single Market, securing deals on sector-specific work visas and establishing mutual recognition of professional qualifications.
- Once the trading relationship between the UK and the EU is deepened, and the ties of trust and friendship are renewed, aim to place the UK-EU relationship on a more formal and stable footing by seeking to join the Single Market.

[Read the full motion](#)

Liberal Democrats are the UK's most pro-European political party.

We believe **Britain's best future is at the heart of Europe** – and our long-term ambition is to see the UK in that place once more.

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## [Catching Up on Our Children's Education](#)

Teachers have been off for over 267,000 days due to Covid since the return of school in September, meaning children have lost out on the equivalent of 1.5 million teaching hours in just this school year.

They have suffered enormous disruption to their education and spent months isolated from their peers.

**Most children in the UK have lost half a year of schooling**, 5% of their entire time in school, which we know has exacerbated educational inequalities and had a devastating impact on mental health.

**The pandemic has put a huge strain on children and young people's mental health.** They have suffered enormous disruption to their education and spent months isolated from their peers. With 1 in 6 children now suffering from a mental health condition, providing catch-up funding is an important way to take this pressure off children.

There are also huge impacts for the economy – children could lose earnings of up to £46,000 each over their lifetimes.

Concerns over their children falling behind as a result of the pandemic is one of the top concerns of parents as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. The Conservatives have let down parents and children by failing to invest in catch-up classes to make up for lost learning throughout the pandemic.

Children in the UK have lost half a year of schooling, 5% of their entire time in school, which we know has exacerbated educational inequalities.

This Government lost £16bn of taxpayers' money due to fraud and error in Covid loan schemes. Yet **they only committed £4.9 billion to our children's catch-up**. Not even one third of the £15 billion recommended by the Government's former Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.

Part of the reason we've seen the disadvantage gap grow during Covid is that many children from less-disadvantaged families are already getting extra tutoring or classes outside of school. As we recover from the pandemic, it is right that closing the disadvantage gap is a top priority for the Liberal Democrats.

In our new policy passed by members today, we are calling for:

- the Government to immediately commit the full £15 billion to catch-up funding for children, in line with the recommendations from the Government's former Education Recovery Commissioner, Sir Kevan Collins.
- the Government to distribute £5 billion of this funding to Catch-Up Vouchers worth £200 a year for 3 years, given directly to parents for all 8.3 million children in state-funded schools.
- £400 a year of vouchers for disadvantaged children eligible for the Pupil Premium or those with special educational needs.
- £600 a year of vouchers for pupils with special educational needs who are also eligible for free school meals, and looked-after or previously looked-after children.

[Read the full motion](#)

**This policy puts money directly into parents' and carers' hands to spend on whatever their children need most:** tutoring in reading, writing or maths; music lessons; swimming classes or other physical education. And the 2 million most disadvantaged children would get double vouchers, so they can get the extra catch-up education they need.

For looked-after children, the vouchers would go to their foster parents or to the local authority, with a duty to spend them in the child's best interests. And those children would get triple vouchers, so they get the extra catch-up provision they need.

**Our Catch-Up Vouchers could make an enormous difference to millions of**

**children.** We know it's vital to make sure all children get the catch-up support they need – **they deserve the best chance for a bright future.**

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## [Action to Improve Air Quality](#)

Air pollution is to blame for nearly 40,000 deaths each year in the UK.

Everyone has the right to clean air, but it's a right many people in the UK are unable to realise. The Conservatives have repeatedly failed to take meaningful action to address this killer.

1 in 4 pupils attend schools in areas over air pollution limits.

Our national limits for nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter are set at **four times the level of the World Health Organisation guidelines.** 1 in 4 pupils attend schools in areas over air pollution limits. And the UK has broken air pollution limits for a decade, **costing the NHS billions to treat people affected.**

**We need to ensure that the right to clean air is one which people can realise.**

That's why today Liberal Democrat members have passed a new policy calling for:

- The implementation or extension of **Clean Air Zones**, like that in my local authority of Bath, which was the first in the UK outside London.
- The introduction of legally binding **national limits for particulate matter and other pollutants** at or below current WHO guidelines.
- Funding to support buses, taxis and private hire vehicles to **switch to clean fuels.**
- Increased funding to local authorities to tackle air pollution.
- Empowering local authorities to:
  - Install more pollution sensors near major roads and at every urban school.
  - Publicise local air quality issues including publishing live pollution levels from their pollution sensors.

