

# ***Rights and Responsibilities at Work***

**Employment and Trade Unions Policy  
Paper**

**Policy Paper 70**



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# ***Executive Summary***

Liberal Democrats believe a liberal, open, market economy produces the best results for the people of the UK. We believe in individual choice, competition, small government, social and environmental responsibility, active citizenship and encouraging prosperity. These themes underpin *Rights and Responsibilities at Work*.

This paper seeks to explain how we would implement the following objectives:

- Encouraging the development of high quality employment practices through voluntary action and competitive pressures in the workforce market.
- Ensuring all employees, regardless of the size of the business or organisation for which they work, receive the same rights and protection from abuse.
- Managing migration to address the needs of the economy whilst protecting individuals from exploitation.
- Developing skills through reforms to training.
- Adopting a flexible approach to retirement.
- Avoiding more red tape on businesses.
- Removing unnecessary regulation of trade unions.

Our key policies to improve the quality of the working environment include:

- The extension to home workers of the rights and protections available to those in the workplace.
- Ratification of the International Labour Organisation Convention on Home Workers.
- Protection of agency workers by ensuring their agencies are responsible for recognising and upholding all employments rights not directly under the control of the employer.

We will extend and improve consultation in the workplace by:

- Placing a duty on all employers to consult employees but letting each business create its own model for consultation to avoid further red tape.
- Encouraging the development of work place councils that genuinely empower staff in large businesses.

We will ensure diversity in the workforce adds to the productivity of the economy by:

- Ending compulsory retirement, granting older workers protection under unfair dismissal rights and modernising pensions to allow people to retire gradually.
- Establishing a Code of Conduct to end indirectly or unnecessarily discriminatory job adverts, drawn up by stakeholders in the economy and provision of advice to employers on diversity through a unified Human Rights and Equalities Commission dealing with all issues of discrimination.
- Advice and support to small and medium businesses provided through Regional Development Agencies and local councils to help them to work co-operatively to provide cover for key worker absence.

We will reform the immigration system by:

- Replacing the current system of work visas with a more effective managed migration system of green cards.
- Setting quotas of migrant workers to address the specific needs of the economy.
- Strengthening controls on illegal immigration and those involved in people trafficking that undermines the legitimate economy as well as the well being of the trafficked workers.
- Ratifying the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families.

In the public sector we will create a UK framework of pay and conditions with scope for top ups negotiated at local and regional level in England and allowing national flexibility in Scotland and Wales.

We will improve the skills level of the workforce by:

- Introducing work based apprenticeships for fourteen and fifteen year olds as an alternative to pursuing purely academic qualifications.
- Offering existing workers the opportunity to gain level 2 qualifications, and those aged under 25 without level 3, through work based training.

We will create a liberal framework for trade unions and their members by:

- Retaining the right to ballot for trade union members on industrial action and for internal elections.
- Entitling members to pay the political levy into a non-affiliated fund instead of a party affiliated fund if preferred.
- Scrapping the unnecessary and bureaucratic requirement on trade unions to hold a ballot every ten years on maintaining a political fund.
- Requiring employers to provide financial information as a background for negotiations.
- Introducing a power for the government, when supported by both Houses of Parliament, to require both workforce and employers to submit to compulsory arbitration where the workforce in a vital area of the economy has voted for industrial action.

# Introduction

1.1 The subject Employment and Trade Unions covers the whole panoply of productive endeavour. Employment is central to the functioning of society. It is key to wealth creation and accordingly improving the quality of life.

1.2 Liberal Democrats start from the assumption that, in the ideal economy, the power of capital, labour and consumer are in balance. In reality a perfect balance is not achievable; so the objective of our policy is to ensure that the economy moves as closely as possible to that balance. Consequently, we generally only support state interference, through law, regulation or financial incentive, when and where the market cannot or does not deliver that balance or where there is an overwhelming need to provide protection to individuals or groups of individuals. For instance, Liberal Democrats strongly support a number of basic rights for employees - including freedom of association, access to information, a decent minimum wage, health and safety protection and the right to be consulted. For most enterprises, none of this is a problem but action is necessary to preserve these rights in the few where it is. The level and complexity of the intervention that we do support is proportionate to the degree of the problem.

1.3 *Setting Business Free*, which was debated by the Liberal Democrats and agreed at the September 2003 Federal Conference, was produced by applying the above principles to both the operation of commercial enterprises and the rights of the consumer. This paper seeks to apply them to the third side of the triangle - the rights and duties of those in the world of work.

1.4 Liberal Democrat policy seeks to achieve a situation where all three partners in an enterprise gain from its success. The owners have more money as dividend or to invest in the development of the enterprise, the employees have higher pay or better terms and conditions and the consumer has a cheaper purchase and/or better quality goods or services.

