

### Free to be Young - Policy Paper 96

This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence.

Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.

### Working Group on Youth Policy

Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every statement or every proposal in this Paper.

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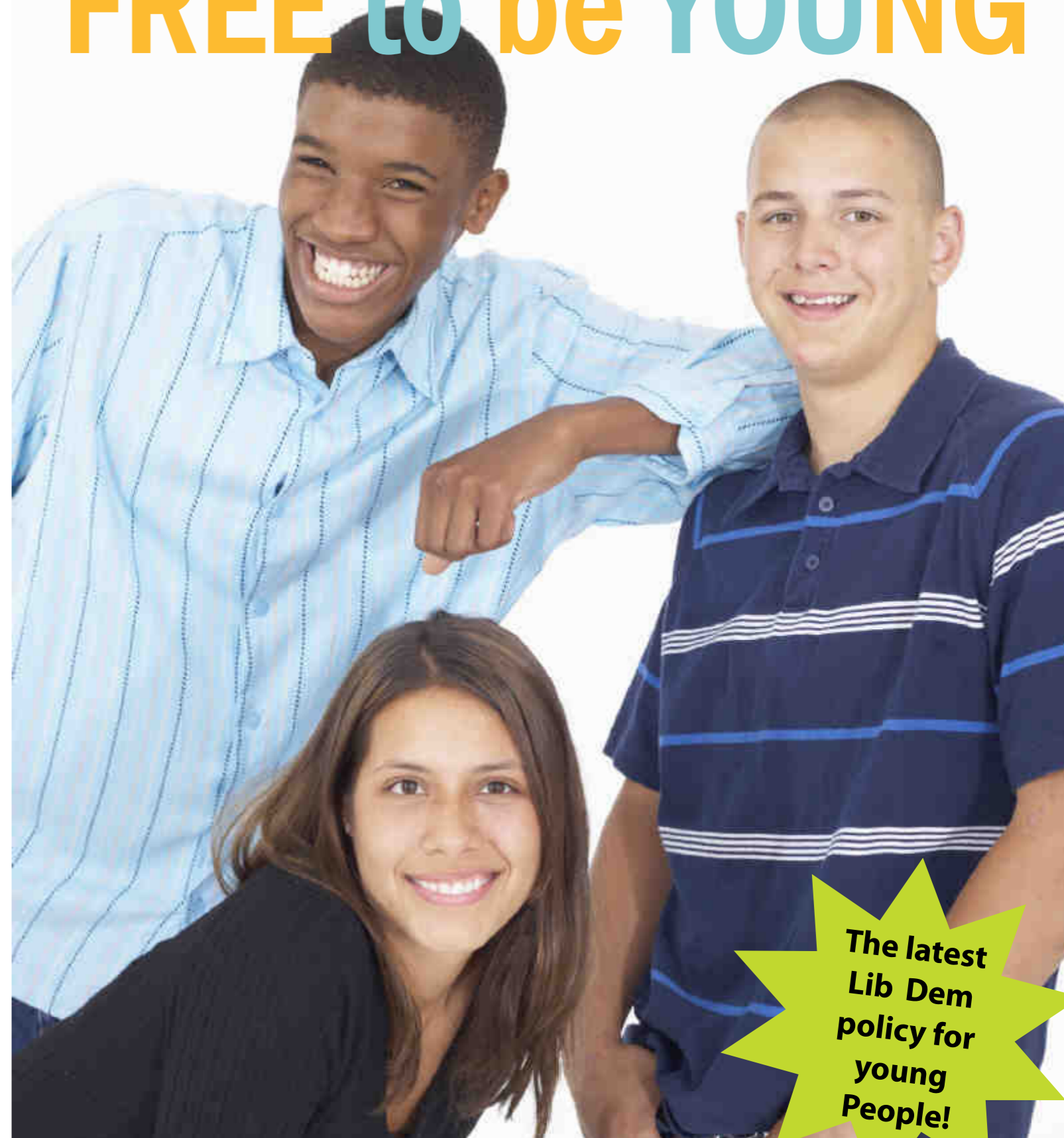
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# FREE to be YOUNG



**The latest  
Lib Dem  
policy for  
young  
People!**

**Over 50 great ideas for young people**



When Nick Clegg gave me the Youth portfolio – we agreed that I would be relentlessly pro youth not anti youth!

