



ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON YOUTH AFFAIRS

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD AT 5:30PM, TUESDAY 24 FEBRUARY
WILSON ROOM, PORTCULLIS HOUSE**

GUEST SPEAKERS

- **BARONESS SAL BRINTON, PRESIDENT OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS**
- **SIMON WRIGHT MP, LIBERAL DEMOCRAT SPOKESPERSON FOR EDUCATION, FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE**
- **ALEX HARDING, CHAIR OF LIBERAL YOUTH**
- **DOMINIC WEINBERG, POLICY MANAGER, NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY YOUTH SERVICES**

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

Group Chair, Julie Hilling MP (JH) introduced the group and briefly set out the format of the meeting.

2. SPEAKERS INTRODUCTION – SAL BRINTON

JH introduced Sal Brinton (SB), President of the Liberal Democrats, who explained the Liberal Democrats have a clear view of the role of the individual and the state. She said they believe the individual should have as much freedom as possible but the state should ensure that they have access to healthcare and education. She explained that the Liberal Democrats support the devolution of powers to a more local level and promote targeted funding e.g. through free school meals. She confirmed that the Liberal Democrats would introduce votes at 16 and added that the Scottish referendum was a good example of how young people can become engaged in politics. She said the Liberal Democrats want to listen to young people and their experiences for education and healthcare.

3. SIMON WRIGHT MP

JH introduced Simon Wright (SW) MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Education, Families and Young People, who said that he was pleased to see such a good turnout to the event. He argued that the Liberal Democrats went into Coalition to ensure a stable government. He said it is wrong that a student's background is still a key factor in their educational achievement. He explained that the Liberal Democrats have introduced the Pupil Premium which has given head teachers the ability to support disadvantaged

students in the way they think is best. He concluded that there should be fully qualified teachers in the classroom and schools should provide a “*curriculum for life.*”

4. ALEX HARDING

JH introduced Alex Harding (AH), Chair of Liberal Youth who discussed the work of Liberal Youth. He argued that young Liberal Democrats have the ability to influence Liberal Democrat policy. He explained that Liberal Youth have representatives on the Liberal Democrats Federal Executive and they feel empowered to go out and try to change policy. He said Liberal Youth have their own priorities and are currently campaigning to improve mental health services at universities. He added that they have previously campaigned on paid internships and tuition fees.

5. DOM WEINBERG

JH introduced Dom Weinberg (DW), Policy Manager at National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, who said young people are supported by those working in the youth sector who give them support and access to opportunities. He said he was sure everyone attending the meeting had received support and mentoring themselves at some point. He argued that young people need strong and thriving organisations able to support them. He outlined NCVYS’ Stop, Look and Listen campaign on safeguarding and said it is important the government are aware of which organisations to fund, so that the most effective organisations receive support. He said organisations are facing challenges around the Lobbying Act, and that it is important charities are able to advocate on behalf of young people.

6. DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

JH invited young people to ask questions to the speakers, covering a variety of topics including political engagement and the election, and employment and skills.

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Jack from Youth Employment UK and NCVYS asked what powers the Liberal Democrats would devolve to the regions and how this would help local authorities.

Ashley from Girlguiding highlighted that only 21% of girls are interested in politics, and asked how the Liberal Democrats would get more young women interested in politics.

Hugo from Youth Employment UK said his experience of political education in school was poor, and suggested that young people are not getting enough of a chance to learn about politics and debate different issues.

Matthew from NCVYS asked what the Liberal Democrat policy was on engaging young people with disabilities.

SW responded that he wanted to see regions come forward with their own plans for devolution and ask central government for additional powers. He argued that girls are interested in a range of issues which matter to them but political parties aren't always attractive to them, and he said he hoped the introduction of votes at 16 would help young people become interested in politics. He said political education should be of a high standard in all schools but that politicians should not "*meddle*" in the curriculum too much. He said the Liberal Democrats want to engage all young people, including those with the disabilities.

SB further responded that women need good role models to engage them in politics and that women in politics now "*pass the torch*" to other women. She encouraged young people to get their peers interested in politics, for example by holding a mock election in schools.

AH responded that young people often feel they do not they know enough to get involved in politics and this leads them not to get involved. He argued this can also lead to young people not supporting the lowering the voting age to 16 because they do not feel equipped to vote.

DW responded that young people need services that listen to them to help them engage with the processes around them.

Ricky from YMCA said lots of young people living rough do not think that politicians will help them. He asked how the Liberal Democrats will engage street homeless young people.

Cameron from YMCA said the Liberal Democrats' change of position on universities fees had made young people lose faith in them, and asked how the Liberal Democrats would help restore young people's trust in politicians.

Soxol from Leicester YMCA asked how politicians can engage young people when they see MPs abusing their power as they have on the recent Channel 4 Dispatches programme.

