

The Radical Association Conference Briefing: Autumn 2017



Supplementary Briefing: Amendments & Updates

This supplementary briefing covers the amendments to motions and the emergency motion ballot, as well as updates on our key campaigns. Please see the main conference briefing for our full discussion of all the motions being tabled at this conference.

The main briefing can be downloaded here:

<https://radicalassociation.org/2017/09/10/autumn-conference-the-radical-policy-briefing/>

Key Campaigns - Updates

Brexit motion

Federal Conference Committee voted last Saturday to oppose the motion to suspend standing orders that will allow us to debate a more decisive Brexit strategy motion discussed in the main briefing. We are surprised and disappointed at this, as we (and others) agreed to pursue the suspension of standing orders route after receiving assurances that FCC would not oppose the suspension, a promise they have apparently decided not to keep, though we are still lobbying them to uphold their original decision. The votes will nonetheless still take place as described in the main briefing, and we of course urge all members to **SUPPORT the suspension of standing orders vote at 9am on the Saturday morning**. The amendment to the motion has also been released; we **OPPOSE** the amendment (on which more detail is provided in the “Amendments to Motions” section of this supplementary briefing), which would return party policy to its current state.

Fair Wages

We are calling for members to **SUPPORT the Young Liberal amendment to motion F26**, which proposes a higher minimum wage for non-guaranteed hours on contracts. This is a relevant, effective policy idea that will incentivise employers to guarantee hours and help speak directly to voters about getting a fairer deal for those in precarious jobs.

Amendments to Motions

F4 (English Language Teaching) Amendment One

This reasonable amendment seems to contain nothing objectionable and it is good to see a stronger stance on (and better highlighting of) the specific problems of English language provision for seekers of sanctuary.

F8 (Brexit and Public Services) Amendment One

This Alliance of Liberal Democrat Councillors amendment seeks a more explicit statement that post-Brexit. This leads us into the difficult area of to what extent Lib Dem policy should be couched in terms of accepting Brexit as a *fait accompli* – arguably the text of the amendment does so. The calls for assurances of continued and improved local government involvement in infrastructure spending decisions and other consultations are good and worthwhile, but it would have been preferable had the amendment been drafted with all constitutional outcomes in mind for the next few years.

F10 (Environment Policy) Amendment One

This seems a reasonable and essentially uncontroversial amendment, calling for explicit inclusion of major international agreements on protection of endangered species and animal welfare as core governmental considerations in setting environmental policy and making investment decisions. These would be in addition to the sustainability and carbon neutrality objectives contained in the original motion.

F16 (Armed Forces and Recruitment) Amendment One

This amendment calls for a review into policies around armed forces recruitment and mental health; this seems a reasonable thing to call for, but we recommend that members attend the debate to hear a range of views on this fairly specific area of social policy.

F17A (Brexit) Amendment One – OPPOSE

This amendment, which will only be considered if standing orders are suspended and F17A is heard, would return party policy on Brexit to something approximating its current state. There is one notable change from current policy, in that the amendment explicitly suggests that EU27 citizens resident in the UK should be able to vote in the “Exit from Brexit” referendum (as it has now been rebranded). We are concerned that this policy is still excessively convoluted, and that having a clearer statement of our aims (including recognition that a Liberal Democrat led government would constitute a mandate to stop Brexit) would help provide clarity for members, activists, and voters alike. We thus support passing F17A unamended, and oppose this amendment.

F21 (Safe Building Standards) Amendment One

This amendment widens the scope of who will be able to conduct the proposed fire safety checks to a list of registered persons rather than the fire service only. This seems sensible considering pressures on fire service time and resources, but the questions of implementation and funding we raised in our main briefing still remain.

F21 Amendment Two

This amendment calls for the government to provide clearer guidance on how certain fire safety regulations apply to residential blocks – this appears to be an amendment in line with the tone and objectives of the motion as a whole. As it references a specific set of recommendations, however, it may be worth hearing the introduction and summation of the amendment for clarification on the implications of such.

