

Employment

Liberal Democrat Policy Briefing 5

January 2005



Rights and Responsibilities at work

Liberal Democrats believe that a modern, flexible, high skilled workforce is essential for the well being of the economy and of the nation. In creating such a workforce we want to ensure that employers are free to run their businesses and create wealth whilst all employees are able to enjoy their full rights, regardless of who employs them. We wish to achieve this without over burdening business with regulation and red tape.

Encouraging corporate social responsibility

The model used by listed companies that has developed over the past decade of reporting to shareholders on environmental and community activities has worked well. We wish to encourage this further as we believe that reporting on such activities benefits the recipients of the activity and encourages its development without the requirement for legislation and regulation.

Home and agency working

Liberal Democrats welcome the development of home and agency working as the flexibility often make them attractive options for those with family or other responsibilities. Nevertheless, they should not be used as a means of denying people the rights and protections they would otherwise receive if working at an employer's premises or directly for an employer.

If a home is a workplace, we would extend to it workplace requirements on working conditions. Employers workplace insurance will also be extended to cover home workers. Firms using home workers will need to register the premises with the local authority.

Agency workers will be protected by making agencies responsible for recognising and upholding all rights not directly under the control of the employer.

Discrimination in the workforce

We will end discrimination against older workers which force them to retire against their will. We will end the compulsory retirement age and reform pensions so that people can retire gradually by paying into a fund at the same time as receiving a pension from it. We will also give people over retirement age protection against unfair dismissal.

Some employers inadvertently discriminate against potential employees by placing unnecessary requirements on jobs. We will encourage stakeholders in the economy, such as the CBI and TUC, to work together to draw up a code of practice to end discriminatory job requirements.

We support the merger of public bodies set up to tackle various different forms of discrimination into a single and more effective Commission for Equality and Human Rights. The Commission would, in addition to its statutory functions, act as an adviser to individual businesses on diversity issues.

Consultation in the workplace

Liberal Democrats have long argued in favour of consultation in the workplace. We will place a duty on all employers to consult, regardless of the number of employees they have. We will not impose a model of consultation as businesses themselves should be free to develop their own practices and structures. In larger firms, however, we will encourage works councils.

Managed migration

Some skill and labour shortages can only be resolved by making use of migrant labour. We will replace the existing, inefficient work visa system for non-EU citizens with a green card system. Quotas of migrant workers to address the specific needs of the economy will be set. We will ratify the UN Convention on Migrant Workers.

At the same time, controls will be strengthened on illegal immigration and those involved in people trafficking that undermines the legitimate economy as well as the well-being of the trafficked workers.

Training

We will offer work based apprenticeships to fourteen and fifteen year olds as an alternative to pursuing purely academic qualifications. **Existing workers** without level 2 qualifications, and those aged under 25 without level 3, will be offered the opportunity to have work based training.

Trade Unions

We will retain the right to ballot for industrial action and for internal elections. We will give members the right to pay the political levy into a non-affiliated fund instead of a party affiliated fund if preferred, but we will scrap the unnecessary and bureaucratic requirement to hold a ballot every ten years on maintaining a political fund.

We will allow the government, when supported by Parliament, to require both workforce and employers to submit to binding arbitration where the workforce in a vital area of the economy has voted for industrial action.

This briefing contains Federal Liberal Democrat policies. The policies of the Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local party apply on issues which are their responsibility within our Federal policy-making structure.

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