
Federal Board Paper

Improving Liberal Democrats Abroad's ability to deliver electorally by its proper inclusion in the party membership and campaigning structures

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Lead at Board: Simon McGrath and Paula Yates

Authors: Lib Dems Abroad Steering Committee and Lib Dems Abroad Future Working Group

Summary

What has the Board previously decided in this area?

In Autumn 2017, the Federal Board established Liberal Democrats Abroad (LDA) to ensure there is a structure and activity to involve, benefit and grow Lib Dem membership and its supporter network abroad. As a starting point - and not wishing for constitutional change at the time - the LDA was set up outside the existing mainstream state party structure as a Federal International Relations Subcommittee without voting rights. Since then, the LDA has succeeded in developing its coordination role of its three local parties.

After five years in its current form, the time has come to have our Liberal Democrat local parties abroad more appropriately integrated into the mainstream of the party. This will allow the LDA to receive the level of commitment and support it needs from the federal party, to take advantage of recent changes in UK electoral law to bring more votes - and donations - to our party from British overseas registered voters

What does the Board need to decide today?

1. To agree in principle that, over an appropriate period of time, LDA should be brought into the mainstream of the party's organisational structure by continuing executing the roadmap detailed in the appendix to enable its members to play their full role within the party and deliver on our collective mission and goals.
2. With immediate effect, to agree to request the **Federal Communications and Elections Committee (FCEC)**, the **Federal Policy Committee (FPC)** and the **Federal Council when constituted** to co-opt a representative of LDA as a non voting member, as allowed by the Federal Constitution until such time any future constitutional changes by conference can make these permanent voting positions, labelled as for "Lib Dems Abroad". This **Federal Board** is also kindly asked to co-opt LDA as a non-voting member.
3. To agree that LDA should make a submission to the Federal Finance and Resources Committee as part of the 2023 Budget and planning process

Background

Lib Dems Abroad (LDA) consists of three local parties - Lib Dems in Europe (LDE), in France (LDF) and Overseas (LDO) - with 1,000 members and 1,300 supporters. It is currently situated outside the mainstream federal party structure of state, regional and local parties. This has significant disadvantages, including a lack of access to the democratic structures within the party and to best practice, advice and appropriate resources. This inevitably leads to misunderstandings and creates difficulties in carrying out its role and work within the party.

LDA has remained a hidden gem to the vast majority of mainstream party members due to the current arrangement. This lack of visibility and connection with local parties within the UK - and HQ difficulties in handling some financial and access to resource issues which are specific to bringing in income from abroad for the benefit of the party and tracking membership data - now need to be tackled as changes to UK electoral law is repositioning LDA within the mainstream to help the LDA deliver electorally for the party

The 2022 Elections Act abolished the "15-year rule" (a Lib Dem 2017 and 2019 manifesto commitment) and fully enfranchised the 8% of British citizens living abroad who had connections with the UK. This means there are an estimated 3.5 million British eligible electors abroad, close in size to the Scottish - and significantly larger than the Welsh - electorate.

The UK government consulted LDA extensively on the overseas part of the Elections Bill during its passage. LDA is currently working with Lord Wallace, the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators on its implementation abroad. The Election Commission intends to involve all political parties in its awareness raising campaign abroad which is due to start from July 2023. We know from the Electoral Commission that the Conservatives are already gearing up their efforts worldwide. We need to be able to up our game substantially with a strategy integrated with the mainstream of the party to be ready in time as well.

The integration of LDA into the mainstream of the federal party structure will be an important part of demonstrating our commitment to British citizens' causes abroad, targeting what we believe to be a naturally liberal leaning population that could help us shatter the Blue Wall in the next General Election.

What are the financial implications (if any)?

Today's Federal Board decisions have no financial implications at this stage.

The Federal Finance and Resources Committee will be the judge for any resources that the party may provide as part of the 2023 Budget and planning process.

An important part of Lib Dems Abroad's mandate is to fundraise from potential British overseas donors on the electoral register in conformity with UK electoral law.

What are the risks?

Allowing the status quo to continue will impede support and recognition for work carried out on behalf of the party, disincentivise activists from taking full advantage of the opportunities presented by the 2022 Elections Act, and stymie electoral and financial support for the cause.

What does this mean in our objective of being carbon-neutral?

No impact.

Have we appropriately consulted with members?

LDA started the consultation process with its members in autumn 2021 and put together a volunteer Working Group on the future of Lib Dems Abroad. The group has worked alongside the LDA Steering Committee to produce this paper. Further consultation and voting across the membership abroad will happen as we develop the roadmap in the next stages of the process.

Which stakeholders have been consulted about this, and which will need to be informed? What is the communications plan?