As a young person in the UK today, you often get a raw deal. When you work hard at school, you're told you only did well because the tests are getting easier. Although you are more likely to be a victim of crime than an older person, you're often treated like you're the criminal yourself. And when there's not much left for you to do after school because increasing red tape and reduced council funding has forced so many youth clubs to close - then you're blamed for hanging around the streets with nothing to do.

The pressure comes at you from so many angles: from the media who happily report on the kids who do cause trouble but seemingly never give column inches to all the volunteering and good things that you do; from the fashion, beauty and diet industry - who bombard you with fake images to the point that you feel unhappy with the way you look; and from an endless stream of advertising that tempts you to want things you can't afford, falsely promising that it will make you happier.

There are huge challenges ahead, particularly as we climb out of a recession that threatens to hit your hopes and aspirations. If we don't want a lost generation - then we have to make sure we deliver on a worthwhile future for you.

We Liberal Democrats are committed to creating a country where you can be free to be yourselves - the very best you you can be - and enjoy equal life chances with everyone else. We want our policies to be effective not vindictive.

We set out in this paper what Liberal Democrats would do differently to provide a fresh start for young people in the UK today.

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[www.libdems.org.uk/freetobeyoung](http://www.libdems.org.uk/freetobeyoung)

# Free to belong

## Because we're better together

**In Britain today, we often don't even seem to know our neighbours. The Liberal Democrats believe that communities should be places where people of all ages are able to come together, free to be themselves. We will confront the stereotypes which keep people apart and empower you to have more responsibilities in shaping the places you live – you may be the leaders of tomorrow but you're part of our community today.**

## My Community Life

- 1.** Support more events to engage both parents in school life, with specific events held at school to involve fathers on their own, such as 'Dads and donuts' events, giving schools a duty to equally involve and correspond with both parents, unless there is a court order to prevent this.
- 2.** Support more intergenerational activities and cross-cultural community events to break down the boundaries amongst young people and adults and build trust within communities such as the WALKTALK Initiative – where people from different backgrounds were encouraged to walk and talk together.

## My Place in Society

- 3.** Campaign for more positive images of young people to be given in the media and recommend the press complaints commission update their Code of Practice to make it clear that papers should not demonise young people.
- 4.** Government policies can inadvertently have a negative impact on young people so we will take steps to ensure that we consider and protect their interests wherever possible by ensuring the duty on public bodies to assess the impact of their policies includes the impact on young people. We believe that all policies should be 'young people proofed' to ensure they are positively supporting young people's well-being – helping to ensure, for example, that young people are also able to access key services like legal advice.
- 5.** Task the Children's Commissioner with a duty to carry out an annual review of the state of young people in the country.



# Free to Thrive

## To be the best you can be



• 80% of young people say they have nowhere to go and nothing to do outside school.  
• 70% of teenagers said young people got involved in anti-social behaviour because they were bored  
(Source: 4Children's Make Space Youth Review of 16,000 teenagers)



### Free to Learn

We believe that our society should be fair, free and open and no-one should be held back because of poverty, or lack of opportunity, or having to conform. That means that all young people deserve the best education and the chance to pursue their interests and dreams - no matter where you live, who your parents are or which school you go to. Education should set you free by opening up a world of opportunities, but the restrictive National Curriculum and the government's obsession with tests and targets means that at times it feels like more of a straitjacket. Effective education and learning also happens outside the classroom. Liberal Democrats will free you to learn and make the decisions which affect your own life, from relationships to careers.

