

# [Spring Conference motion selection 2022](#)

The Federal Conference Committee (FCC) met on Saturday, 15th January to start its work on the **final agenda for Spring 2022 Conference**, which will be taking place virtually via the Hopin platform.

**If you haven't yet registered for Conference, I would recommend doing so [here](#).**

We've had a few departures from the FCC in the last few months and [welcomed two new members](#). Jennie Rigg ceased being the English Party's Representative to the FCC and Jenni Lang stepped down as the Scottish Party Representative after becoming the Convenor of the Scottish Liberal Democrats. I would like to place on record our thanks for their service to the FCC, they will be missed, and we would like to wish them all the very best for the future. We welcomed Matt McLaren as our new English Party Rep and Paul McGarry as our new Scottish Party Rep to the committee.

**The FCC wants to thank the Conference Office for the amazing work that they do.** We are always so grateful to them for their hard work.

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## [What we must do next to learn the lessons of 2019](#)

**The headline "two new MPs so far in this Parliament" is a welcome one.** Winning, especially winning with record swings, is what we all want.

Underneath the headline is a lot of hard work, plenty of tough decisions, and a drive to improve. **We should all be thankful to our activists, staff and supporters.**

It is clear to me that the diagnosis and recommendations [my team and I set out](#) after the failures of 2019 were right, and that [they are being taken seriously](#). Not least among them was that a Federal Board of 41 members cannot, and should not, be the clear leadership team we need to steer our party and help us all win elections. Something of that size is a talking shop, and talking shops are neither democratic nor effective.

**I therefore welcome the Federal Board's motion to Spring Conference setting out options for reforming the structure of the Board.**

My thanks to those [who took part in the supporting consultation](#) – collectively you have been clear that it is time for change. This feedback was crucial in helping the Board refine our options to a sensible number for consideration. With limited time, not all ideas could be brought to the floor.

Conference is being asked to choose between three options for change, and then finally between reform and the status quo.

As you can see (below) from the proposed set-up of a new Board, the options deliberately ensure key voices from across the party – geographically, demographically and in other respects – are built in.

**I am pleased that the reform options presented address the concerns highlighted in my review. The options provide for a smaller, more nimble leadership team.**

They also **retain the democratic selection we cherish while clarifying responsibilities**, individual and collective.

I see in these options a chance to better encourage cooperation across the party. To build a real leadership team. Only when we have that team can our leaders be held collectively accountable by members: currently a missing ingredient.

That accountability makes for a better democracy for members. Too much power, now, is wielded outside of our official structures, and so outside of accountability.

I look forward to a rigorous, healthy debate at Conference. This is a complex question and I will be listening hard to colleagues and friends to help make my own decision. My principles will be **democracy, accountability, electability, and not letting the best be the enemy of the good.**

Organisational change is not easy. For us, though, it is necessary.

**Do see below for a quick summary of the options coming, in more detail, to Spring Conference.**

**What a reformed Board would look like: key points**

The smaller, reformed Board under these proposals would consist of:

- The President, who shall act as its Chair;
- The Leader;
- The Chair of the English Party, the Convenor of the Scottish Party and the President of the Welsh Party;
- The Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities;
- Three people who shall be party members elected by all members of the

Party except that persons who, at the date of the close of nominations for election under this paragraph, are members of Parliamentary Parties set out in Article 17 shall not be eligible to be candidates for election under this paragraph. Casual vacancies amongst this group shall be filled in accordance with the election regulations;

- A Vice-Chair of the Federal Policy Committee;
- The Chairs of the Federal Conference Committee, the Federal Communications and Elections Committee, the Federal Finance and Resources Committee and the Federal People Development Committee;
- The Chair of the Young Liberals; and
- A principal local authority councillor, elected Mayor or Police and Crime Commissioner, elected by the principal local authority councillors, elected Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners of the Party.

Others would also be invited to Board meetings where applicable, such as a staff representative and the Chief Whip for topics that particularly affect staff or interact with our MPs respectively.

It's important to note how many of the roles listed are already elected by party members, given direct accountability:

- The Party Leader, President and Vice President responsible for working with ethnic minority communities are all elected by all party members; and
- The Scottish Convenor is elected by all members in Scotland, the Welsh President is elected by all members in Wales, the Chair of Young Liberals is elected by all Young Liberals members, that the councillor representative is elected by all councillors, and that the Chair of Federal Conference Committee (FCC) has to come from the FCC members elected by all party members.

Conference will also be asked to choose an option for holding the Board to account, with options including a relatively small 'scrutiny committee' model of less than 20 members, a larger 'Party Council' model of about 40 members, or direct oversight by Conference itself alone.

More details of these options are in the full motion which will appear in the conference agenda.

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## [February bulk-buy deal](#)

The LDHQ Campaigns & Elections Team are running a rolling programme of bulk-

**buy deals.**

This month's bulk-buy deal is on an A3 Focus leaflet.