1.5 In employment terms it is difficult to express this better than as 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work'. The employer is entitled to get value for the wage that they pay but the employee

is entitled to be free from exploitation. It is, perhaps, fashionable to think that the exploitative employer is a thing of the past and it is true that the UK has eliminated the worst excesses of the early Victorian industrialists. However, one only needs to think of recent evidence that many employees are still paid below the statutory minimum wage to realize that exploitation still exists.

1.6 The small business sector is vital to the health of the UK economy. The Liberal Democrats have rightly championed such enterprises and frequently railed against the disproportionate cost burden that regulation places on them. This paper accepts that case but not in the traditional way politicians normally tackle that issue - essentially by exempting such businesses from a proportion of the regulations. Firstly, if it is decided that employees or job applicants should have certain rights (freedom from discrimination, maternity leave or whatever) as a matter of public policy, then it is difficult to justify their losing those rights simply because their employer has less than, say, 20 employees. Secondly, the existence of thresholds below which the cost of certain regulations no longer need be borne automatically creates a barrier to the expansion of an enterprise. Liberal Democrats believe that the answer lies far more in the provision of outside expertise (say personnel or accounting services) and organisations such as Regional Development Agencies and mutually supportive co-operative ventures formed by businesses themselves, than it does in taking away employees rights because they work for a small company.

1.7 Another area where employees are particularly vulnerable is through the increase in working from home and in agency work. Legislation has not kept pace with changing practice and developing technology and this can no longer be ignored. Consequently, this paper spends a fair amount of time on this growing area as well as on the rather different but traditional 'problem' of home workers.

1.8 With larger companies, Liberal Democrats are very impressed by the success of the idea of voluntarily including social

responsibility information in their Annual Reports. This started out as an ideal that no-one really knew how to implement but, through evolution, it has become normal practice for nearly all our most community conscious companies. If government had tried to legislate for this approach 10 years ago, there would have been an outcry. Today there is barely a significant objection. This paper uses this approach as a model for areas like discrimination and industrial relations. If it is known which companies have good records in these areas then a proportion of consumers will alter their habits accordingly. That was shown with Barclays in the 70s when their South African connections lost them vast quantities of student business. This sort of consumer pressure is likely to be more effective in the long run, as well as a good deal cheaper and less bureaucratic than legislation or regulation.

1.9 Finally, this paper applies to Trade Unions the principle on which *Setting Business Free* was built, in the same way as that paper applied it to commerce, which was of *regulation only when the desired outcome is not being or cannot be delivered by the market*. Some union legislation from the 80s is to be applauded for improving the rights of members within their unions but other aspects of the law were either partisan or just plain wrong. This paper proposes that it should all be reviewed, just as the regulation of business should be reviewed and we make some specific recommendations for regulations that could be abolished with immediate effect.

1.10 The policies proposed in this paper are designed to provide the balance between employee rights and the wider needs of commerce and the market needed to develop a flourishing but fair economy.

# ***The Quality of the Working Environment***

## **Workforce profile changing**

2.1 The profile of employment in the UK has changed significantly over the past few decades. Women now make up nearly half the workforce and soon they will form the majority. Furthermore, the decline in the birth rate has seen the average age of the population increase. People are living longer, normally in better health and with fewer children. More young people are in higher education thus keeping them out of the jobs market for long periods. This is having an important impact on the workforce. Pressures to accommodate these demographic changes need to be addressed.

## **A flexible workforce**

2.2 Furthermore, there is evidence that overall, job satisfaction is falling and that hours worked have grown longer. Competitive pressures at work and the need to fulfil the demands placed on businesses by an increasingly competitive market all have an impact on the work place environment. Nevertheless, even though the majority of the work force continues to work under full time, permanent employment contracts, there has been a growth of part time working, short term contracting working, self-employment and so on. This is a development Liberal Democrats generally welcome, for many people with family and caring commitments need a greater degree of flexibility in the way they work; for others, flexibility provides opportunities for an improved quality of life. Nevertheless there is a need to ensure flexible working is not a convenient route for employers to bypass employment legislation or the need to ensure good working conditions. Nor should it impose conditions on people which would not be acceptable for the majority on full time contracts.

2.3 Liberal Democrats recognise that employees who are committed, satisfied with their conditions, well trained and feel the benefits of being full stakeholders in both the economy and the businesses in which they work are more productive than those who feel alienated from employers, have little or no stake in success, and lack friendly corporate policies that address their individual and collective needs.

