

## Policy Committee Chair Report to the 2024 YHLD Conference

At last year's YHLD Conference, three policy motions were approved by members. They were Gill Long's *School Uniforms Motion* (amended), George Sykes's *Tackling the Housing Crisis*, and Samuel Jackson's *Fixed Term Parliaments* (unamended).

*Tackling the Housing Crisis* was adopted by the Young Liberals at their 2024 Winter Conference after George Sykes's successful endorsement. However, owing to the adoption of an amended housing motion at the 2023 Autumn Federal Conference, these motions served to reaffirm the housing target of 380,000 new units. He hoped that there would be scope for his policy's measures concerning housing construction or environmental standards to be utilised for a future submission to federal conference. George has not received word from any local councillors concerning the enactment of any of the motion's proposals.

*School Uniforms Motion*, amended to encourage wider support from Liberal Democrats for proactive measures to prevent poverty-based exclusion from schools. George Sykes successfully endorsed a version, *Poverty Proofed Schooling*, at 2024 Young Liberals Winter Conference. Meanwhile, Cllrs Jeanette Sunderland and Aislin Naylor successfully pushed for debate on the motion on 12 March, although the version supported unanimously by councillors was a version amended by and primarily crediting the Labour portfolio holder.

*Fixed Term Parliaments* was submitted to the Federal Policy Committee for consideration for inclusion in the 2024 Spring Federal Conference agenda, with then PPC for Harrogate and Knaresborough Tom Gordon as its summator. However, the FPC rejected the motion since fixed-term parliaments and handing any decision to impose term limits on members of an elected upper house to a citizens' assembly, and as the motion seemed to provide no rationale for the model it proposed.

To address this critique, the motion was redrafted. The redraft stated that parliamentary terms would last for four years instead of five as originally stated, and that unscheduled elections would be framed as 'emergency elections' rather than 'extra elections', emphasising that they would be initiated by the failure of the incumbent government.

Efforts were made to propose *Fixed Term Parliaments* at other regional conferences to garner further support for the motion ahead of possible resubmission to a future federal conference. Unfortunately, the timings of other English regional conferences and the rights of English members at Scottish and Welsh conferences stymied these efforts.

George Sykes forwarded several policy motions to the Policy Committee Chair for consideration. They included *Elections Here, There and Everywhere*, which advocated regulation of electoral conduct for private organisations, *Firework Regulation*, which advocated greater regulation over the sales of fireworks, and *Towards a Liberal Approach on Surveillance Technology*, which advocated new classification systems, codes of conduct, auditing procedures and ethical police oversight guidelines for private surveillance systems. *Elections Here, There and Everywhere* was adopted as Young Liberal policy at their 2024 Winter Conference.

2024 Spring Federal Conference was held in York from 15 to 17 March. The Policy Committee Chair took the opportunity to carry out enquiries to benefit *Fixed Term Parliaments* and *Poverty Proofed Schooling*.

During a Q&A session at the fringe event *Investing in the Future: Education at the Heart of Future Funding Plans*, sponsored by the National Education Union and the Education Policy Institute, the Chair asked the panellists their opinions regarding the exclusion of low-income students due to cost of school uniforms and extracurricular equipment. The panellists were generally supportive of the need for financial assistance, with Chris Brown stating that measures in Tim Farron's Outdoor Education Bill covered this but could have done with strengthening. However, Rob Herd questioned the need for school uniforms, citing less stringent dress codes in work environments. Later at conference, Chris Brown requested a copy of *Poverty Proofed Schooling*, which the Chair forwarded to him digitally.

During the debate on the policy motion *Tackling Persistent Absence*, Young Liberal Noah McGarry spoke of children at his school who had been excluded during fun days such as World Book Day due to their inability to afford costumes. He proposed allowing for the provision of loan costumes to prevent poverty-based exclusion. Despite its niche applicability, the Chair considered including this measure in future iterations of *Poverty Proofed Schooling*.

For *Fixed Term Parliaments*, there was little scope for inquiry, with a general commitment to fixed quadrennial parliaments being party policy. Discussions about the issue and the possibility of review with Wendy Chamberlain, as the Spokesperson for Political and Constitutional Reform, proved inconclusive.

While visiting the Fringe Exhibition, the Chair encountered the Action for Land Tax and Economic Reform (ALTER) stall, where representatives were endorsing their group's policy motion *A Fair Deal on Council Tax*, which they hoped to submit to 2025 Spring Federal Conference. With the Northumberland and Newby local parties already in favour of the motion, the Chair offered to press the case for the motion at future regional conference to garner further support.

