

Expanding the Use of British Sign Language

As a child I learned basic sign language.

My parents' had a friend whose mother had been deaf since birth and just loved looking after and playing with me.

Part of that was teaching me her language so we could chat about the TV we were watching, what I was doing at school or just whatever flitted through my happy little head.

It didn't seem like a big issue to me at the time. Natural in fact.

But over the years after Annie passed away I gradually forgot everything that she taught me so that when I met one of my heroes, Dame Evelyn Glennie I felt inept at relying on her to ensure we could communicate.

All deaf and hearing-impaired individuals have the right to participate in society fully and independently and too often these rights are not fully realised.

It shouldn't be that way. Not for anyone.

British Deaf Association figures suggest that 151,000 people can currently use BSL in the UK including 87,000 hearing impaired users.

British Sign Language was recognised as a language in its own right by the UK Government in 2003.

Many parents may want or need their children to learn sign language, however they will need to pay for these lessons. Subsidised or free lessons are entirely at the discretion of local authorities.

As a party, we are deeply concerned that, despite deafness not being a learning disability, it can lead to underachievement of deaf children. All deaf and hearing-impaired individuals have the right to participate in society fully and independently and too often these rights are not fully realised.

British Sign Language should have equal status to the UK's other official languages.

Better access and understanding of the language used by deaf children by both their teachers and their peers can only help to alleviate some of these problems. British Sign Language should have equal status to the UK's other official languages.

The British education systems teach modern languages in the hope of fostering greater communication between peoples and bringing long-term economic benefits, British Sign Language lessons would fulfil both of these aims. Sign language is included on the education curriculum in Sweden, Norway and Finland who have seen no detrimental effects on children's education by adding more subjects.

School budgets are already creaking under the consistent underfunding and cuts from the Conservative Government.

In order for schools to be given the resources they need to teach British Sign Language, it must form part of the core curriculum for young people.

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

- The rapid introduction of GCSE equivalent qualifications in BSL in England.
- The Department for Education to commission a feasibility study into the introduction of BSL lessons in primary schools to embed the teaching of basic BSL from an early age, with expert findings to be offered to devolved education departments.

[Read the full motion](#)

This policy would sit alongside our other education policies to improve the system for all, including for English, Maths and Science. We have also been in strong support of British Sign Language being given legal status as a way of raising awareness of deaf culture. Now that this idea is gaining traction politically across the spectrum, a GCSE and more accessible studies of the language should follow

Young children are able to learn languages at a faster rate due to rapid neural formation. If the aim is to get young children to fluency, then it is best to start at a young age.

Around 150,000 people in the UK use British Sign Language, these changes would give them a chance for a more integrated future with the children and adults around them.

As Liberal Democrats, we are committed to inclusivity. Not only will learning British Sign Language include those children who have hearing impairments, it will teach all children about the importance of this inclusivity.

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[Conference update Spring 2022](#)

Conference starts on Friday, and if you haven't yet registered you can do so [HERE](#).

The Federal Conference Committee met on Saturday, 5 March to review amendments, emergency motions, and questions to reports submitted for next week's Spring Conference.

Spring Conference 2022 will again be held online via the Hopin platform, and we would like to **thank the Conference Team and the wider team at HQ for making it happen.**

As mentioned via email and in an earlier post on Lib Dem Voice and the Federal Conference Facebook Page the FCC has agreed to allow a **later deadline on emergency motions on the topic of Ukraine**, following the Russian invasion and the evolving situation. You can still submit an emergency motion on Ukraine [HERE](#).

We are also delighted to announce that there will be a **fringe session held on Sunday, 13 March from 17:40 to 18:45 with Kira Rudyk, Leader of the Holos Party in Ukraine** (a sister party of the Lib Dems), who will be **joined by Layla Moran MP, answering questions from members on her experience and the current situation in Ukraine.** I do encourage you to attend this exciting fringe event.