6. Free education from the prescriptive curriculum and unnecessary testing so learning can be fun, engaging and challenging.
7. Support you as you prepare for adult life with key personal and social skills - like how to manage relationships and deal with sexual health issues and how to make the most of your money. We will also give you access to specialist support and advice on things like your legal rights and responsibilities and how drugs and alcohol can affect you both inside and outside school.
8. Free you to make your own decisions at 16 without forcing you to stay in a particular form of education, training or employment – providing you instead with a flexible entitlement of two years post-16 education when you want it.
9. Abolish University tuition fees for full and part time students studying for their first degree to remove the spectre of debt which crushes ambition and distorts choices



### Free to Have Fun

10. Safeguard public playing fields by closing the loophole which means that large fields lose their protection if they are boarded up for five years.
11. Reform the way the National Lottery is taxed to replace some of the money lost by the arts because of diversions to the London 2012 Olympics. This will provide more money for sports facilities for young people.
12. Promote partnerships between schools, young people and local voluntary and community services and sports clubs so that regardless of your background you have the opportunity to try out different sports to find what you enjoy.
13. Enable Local Authorities to set up and support a wide of artistic opportunities such as bands, playing and singing groups, orchestras and choirs as well as acting, dancing, painting and sculpture groups. These would be in schools, colleges, youth clubs and other places where you meet other young people.
14. Both producers and users should have a fair deal from the internet revolution in content provisions. We will work with the creative industries and young people to promote legal downloading websites. No-one should be arbitrarily cut off – we will ensure that this is used as a last resort and that there are proper protections and rights of appeal.
15. Support schools and youth clubs to enjoy regular visits to the theatre and other live performances.
16. Maintain free entry to publicly owned museums and galleries.

### Free to be Healthy

17. Provide parents of teenagers with access to appropriate parenting support, helping them to discuss sex and relationships with their children alongside other issues such as drugs and alcohol.
18. Encourage parents who drink to do so responsibly and provide a good example, recognising that sensible drinking within a family setting is a more effective response to the problem of binge drinking, than the government's blanket ban on all drinking for under-15 year olds.
19. Recognise that sex and relationships education takes place in a variety of formal and informal settings, including peer to peer. To be effective it must include a whole range of behavioural skills including assertiveness and negotiation as well as broad education on relationships, including transgender issues, sexual orientation, domestic violence, and health. We recognise the need for confidentiality and discretion when these issues are discussed.
20. You should have access to non-judgmental information on contraception and all forms should be available to you if you need them.
21. Provide more support and information for teenage parents and teenagers who have had abortions to tackle the number of unwanted second pregnancies. We will also target support to those young women likely to become young mothers, recognising that raising aspirations – fostering your dreams and ambitions - is one of the best ways to combat teenage pregnancy.
22. Recognise that the scourge of drugs is best tackled by more education and tough action against drug pushers, rather than the increased criminalisation of occasional users.

# Free to Succeed

## Helping you to achieve your dreams

### Free to Work

23. We believe that you have as much right to work as anyone else and would create hundreds of thousands of new opportunities for you in education, training and the work place.
24. Fund 15,000 more college based foundation degree places this year.
25. Introduce a new "Paid Internship" scheme until the end of 2010 where you would be able to work for up to three months with any employer, without cost to the employer. Each intern would be paid a new "Training Allowance" of £55 per week. Employers would be required to give employees help with writing their Cvs and time off for job searching.
26. Ensure that no one under 24 claims Jobseekers Allowance for more than 3 months without a right of access to training, apprenticeships, work experience or specialist back to work support. We support schemes which recognise the importance of long-term relationships with young people.
27. Support schools, colleges and apprenticeship schemes to promote opportunities for disabled children and young people to address the disproportionate number of disabled young people who are not in education, employment or training.