The 2024 general election was called for 4 July, impacting the expected policy agenda for 2024 Autumn Federal Conference. Apart from our national party winning an equitable share of seventy-two seats in Parliament, including Harrogate and Knaresborough, the general election proved one of the most disproportionate in recent British history, inspiring the Chair to author two policy motions.

The first was *Election Debates for a Parliamentary Democracy*. To address the patchwork system of hustings events, the motion proposed the introduction of debates between all candidates in every constituency, livestreamed with the aid of public service broadcasters and financed as part of financial support for local journalism by levying social media platforms. And to address the growing tendency for televised debates to falsely present general elections as votes for a Prime Minister, the motion also proposes restoring policy area debates between parties' respective portfolio holders.

The second was *Improve Voter Participation*, although this was dependent on the replacement of First Past the Post with Single Transferable Voting for UK general elections. The general election saw Labour win over sixty per cent of parliamentary seats with only one-third of all votes cast, a reduced voter turnout of below sixty per cent, at least sixteen thousand people barred from voting due to voter ID requirements, and abstentionism surpass the majorities of winning candidates in 611 out of 650 constituencies. In response, the motion proposes to introduce – for general elections – two-week-long early in-person voting periods; the use of mobile polling stations in rural localities; semi-optional preferential voting requiring voters to rank at least as many preferences for candidates as there are positions in a given multimember constituency; a None of the Above option on ballot papers; and Universal Civic

Duty Voting with non-voting incurring – depending on personal choice – fixed monetary fines or hours of Community Payback.

In anticipation of 2024 Young Liberals Summer Conference, the Chair submitted *Election Debates for a Parliamentary Democracy*, *Improve Voter Participation*, and *A Fair Deal on Council Tax* to consideration of inclusion in its agenda. Ulysse Abbate, the incumbent Young Liberals Policy Officer, said that the two political reform motions were declined due to limited time for discussion by the executive and a high volume of submissions, whilst *A Fair Deal on Council Tax* was rejected due to incorrect data points and use of overly technical jargon. When offered the chance to do so, the Chair declined to draft his own version of the motion to submit to YL Conference.

While at YL Conference, the Chair asked other former PPCs for their thoughts on *Election Debates for a Parliamentary Democracy*. During a Q&A session, Joshua Reynolds (MP for Maidenhead) stated, based on his experiences, his beliefs that hustings events were not effective means for constituents to learn about their candidates. George Sykes (Leeds South) suggested reviewing *Policy Paper 145 (Democracy and Public Debate)* to tie funding for constituency-level debates with financial support for local journalism from the levying of social media platforms, and to allow the debates to be streamed via social media and video-sharing platforms. And Rebecca Jones (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) suggested that local authorities provide recording equipment for the debates, and that debates could take place via teleconferencing.

*The Rise of the Far Right* chosen as the emergency policy motion in response to rioting following the recent Southport stabbings. George Sykes authored, proposed and successfully argued for the adoption of an amendment advocating for greater investment in community-led policing.

When asked by the Chair, Abbate stated that the same policy motion could be submitted to the Young Liberals Executive as many times as possible before it was accepted. Inspired by the motion *Abolish the Voting Age*, which its author and proposer Katharine Macy said was designed to generate debate, the Chair drafted the policy motion *Regulate In Vitro Gametogenesis*. It is the Chair's intention to submit it to 2025 YL Winter Conference alongside a serious political reform motion to gauge the YL Executive's reactions to both.

Sally Burnell, the English Party Representative on the FPC, reached out to regional policy officers to share ideas for policies which they may be working on. In response, the Chair forwarded copies of *Election Debates for a Parliamentary Democracy* and *Improve Voter Participation* to her. As she also mentioned the undertaking of a policy review consultation, the Chair also forwarded her a copy of *Reintroduce Fixed-term Parliaments*.

Ms Burnell said that the Policy Review Working Group could endorse motions if it wished to address loss of public trust in politics. If not, such motions could be considered at federal conference in twelve to eighteen months if they garner support. She also recommended condensing *Election Debates for a Parliamentary Democracy* and *Improve Voter Participation* into a single policy motion, which the Chair has entitled *Fix Britain's Broken Politics*.

At 2024 Autumn Federal Conference, the Chair took on the policy motions *Election Debates for a Parliamentary Democracy*, *Fix Britain's Broken Politics*, and *Regulate In Vitro Gametogenesis*.