The FCC reviewed the emergency motions submitted by 28 February and as these were either out of order or have been accommodated as emergency amendments to motions already on the agenda, the Committee therefore decided that it would select one of the Ukraine motions which have a later deadline of Thursday 10 March at 14:00. This means that we will have a 70-minute Ukraine motion; this motion will be unamendable. **The Committee will publish the selected Ukraine motion on Friday around midday.**

In addition, the submitters of motion F16 Selection of Speakers (Standing Orders Amendment) have informed the Federal Conference Committee that they wish to withdraw their motion from consideration at Conference. Once a motion (or amendment) has been included in the agenda it can only be withdrawn by leave of Conference. Therefore, **during the Federal Conference Committee Report to Conference (F2) there will be a vote held if Conference agrees that the motion is withdrawn.**

I have included below the list of amendments selected, I have provided a summary of the nature of the amendments. These titles are based on my summarisation of the amendments and I apologise in advance if any of these have not been summarised correctly.

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Break the Bias

I'm proud of the strides our country has made towards gender equality, and of the role Liberal Democrats have played in delivering that progress. **Yet there is still so much more to do.**

Far too many women still face violence, sexism and discrimination – a reality that has been brought into sharp focus by the pandemic and Sarah Everard's murder last year.

Liberal Democrats continue to fight for true gender equality. We are campaigning to make misogyny a hate crime, establish a royal commission on violence against women and girls, and reverse the cuts to international aid.

This year, **International Women's Day is focused on breaking the bias** – because whether conscious or unconscious, bias makes it difficult for women to move ahead in our society. And simply acknowledging this isn't enough. We need to take far more action to level the playing field.

This starts with representation in our politics. That's why Liberal Democrat initiatives like the Campaign for Gender Balance are so important for encouraging and supporting women who want to stand as candidates.

Now, **for the first time ever, women make up the majority of our parliamentary party.** I was delighted to be joined by two more brilliant women in the House of Commons last year – Sarah Green, the new Liberal Democrat MP for Chesham and Amersham, and Helen Morgan, the new Liberal Democrat MP for North Shropshire.

In the House of Commons, nine of the Liberal Democrats' thirteen MPs are women.

This year for [#InternationalWomensDay2022](#), our MPs are proposing nine new Bills which embody the principles at the heart of our party.

Check them all out below ↓ <https://t.co/I0oT7BZGKd>

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [March 8, 2022](#)

And they are doing fantastic work. Today, my colleagues have proposed nine new Bills to celebrate International Women's Day, which you can read about here. From ending the pay gap once and for all, to addressing maternal health for Black and Asian women, these Bills tackle problems affecting women and girls in the UK and beyond.

So this International Women's Day, I will be celebrating so many incredible

women – who have brought us this far; who work tirelessly for equality; and who are helping us all to finally break the bias.

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[9 New Laws proposed for International Women's Day](#)

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[The importance of liberal internationalism](#)

It was a shocking and sobering sight just a few days ago to wake up and see a photo of Kira Rudyk, the leader of a sister liberal party of ours in Ukraine holding a gun and preparing to fight.

It was also a reminder of the importance of our liberal values – and the need for internationalism to support fellow humans, rather than to try to hide away within our own borders as if the rest of the world doesn't exist. **Viruses, climate change and dictators don't stop at borders, and nor should our compassion for other people.**

The wave of sanctions, both mandatory from governments and voluntary as others too have ceased trade, cancelled events and ended Russian participation, is a reminder of just how much integration there was – economically, socially and culturally – between Russia and the rest of the world.

A frequent hope of liberals is that such extensive links can bring people together and reduce the risk of conflict. What the invasion of Ukraine has shown, however, is that such hope is not enough. We also **need strong**

multinational institutions with the necessary powers to enforce their decisions when required.

Getting that right will help avoid future Ukraines, but we also have to work with where we are in the present. Which is why **we're pressing the government so hard to take effective action against the Russian oligarchs** who have secreted so much wealth in London and spent so heavily on British politics, British legal services and British financial services.

Events in Ukraine will come up in multiple ways at our online federal spring conference 11-13 March. You can still [register for the event here](#) (and it only costs £5 if you have not come to conference before).

In the light of both the tragedy in Ukraine and the controversies over the Chinese use of money to influence British politics, we've been reviewing our rules for checking the international aspects of potential donations to confirm that they have the right safeguards in them.

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