## **Corporate social responsibility**

2.4 Good companies will ensure that they are socially responsible. Such companies will succeed partly because their employees have a greater commitment to their workplace. The employees themselves see the benefits of being in a successful company and enjoy those benefits as well.

2.5 In most circumstances it is not possible to legislate or regulate for employers to exercise corporate social responsibility. A plethora of legislation would weigh down unnecessarily on employers and tie them up in red tape. A culture of social responsibility would be far more effective in ensuring a quality working environment. Corporate social responsibility has developed as a culture within listed companies over the past decade. It is seen as adding to the productivity of the workforce as well as good for business. A Liberal Democrat government would wish to encourage its further development.

2.6 Most listed companies find it useful to report to their shareholders on their corporate social responsibilities and their actions in meeting them. This has happened without legislation as the moves to report on these activities have come from within the business community; however, this will change for listed companies in 2005 with the introduction of the new Operating & Financial Review (“OFR”), and we welcome this.

## **Home workers**

2.7 We have stated earlier that government intervention in the economy should be focused on preventing abuses so that no individual stakeholder holds a dominant position that unfairly damages the interests of others. Home working is one area that may need some degree of intervention. The growth of home working in recent years is welcomed in principle by Liberal Democrats but there are potential abuses against which we must guard. Home working can be attractive for some; such as those with commitments that keep them at home: for instance, parents of young children or carers of elderly parents. Home working can also be an opportunity for some to continue with their caring

responsibilities whilst earning, thus relieving themselves of the heavy costs of purchasing care services.

2.8 Generally, home workers fall into three very broad groupings. One is people who spend much of their working time ‘away from base’ and for whom a journey to a central office is a waste of time and energy - salespeople, utility repair workers and mobile vehicle recovery people are examples of this. These people tend to be reasonably well catered for in terms of their conditions. They are less isolated from colleagues, are often better paid and convenience is a key issue for them.

2.9 Secondly, many self-employed people run their businesses from home. In this case, the conditions under which they work are essentially a matter of choice.

2.10 There is, however, a third group that has less - often far less - protection. That is people in low paid and often unskilled work such as packing materials or assembling goods. They tend to be paid by the quantity done rather than by the hour. They work wholly from home and in the main are non-unionised. People working for the same firm tend to have little or no contact with each other. Liberal Democrats are concerned that such people are more likely to be subjected to abuses and have less opportunity to protect themselves.

2.11 For such people, the home is the workplace. Were they to work in a location other than home, their employers would be subject to statutory requirements on working conditions. We believe home workers should receive the same protection and rights.

2.12 We do not, however, wish to regulate home working in a way that discourages its growth. We believe that firms should undergo a culture change that recognises the responsibilities they have towards their home workers. In many circumstances, a fear by a firm that it will be liable to action by regulators can be sufficient to ensure good working practices are in place. Currently, this is not possible with home working as there is no record of which homes are used as a workplace.

2.13 We will therefore require each firm using home workers, where the workers are employed

entirely or mainly from their home premises, to register those addresses with the appropriate local authorities. Working conditions in these homes will be the responsibility of the firm. We will extend appropriate workplace legislation to cover home working. We will also require employers’ insurance to cover home workers.

2.14 We do not expect each home to be inspected by regulators concerned with workplace conditions. Nevertheless, some will be and we believe this will encourage firms to ensure that conditions are brought to an acceptable level for home workers. Our aim is to set in train a culture change within firms that use home workers. The aim is not to tie up firms in additional red tape and to monitor and regulate them closely. The culture we wish to create is one of responsibility and common sense. But we will back this up by ratifying the International Labour Organisation Convention on Home Workers. We will retain the current funding for the National Group on Homeworking Helpline, currently paid for by the DTI.

2.15 Nevertheless, there should be a simple requirement on firms that use home workers to report on the way that they are ensuring that decent workplace conditions are maintained; this information should be included in the OFR for listed companies. The Health and Safety Executive will have access to the list of businesses engaging home workers and will randomly select some for inspection in liaison with local authorities.

2.16 We believe that the threat of inspection should help bring standards up to an acceptable level for home workers.

2.17 We will, however, review the current restrictions under the planning system and the local business tax regime to look at ways of liberalising the use of the home as a place of work provided any changes do not damage the amenities of neighbourhoods.

### **Avoiding unnecessary legislation**

2.18 We have said earlier in this chapter that the growth in flexible working has been welcomed by Liberal Democrats. Creating an environment in which people with family and caring commitments are able to juggle more effectively the time demands placed on them is

important. We do not believe at this stage that widespread legislation is needed to enforce flexible working. Employers seeking new staff or to hold on to existing employees will realise that in an increasingly competitive market, flexible working will have to be offered to be able to recruit quality staff. Employers who fail to accommodate these realities will undermine their own ability to succeed in the market place.