In addition to the consultation process amongst the membership abroad, we will work with other interested and impacted individuals and groups across the Party as we deliver on the roadmap. Please refer to the appendix for more details.

Appendix

Lib Dems Abroad initial Working Group Recommendations

Summary

LDA to receive formal recognition as an official Federal Party body with appropriate representation, resourcing and voice, with a mission to foster international engagement to deliver overseas votes, increased membership and donations.

The position of LDA within federal party structures

It is felt premature to finalise the position of LDA within the party - State, Region, or some hybrid thereof - before the Federal Board has discussed the broad recommendations set out in this paper at the September 3rd meeting.

We expect the new LDA framework would have no more than 2 levels of formal organisation between members and supporters and LDA.

In the interim LDO, LDE and LDF local parties will continue in their current format.

LDA Objectives and Responsibilities

Objectives

- Promote the values and principles enshrined in the Federal Constitution
- Identify and represent the interests of, and build awareness of the issues facing, British citizens living overseas
- Develop and promote policies that lead to the realisation of those values, principles and issues
- Campaign for the election of Liberal Democrats as Members of Parliament, including securing donations for the party.
- Represent the Lib Dems globally, liaising with liberal parties in other countries

Responsibilities

- Increase the membership and support of the Party and the number of registered Liberal Democrat voters abroad
- Encourage members and supporters to engage actively with the Federal Party and other constituent Parties and organisations
- Contribute to Party policies and policy development especially as relevant to British citizens living abroad, and promote such policies
- Promote awareness through the overseas network of the work and policies of the Party; provide forums for overseas members to share ideas and support each other
- Encourage closer links with other globally-aligned parties and associations
- Provide support for Liberal Democrat Members of both Houses of Parliament, local and other elected public authorities in United Kingdom
- Cooperate with the Federal Party and other constituent Parties and organisations in the furtherance of shared objectives.
- Raise finance and resources to support the LDA's objectives and responsibilities
- Comply with all relevant legislation relating to the running of a political party.

Federal Representation

In order that the LDA can fully perform its new roles within the party, and for its members to have representation on federal bodies on a par with all other members of the party, it is recommended that LDA should hold permanent positions with voting rights on some more Federal party committees to ensure more effective delivery of its mandate for the party. An interim solution of non-voting co-options is proposed for this paper.

Management Structure

The LDA will be the single point of focus for coordinating funding, resourcing, communications and campaigns across the network abroad. The initial executive structure will be finalised in the next stage of the process to reflect this remit.

There will be an annual virtual conference open to all members to participate and establish policy, as well as electing the LDA executive and Chair.

Membership & Support of UK Local Parties from Overseas

Eligibility for membership of the Party or participation in its Registered Supporter Scheme will be open to qualifying individuals who have permanent residence outside the UK. All such Members and Supporters will automatically be registered with the appropriate local organisation within LDA according to their permanent residential address.

LDA actively supports the links between Lib Dem electors abroad and the UK local parties where they are registered to vote. As a new feature, LDA would propose membership where the person is permanently resident and registered supporter status where they have a vote or are actively involved so we can involve more members who are in reality abroad.

Financing & Resources

LDA will be responsible for the overall financial stewardship of the overseas network and allocation of resources.

LDA will further develop the collaboration already taking place with the fundraising, compliance and technology teams within the Party to facilitate these activities and put the overseas network on a firmer financial footing going forward.

Communications and Campaigning

LDA will develop a common, coordinated communication and campaign strategy abroad with a single look and feel, that is consistent with that of the Federal Party and reinforces the Liberal Democrats' message abroad.

Roadmap

The detailed roadmap is set out below. Some milestones have already been achieved and are included to provide context on work already done.

	Milestone	Status	Tasks to achieve	ETA
1	LDA Steering Committee formed	Initiated : Oct 2021	LDA Conference briefings, local party executives and LDA Conference votes to agree formation	Oct 2021
2	Future of LDA Working group created	Achieved: May 2022		
3	Elections Bill passed	Achieved: Apr 2022	LDA consult with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK Government • Lib Dem Peers • Electoral Commission • Assoc. of Electoral Administrators 	Apr 2022
4	Working Group produces initial proposal and presents to Federal Board			Aug 2022
5	LDA representation on Federal party bodies through co-opted seats			Sept 2022
6	LDA makes a submission to the Federal Finance and Resources Committee as part of the 2023 Budget planning process			
7	Working Group final proposal			2023
8	Membership and stakeholder review and feedback		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership consultation exercise • Agreement with Compliance 	2023
9	Federal Board presentation			2023
10	Motion tabled at Federal Conference (if necessary)			TBD