F26 (Employment) Amendment One - SUPPORT

We are officially calling for **SUPPORT** for this amendment, a policy which would provide significant and real support to some people in low paid and precarious working sectors. It is the sort of effective social liberal policy that should be at the heart of the party's basic offer to voters, and it is particularly pleasing to see such a proposal coming from the Young Liberals.

F28 (Corporate Citizens) Amendment One

This amendment is an improvement on the main motion, by pushing to the more effective position of making employee board membership a requirement for larger companies rather than, as we were concerned over, simply applying soft-touch “calls” for it. Having a single employee as a board member, however, should be considered a fairly minimal rather than a radical move on this front, and we maintain our strong reservations over the general tone of the motion and its lack of provision for seriously shifting the terms on which business operates or giving real power to businesses' wider community of stakeholders.

F31 (Gun and Knife Crime) Amendment One

This amendment essentially adds acid attacks alongside those with guns and knives among the things the motion seeks to ameliorate. It's unclear whether the replacement of gun and knife “crime” with gun and knife “attacks” expressed in the amendment makes any substantive difference, and it may be worth someone raising this query.

We do wish to note the good drafting amendment here which responds to one of our major concerns expressed in the main briefing by widening the community groups discussed beyond faith groups.

Emergency Motions Ballot

EM1 Venezuela

This outlines what seems to be a proportionate response to the human rights crisis in Venezuela. The drafting is not ideal: condemning Trump is always fun, but it would have been helpful to more explicitly define the problems around his “politicisation” of the situation, a curious choice of wording in a motion that backs political sanctions to solve a political crisis. We do approve, however, of cracking down on arms sales to this increasingly unstable regime. Like the Afghanistan motion, this is a clear reaction in an area where the party does not have current policy, making it a good use of an emergency motion. Members should, however, consider both the drafting and policy implications here.

EM2 Universal Credit

Most of the measures discussed in this emergency motion are sensible ones, and we agree with the condemnation of the Conservatives’ horrendous policy failing in this area. It is however the Association’s continued view that the Liberal Democrats should be looking in the medium term to support a much larger overhaul of social security, in which context a motion that largely clarifies aspects of our existing policy is not necessarily the ideal step. We would also have liked to see reaffirmation of conference’s decision to entirely scrap benefit sanctions.

EM3 International Students

We applaud this motion for taking a hard-headed, positive view of international students in the UK, something that is very much needed. The policy considerations mostly seem to be in line with current Liberal Democrat policy, however, and we would have liked consideration and highlighting of wider issues and more radical proposals to solve them; an explicit call for loosening visa rules and removing certain elements of red tape for students to get into the UK, for example, might have strengthened this motion from a radical perspective.

EM4 Leasehold

This is a generally good motion that provides for a real, radical policy step – the amendment of prior contracts that have been completed on unfair grounds – to alleviate problems in the leasehold sector. Whilst the mechanisms for changing contracts by law must of course be approached with extreme caution, we approve of the radicalism and the forward thinking nature of this proposal, one of the better ones on the ballot from a radical perspective.

EM5 Mental Health

It is our understanding that this emergency motion has been withdrawn.

EM6 Afghanistan

This motion is on a genuinely contentious and up to date topic, that of whether to support future troop increases in Afghanistan, which touches on a wider policy question (one difficult for liberals) what extent the UK should pursue military versus negotiated solutions with terrorist and extremist groups like the Taliban. We would have liked to see clauses in this motion that went beyond seeking

peace for the general population of Afghanistan and noted the specific need for protection of, for example, women and minority ethnic groups and the protection of Afghan democracy; it is a pity that emergency motions cannot be amended. As such, whilst we approve of bringing controversial subjects to conference, we have qualms about this specific motion.

EM7 Teacher Recruitment

The problem highlighted by this motion is a very real one, but the policy recommendations seem to deviate little, if at all, from current Liberal Democrat policy, primarily involving the reversal of frontline cuts and of the public sector pay cap.

EM8 Treatment of Disabled People

We fully agree that there is a significant need to highlight and find new solutions to the appalling maltreatment of disabled folk by this government; this emergency motion should be applauded as a reminder of that, and especially for calls to centre disabled peoples' voices in the discussion. We question whether the motion could have called for more specific recommendations; the "conference calls for" section could be sharper and more specific.