This should be your last 'Focus' branded leaflet, before you head into the election period. Include a couple of key local stories, but don't forget to have your strong squeeze and attack messages as well.

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## [Campaigning on Europe – members' views](#)

You may remember, last November, taking part in a **survey on members' views on Brexit and the party's campaigning on the future of UK–EU relations. Thanks to everyone who participated – 6,500 members, more than any previous survey of this type** – and thanks to Greg Foster and Dan Schmeising at party HQ who organised it on behalf of the Federal Policy Committee. This article gives you the results.

The first question asked how you voted in the 2016 referendum. Completely unsurprisingly, over 91 per cent voted to Remain. Most of the rest couldn't vote (for example because they were too young); just 2.5 per cent voted to Leave. No less than 95 per cent would describe themselves now as Remainers (more than four-fifths of whom chose the option 'Yes, I am a Remainer and I am proud of it') and just 1.3 per cent described themselves as Leavers (a third of whom – 25 people – were proud of it).

In response to the question, **'Do you think people in your life who aren't Liberal Democrats associate the current problems the country is experiencing – shortages of truck drivers, farmworkers, care workers and goods in shops – with Brexit?'**, on a 0–6 scale, the average answer was 3.7: **in other words, they do, but not all that strongly.** Of course, the pandemic and the government's feeble response have complicated the picture substantially, but this will change over time, as the impacts of Brexit become ever clearer. Indeed, if we'd asked the question now rather than two months ago, I suspect the response would have been stronger.

We next asked which **EU-related policy areas the party ought to treat as a priority**, given that the impact of Brexit is being felt across so many; people could choose three out of a list of fourteen. **Trade came top**, listed by more than half of respondents. **The others, in order, were:** climate change and energy; freedom of movement and immigration; rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in the EU; standards for environment and labour issues;

scientific collaboration; cultural, artistic and educational links; environment and biodiversity; defence and security; health policy; justice and police cooperation; foreign policy (countries outside the EU); international development; and crime.

The remaining questions dealt with **how people thought the party should communicate its existing policy** (as decided by party conference – to build closer links between the UK and EU, leading in the longer term to joining). We asked (on a 0–6 scale) whether people thought that (a) people who aren't Liberal Democrats and (b) party members and supporters, would like to hear us talk more about building a better relationship between the UK and EU, short of joining the EU; and whether they'd like to hear us talk more about the UK rejoining the EU. **For each audience, respondents thought that 'building a better relationship between the UK and EU, short of joining' would be a better message than 'the UK rejoining the EU'** (by 4.2 to 3.1 for non-Lib Dems and 4.9 to 4.5 for party members and supporters). All those are on the positive side of the results (3.0 is the mid-point), though only just so for a rejoin message for non-members.

We asked similar questions about the party's target audience at elections: 'The Liberal Democrats should pitch our appeal mainly to former remain voters by emphasising our belief that the UK should join the EU' (score 3.6) and 'The Liberal Democrats should pitch our appeal mainly to former leave voters by stressing the need to build a better relationship between the UK and EU, and avoiding talking about joining one day' (score 3.9) – both positive, but neither exactly ringing endorsements. **The combined position – 'The Liberal Democrats should pitch our appeal to both former remain and former leave voters** – even though this may be a less clear message – by stressing the need to build a better relationship between the UK and EU in the first instance, leaving open the possibility of rejoining' – proved more popular, with an average score of 4.5.

The final question asked people to choose between those three positions. **The combined message was a very clear winner**, chosen by 65 per cent of respondents. The 'appeal to remainers' message won the support of 19 per cent and the 'appeal to leavers' message 16 per cent. Although we tried to force the issue by stressing the likelihood of the combined message being a less clear one, you were having none of it!

**Thanks again to everyone who took part.** The FPC's task is to take that core message and put policy flesh on it. Look out for our policy paper on the future of the trading relationship between the EU and the UK, and Single Market membership, due for debate at spring conference.

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# [Future of the Federal Board: what members say they want](#)

After the disappointment and failure of the 2019 general election, an independent post-mortem was carried out into what went wrong. [The findings of the Thornhill Review](#) set a broad and challenging reform agenda for the party, which we've made good progress on implementing so far.

On the role of the Federal Board itself, the Thornhill Review found that:

*The lack of connection between operational, political and governing parts of the party has created structures which foster a lack of collaboration and isolated decision making. (p.35)*

*A fragmented organisation led to low collaboration and isolated decision making. (p.33)*

*There is no clear 'leadership team' where the three pillars of the party – political, operational, federal – can make cohesive decisions, simply, quickly, and effectively. The Federal Board – 40+ members – is not, cannot, and should not be that team. (p.34)*

*The Federal Board was often a 'rubber-stamp' and is too large a group to be a realistic decision-making body. (p.22)*

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