Nick Clegg at Bournemouth and Poole College  
Alex Folkes/Fishnik Photography

*My background, where I come from, how I have been raised and my financial situation should not prevent me from achieving my full potential and chasing after all my goals; whether they be big or small, short or long term. Whatever my story or my means, there is no way I should lose out to anyone simply because they are from a more privileged background than I am. I'm glad the Lib Dems will ensure doors are kept wide open by.....cutting youth unemployment, abolishing fees for those taking their first degrees, providing more help for young people with families to realise their dreams, more apprenticeships/internships/and help with further studies.*



### Free to Gain Experience

28. Require organisations offering internships (opportunities to get work experience, usually without payment) to meet a basic standard of provision, similar to that set out in Internocracy's 'Intern Manager's Guide' and the CIPD Internships Charter.
29. As a minimum, interns should be reimbursed for reasonable expenses, including travel and lunch, and where possible be paid at least the minimum wage. All organisations recruiting interns have a duty to consider access opportunities, diversity and equality, especially in the advertising and recruitment process.
30. Unpaid internships should typically be no longer than 3 months unless rooted in an educational programme. Interns should always be treated professionally, as with any other member of staff.



Envoy Residential © Selena Brown, NCVS, 2009

- Approximately 117,000 young people under the age of 21 will be paid less than the national minimum wage in 2009-10.
- Over 60% of all 16-21 year olds work in low paying jobs, compared with just 30% of all other age groups.

(Source: British Youth Council)

Adverts for internships quadrupled between 2008 and 2009 as employers use unpaid work to fill recession gaps.  
(Source: Guardian inquiry into exploitation)

### Free to Prosper

31. Make the Minimum Wage fair – setting it at the same level for everyone. It is appalling that you can be paid less simply because of your age.
32. Develop a strategic national housing programme taking account of young people's particular needs and review the provision of housing benefit with a view to ensuring you are not disadvantaged.
33. Ensure that all services are accessible to disabled young people and their families and do not exclude them or discriminate against them. We will invest in accessible and inclusive participation structures, so that disabled children and young people can enjoy the same opportunities as their peers and will introduce forums for them to influence issues around disability.



# Free to be Myself

Enjoying being young

**We are only free to be ourselves if our freedom is backed-up with meaningful rights and responsibilities. Liberal Democrats believe that when you are old enough to get married or join the armed forces, you are old enough to vote and we would empower young people with full political rights at 16. It's not easy growing up and we will ensure that you have the support you need as you make the transition to adulthood and the space and freedom to enjoy being young**

## My Rights

- 34.** Give you full political rights at age sixteen, including the right to vote and stand in public elections, along with radical reform of our political system so every vote counts and you can exercise real political power.
- 35.** Defend and strengthen academic freedom and free expression on university campuses by guaranteeing academic freedom and removing unjustified restrictions - such as 'No Platform' policies which stop some groups from taking part in debates - on free association and expression.
- 36.** Immediately remove from the National DNA Database all DNA samples taken from children and young people under 16, unless they were convicted of either a violent or sexual offence.
- 37.** Incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into UK legislation to give your rights proper protection.
- 38.** Allow groups of people to assemble unless they are causing public disorder, damage to property or disruption to the the community – this would allow you to go out with a group of



The UK Youth Parliament recently debated lowering the voting age to 16 in the House of Commons chamber”  
(c) Parliamentary copyright. Photography by Terry Moore.

friends without fear of being broken up by police for no reason.

- 39.** Abolish mosquito devices that stop you moving freely.
- 40.** Recognise that respect goes both ways. Liberal Democrats will introduce a 'Code of Service' to ensure you are treated well by public sector organisations and to drive up standards in the private sector. We will include within this a specific duty to treat young customers and service users with respect to make it clear that you deserve the best service too.



## My Growing Up

- 41.** Ensure that support is available at key points – particularly when you leave or move school at 11, 16 or 18. We would encourage integrated working between social workers and schools to ensure that you have everything you need as you make the transition and keep in contact until you are settled.
- 42.** We will encourage local authorities to provide more support to those young people who particular needs, such as suitable accommodation for young people with disabilities.