Barnabas asked why politics GCSE is not compulsory given that affects people throughout their lives.

Mita, the Chair of the BYC asked whether the Liberal Democrats would introduce a Youth Minister to advocate on behalf of young people. She pointed out that the Minister for Civil Society is currently responsible for young people but they have a number of other responsibilities too.

Chante, the Vice-Chair of the BYC, said young people are often attracted to more issue-based politics and asked how the Liberal Democrats would get more young people engaged in social action.

Cllr Mathew Hulbert, a member of the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Education, Families & Young People encouraged all young people to get involved in politics and to stand for election when they are old enough.

Anna Smee from UK Youth questioned where responsibility for young people lies given the transfer of responsibilities and staff from the Department of Education to the Cabinet Office.

Amie from St Johns Ambulance asked how politics could become more positive for young people.

SB responded that the street homeless need more access to housing, and that there needs to be more properties for rent and rent to buy. On tuition fees she said the Liberal Democrats were the junior partner in the Coalition and had to compromise on their election commitment not to raise fees. However, she said the current system functions like a "*graduate tax*" and more young people from poorer backgrounds are now going to university, not less. She said she thought young people were able to recognise the need for compromise in a Coalition.

SW further responded that most MPs are hardworking and do not abuse their power. He said most MPs do not have time for a second job but a minority of MPs cast the rest in a negative light. He said the Liberal Democrats want to see a "*curriculum for life*" throughout school not just during GCSEs. He said while it is not current Liberal Democrat policy to introduce a Youth Minister he thought it could be an interesting and positive way forward. He said many young people are already engaged in social action, and the benefits from young people volunteering are currently undersold.

EDUCATION

Chloe from the Young Women's Trust said that there are consistently more young women not in education, employment or training (NEET) than young men. She asked what the Liberal Democrats are doing to recognise the specific needs of women NEETs.

Yusuff from the Children's Commission on Poverty said there should be more transparency on how the Pupil Premium is spent and free school meals for every child in poverty. He said many children in poverty come from working families.

Shona from NCYVS asked whether the free school meals provided to young people would be healthy.

Faraowsa from St John Ambulance asked whether the Liberal Democrats support including First Aid training on the curriculum.

A representative from Girlguiding asked whether the Liberal Democrats support including compulsory sex and relationships education on the curriculum.

Kemi from Young People Matter enquired about the Liberal Democrats' plans to improve mental health services for young people.

Joe from Youth Access asked what had happened to a report on the impact of cuts on legal aid on young people which was supposed to be published by the Government but has not been published.

Charlotte from YMCA said she worked with young people living in emergency housing and she asked what kind of properties will be built by the Liberal Democrats. She highlighted the need for one-bedroom flats for young people and support to help them in transitioning into independent accommodation.

Brian from YMCA Leicester asked about safeguarding young people, in particular making sure they are not on the streets.

SW responded that he would encourage women NEETs to tell politicians what kind of support they need. He said the Liberal Democrats support free school meals and have ensured that all children in infant classes have a free lunch at school which helps them learn and reassures their parents. He said the Liberal Democrats do support the introduction of First Aid training onto the curriculum.

SB further responded that too many young people with mental health problems are being held on acute wards. She said the Liberal Democrats would provide more funding for young people with mental health problems, particularly in the areas of suicide in young men and eating disorders, which can often disproportionately affect young people. She said well-being should be a part of every school and that rights respecting schools currently work to ensure the well-being of their pupils. She added that the Liberal Democrats do support the introduction of compulsory sex and relationships education in schools. She said that if the report on legal aid has been held back it is likely to be because the two Coalition partners cannot agree on the content.

CONCLUSION

DW thanked SB, SW and AH for coming and listening to young people. He said the issues facing young people can be challenging, such as homelessness and poverty but it doesn't mean they should not be discussed.

JH closed the session by thanking the speakers and attendees, and highlighting the importance of young people's contribution to the group.

FINAL ATTENDANCE LIST

Name	Organisation
Baroness Sal Brinton	House of Lords
Simon Wright MP	House of Commons
Julie Hilling MP	House of Commons
Alex Harding	Liberal Youth

Dom Weinberg	NCVYS
	Artswork
	British Red Cross
	BYC
	Diana Award
	Youth Employment UK
	Farnborough College Sixth Form
	Foyer Federation
	Gateway
	Girlguiding UK
	Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council
	Hyde Housing
	Impetus
	London Youth
	NACRO
	NCS
	St John Ambulance
	UK Youth
	YMCA Bedford
	YMCA Leicester
	YMCA Milton Keynes
	YMCA South London
	YMCA Youth
	Young People Matter
	Young Women's Trust
	Youth Access
	Youth Employment UK
	YMCA
	BYC
	Connect Communications