For *Election Debates for a Parliamentary Democracy* and *Fix Britain's Broken Politics*, the Chair forwarded copies to Keith Sharp, who promised to present them to the executive of Liberal Democrats for Electoral Reform; the Chair consulted representatives with the BBC's fringe exhibition stall, who said that they could support the livestreaming of PPC debates;

David Naghi of the Parliamentary Candidates Association could an interest, with the Chair forwarding him copies; at the LDER fringe event *A Parliament for Proportional Representation*, the Chair noted that the panellists' broad opinion that the adoption of proportional representation would need to be a condition of the adoption of mandatory voting; and Duncan Brack stated that they may be considered as early as Spring 2025.

For *Regulate In Vitro Gametogenesis*, the Chair took soundings from various groups likely to be affected by its proposals, namely LGBT+ Liberal Democrats, the Liberal Democrat Disability Association, the Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats, Liberal Democrat Women, and the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. Many stall representatives thought that the measures of this motion were largely reasonable, although Katharine Macy objected to its proposal to prohibit 'solo' application due to its ramifications for asexual people. Rebecca Jones, while keeping private any personal views, recommended redrafting the motion to reflect the fact that health is a devolved matter. The Chair forwarded copies of the motion to Mx. Macy, Charlie Hasted and Anne Wellington for reference, and to the Scottish and Welsh Young Liberals for drafting advice. The Chair also forwarded copies of the motion to Helen Morgan, Munira Wilson and Christine Jardine, the Spokespersons for Health, Children and Education, and Women and Equalities respectively, to ask for their opinions. Duncan Brack said that the motion could only be considered as early as Autumn 2025 due to the timing of the Young Liberal Conference and submissions deadlines for 2025 Spring Federal Conference.

For George Sykes's motion *A Liberal Approach to Surveillance Technology*, the Chair attended the Big Brother Watch fringe event *Liberals Against Authoritarianism: Protecting Civil Liberties in the Digital Age*, where he asked about the use of surveillance systems by small businesses. The Chair went on to forward copies of the motion to Josh Babarinde and Lisa Smart, the new Spokespersons for Justice and Home Affairs respectively, for their opinions.

The Chair got in touch with Andrew Haldane, a former policy officer for the Northeast. He presented an open offer for cooperation between policy officers for Northern English regional parties. The Chair accepted.

For 2024 YHLD Conference, the Calderdale local party endorsed *Election Debates for a Parliamentary Democracy*, which has been submitted to be considered for debate at conference.

Joshua Rutty, Co-chair of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, contacted the Chair to discuss redrafting the motion *Regulate In Vitro Gametogenesis*. Apart from the measures in question, he recommended changing its applicability and contacting their Policy Officer Brendan Roberts.

The Chair endeavoured to lobby the Young Liberals to hold their 2025 Winter Conference in Halifax in a bid to boost the profile of the Calderdale Liberal Democrats and help its drive to attract younger members. He recommended several venues of equivalent scale to the Bridewell Centre and noted Halifax's geographically central position and easy accessibility, as well as the expediency of applying pressure to its incumbent MP Kate Dearden following her support for the Labour government's emerging austerity programme as an Assistant Whip. This advocacy was hampered by the YL Executive elections.

The Chair wrote several opinion pieces for *Liberal Democrat Voice* connected to motion policies that he is currently advocating to gauge potential reactions to them. While that pertaining to election debate formats received some positive responses, that pertaining to in vitro gametogenesis received comment resistant to its 'solo' application.

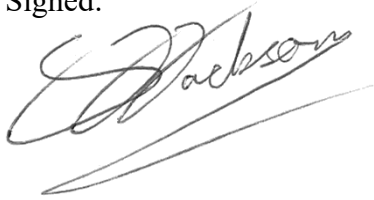
In researching the impact that the adoption of Single Transferable Voting would have on constituency-level election debates, the Chair contacted members of Government and Politics departments of several Irish universities. Dr Karen Devine of Dublin City University

responded, stating that PPC debates could still take place in multimember constituencies if parties either field only one candidate or endorse a candidate preference. For the latter, the primary candidate would likely represent their party and its raft of candidates in such a debate. However, in a candidate-orientated ranking system, she did state that could be possible for primary candidates to lose against lower preference candidates from the same party.

Following the Young Liberals Executive elections, the Chair contacted the re-elected Policy Officer Ulysse Abbate to discuss the prospect of *Poverty Proof Schooling* being submitted to federal conference. Although both are due to discuss this matter in the near future, Mr Abbate said that the submission of the motion by the Chair would be acceptable.

The Chair also contacted Lucas North, the re-elected Young Liberals Event Officer, to lobby for Halifax is serve as the host for the 2025 YL Winter Conference. The Chair has yet to receive a response.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Jackson', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Samuel James Jackson  
Policy Committee Chair  
Yorkshire and the Humber Liberal Democrats

Date: 26 October 2024