[Read the full motion](#)

**Reducing air pollution is vital for the health of everyone in the UK,**

particularly children.

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## [Political Reform to Tackle Sleaze](#)

This country is built on the simple mantra, that it doesn't matter how high and mighty you think you are, the rules are the rules. If you break the rules, you get punished. Yet **Boris Johnson and many Conservative MPs think the rules don't apply to them.**

Conservatives' actions have created a sense of 'one rule for them, another rule for us', eroding the trust of the public they are meant to be acting in the best interest of.

This Government showed its true colours back in Autumn 2021, with their decision to overturn Owen Paterson's 30-day suspension from the House of Commons. Then their lies were exposed with the revelations of parties in Downing Street and the accusations that Number 10 officials and the Prime Minister have potentially breached lockdown rules.

Polling in December 2021 showed that just 5% of the public believe politicians work for the good of the country. **That is a tragedy for our democracy.**

The Government is accountable to the public, who have the right to a transparent Government that does not act above the law.

Previous Prime Ministers and previous Governments have all had their failings. However, **it has been a long time since we have seen, not just this stench of sleaze, but the absolute lack of resolve to do anything about it.**

Time and again, government ministers have refused to properly investigate allegations of sleaze, failed to declare relevant meetings and donations and tried to rig the system to cover their own backs.

Boris Johnson and many Conservative MPs think the rules don't apply to them.

This crisis has highlighted the imbalance of power between the executive and the legislature. This includes the Government's evasion of scrutiny during Parliamentary recess – only ministers can recall Parliament – and the

Government's control of the Parliamentary timetable, thus limiting the issues which can be discussed by MPs.

The Conservatives' actions have created a sense of 'one rule for them, another rule for us', eroding the trust of the public they are meant to be acting in the best interest of.

In our new policy passed today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- A public inquiry into the ongoing Conservative sleaze scandal, with the disclosure of relevant documents
- Codifying the Ministerial Code into legislation with governance independent of the Prime Minister
- Introducing a range of sanctions for those who break the Ministerial Code with an Independent Advisor for investigating breaches
- Giving MPs more control of the business in the House (e.g. recalling Parliament)

[Read the full motion](#)

We need an independent, statutory public inquiry, with the powers and resources to get to the bottom of this Conservative sleaze scandal – including the power to summon witnesses and require them to give evidence under oath.

We also need an independent investigation system – at present it's the equivalent of defendants in a court case also taking part in the jury. And we must ensure those with a vested interest in tearing up Parliament's anti-sleaze rules don't have the power to do so.

Liberal Democrats are committed to creating an inclusive democracy, in which politicians from all parties can be trusted by the people they represent.

**We will not stand by and allow this culture of sleaze to continue.**

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## [Meeting the challenge of the ecological emergency](#)

The UK has lost nearly half of its biodiversity since the Industrial Revolution. We're ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations for biodiversity.

The UK should be leading at COP15, but the lack of action at home undermines our credibility

Conservative ministers claim to be close to the target of protecting 30% of the land and sea for nature, but are completely undermined by a lack of management measures and enforcement.

**It's not acceptable. We can and must do better.**

In new policy passed by our members today, Liberal Democrats are calling for:

- A plan for delivery of the target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030, with specific and costed policy measures.
- Substance to the Government's promise to protect 30% of land and sea for nature.
- Reforming the powers, purposes, funding and duties for AONBs and National Parks to restore nature.
- Ensuring that the environment is at the heart of all government policymaking.
- Greater powers for local authorities to help tackle the nature crisis.
- Reversing the cut in International Aid to support developing countries restore their ecosystems.

[Read the full motion](#)

The forthcoming UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) is a rare opportunity to secure global commitments to addressing the ecological emergency. The UK should be leading at COP15, but the lack of action at home undermines our credibility abroad.

We're ranked in the bottom 10% in the world and the worst among G7 nations for biodiversity.

**Inadequate protection** or investment in wildlife sites. **Debilitating funding cuts** to the statutory environmental agencies. Weak policies that fail to support a transition to a sustainable farming and fishing industry. **Undermining accountability** with their decision to restrict the independence of the new Office for Environmental Protection.

We must get our own house in order when it comes to the ecological crisis if we are going to be taken seriously on the world stage.

The world has failed to meet previous targets to halt the global decline in biodiversity. We cannot afford to fail again.

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