**There is evidence that a 15-month subscription to a fashion magazine increased body dissatisfaction, dieting, and bulimic symptoms amongst adolescent girls who had low levels of social support.**

## My Confidence

- 43.** Protect you from body image pressure by preventing the use of altered and enhanced images in advertising aimed at under 16s, through changes to Advertising Standards Authority rules. We will also require adverts to clearly indicate the extent digital retouching technology has been used to create overly perfected and unrealistic images of people.
- 44.** Campaign for greater body confidence by challenging magazines and other media to take more responsibility for it and to use a range of different sized models. We will also include body confidence within the relationships curriculum.
- 45.** No young person should have to suffer bullying. Increasingly bullying is taking place online and we support campaigns for Social Networking Sites to make it easier for young people and their families to report offensive posts and fir sites to respond to remove such posts within six hours.



- 46.** We recognise that bullying is not always tackled correctly, in particular when it is homophobic or based on disability:
  - Homophobic taunts and name calling in schools and youthwork settings should be challenged immediately by staff;
  - All schools' and anti-bullying policies should include measures specifically to deal with homophobic bullying;
  - At least one teacher in all school should be trained on tackling homophobic bullying;
  - All teacher training courses should include guidelines on tackling bullying, including homophobic or disability based.

# Free to be involved

## Time to make a difference

### Free to Take Part

**47.** We believe it is important for you to have something to do and somewhere to go. We will make Youth Services a statutory responsibility for local authorities to ensure it is not the first service to be cut when money is tight.

**48.** We will raise the status of youthwork and expect local authorities to provide youth services in partnership with young people and the voluntary sector, to facilitate more activities and support for young people, such as mobile services in rural areas.

**49.** Cut back on bureaucracy and red tape so youth organisations are free to be creative and flexible. We will get rid of targets and tick boxes and base funding and evaluation on core principles and broad outcomes.

**50.** Ensure that health and safety legislation provides a common sense basis for activities and is not needlessly restrictive about what schools and youth groups can do - everyone needs a safe place to push boundaries and make mistakes.



**51.** Introduce an optional contributory insurance scheme for schools and clubs, providing cover to ensure school trips and other youth activities can go ahead.

**52.** Encourage councils to draw up Youth Community Plans to ensure there are more youth activities, particularly in deprived areas. Encourage councils to consider the needs of young people in all their areas of service delivery and particularly to consider whether charges for services such as leisure and transport can be discounted or provided free of charge to young people.

**53.** Merge funding for out of school activities for all young people into one easy-to-access fund and guarantee youth projects their funding, where appropriate, for 3-5 years, subject to satisfactory safeguards. Funding would be allocated on the principles of freedom outlined here, rather than according to tick-boxes and changing priorities.

**It has been suggested that the area where young people are free to play has been reduced by 90% over the last 20 years**

(Source: Report by Play England)



***We need more places we can spend time expressing ourselves through art, music, literature, dance, drama, sports etc. Maybe this would prevent us from being "out on the streets" which is only stifling our creativity. We need proper outlets which could also help us find something we excel at and give us some direction.***

### Free to Contribute

**54.** Give you a say over where the money should go, for example, through local youth councils and the Youth Parliament. Youth involvement will be monitored by setting up a cross departmental (junior minister level) young people's committee to ensure a joined up approach to youth issues in government.

**55.** We will support national youth volunteering organisation V to ensure that whoever you are, wherever you live, you will have the opportunity to volunteer and contribute to your community. We will give volunteering a higher priority across government departments, with more placements and further encouragement and incentives to employers to develop links with voluntary organisations.

**56.** Further encourage employers to support their employees in carrying out voluntary work – including release for induction and training and set up a national accreditation scheme for volunteering to recognise the important work done.

**57.** Recognise that volunteering can have a key role in preparing you for work and ensure that the rules for Jobseeker's Allowance provide flexibility for those engaged in an accredited volunteering scheme, revising and clarifying guidance for Jobcentre Plus staff on benefit rights during periods of voluntary work – particularly to allow the payment of 'up front' expenses.