2.19 A number of rights to time off work, in some cases paid and in others non-paid, are already in place; for example holiday entitlement and maternity and paternity leave. We support these rights and will ensure they continue to be available. Nevertheless, we recognise that the absence of a member of staff from a small business can have serious consequences for that business.

### **Key worker cover**

2.20 Large employers are in a much better position to accommodate the temporary absence of key workers. Small businesses should be encouraged to take out key worker insurance so that temporary staff can be brought in without burdening the business disproportionately. We will not make this compulsory. The decision to enter into an insurance arrangement should be for the employer and not the state to take. There is however a role for Regional Development Agencies and economic development units in councils to play in facilitating mutual key worker insurance. Councils often provide premises for start up businesses which sometimes provide business services such as pay roll and secretarial work which can be bought in by the business. This could be a route through which key worker insurance is provided.

### **Agency working**

2.21 One area that is growing within the labour market is that of agency working. Liberal Democrats welcome this growth because it adds to the flexibility of the workforce to the benefit of both worker and employee. However, whenever work takes place outside the formal office/factory/site environment, it is more difficult to ensure that controls designed to protect the workforce operate effectively.

2.22 It is understandable that there are growing concerns about the lack of rights of agency workers compared with those on permanent or direct contracts. We believe strongly that agency working should not be used to undermine established rights and protection of the workforce. We will therefore make their agency, rather than the company to which they have been contracted, responsible for ensuring that their rights as employees, in all areas except those where the company has direct control (eg health and safety on the company's premises) are met in full.

2.23 Productivity is improved when individuals have direct stakes in or part ownership of the firm in which they work. Liberal Democrats have long supported wider share ownership especially in the business in which individuals work. In 1978, under the Lib/Lab Pact, Liberals were instrumental in pioneering this. We believe this is an important development which we wish to see continue.

# ***Consultation in the Workplace***

## **EU Directive**

3.1 From next year the European Union Directive on information and consultation in the workplace comes into force for companies that employ 150 or more workers. Over the following three years the legally enforceable regulation will be introduced in stages so that by 2008 all enterprises employing 50 or more workers will be covered by its provisions. The Labour Government opposed the measure to the bitter end but finally agreed to the Directive when it found itself isolated over the issue. The Liberal Democrats have always taken a positive attitude to the extension of information and consultation rights to most of Britain's workplaces and the Party has called for a more rapid implementation of the regulation than is at present planned.

3.2 In most of our partners in the European Union, workplace consultation is already a common practice. Its results have normally proved to be very positive. Employees feel more committed to the businesses in which they work when they are better informed and better consulted on the activities of their employer. For their part, employers are able to secure active cooperation and consent to necessary workplace modernisation. Employer/employee confrontation is rare as a result - indeed, it is not uncommon for employees to come up with ideas or improvements than management have not considered. All of this has helped to boost productivity from employees who feel they are treated more as stakeholders with a say within their own companies and workplaces.

3.3 In The Netherlands, for example, works councils have developed and are often greatly beneficial to the companies in which they are based. They act as a voice for the employees, who are important stakeholders in a business. They work in harmony with management to consider how to improve the working environment as well as corporate performance. In Germany, France and Sweden well-established systems of information and consultation have proved to be a genuine success in developing effective partnerships in the workplace.

## **Meaningful dialogue**

3.4 Liberal Democrats believe strongly that consultation in the workplace cannot be a device simply for legitimising decisions of employers, especially where the workforce itself is unhappy with the outcome. The consultation process must also lead to the empowering of the employees within the business for which they work. Consultation should be a meaningful dialogue and not just an exchange of information. Both sides need to have influence over the outcome.

3.5 We believe that these models for works councils are a good starting point for British businesses. We do not, however, feel they should be compulsory. Businesses which develop meaningful works councils will, we believe, be more productive and successful as the workforce will be more engaged with decision making and the future prosperity of the firm. We do not wish to lock in employers, through more red tape and regulation, into a pre-ordained straightjacket of state engineered consultation processes. We do, however, welcome participation by trade unions in work councils.

3.6 Nevertheless, we do feel there should be a requirement on employers to have some form of consultation with employees. How that consultation takes place should be up to the businesses themselves to decide. We expect large firms will draw up their own codes of practice on consultation and report on them in their annual reports. We anticipate that over time this will give rise to best practice.

3.7 We will impose a general legal requirement to consult when a business is below the threshold to which the EU Directive on Consultation applies. We do not believe that this will be an undue burden, or even a burden at all, on the SME sector. After all, they are arguably, by their very size, best placed to carry out consultation and dialogue with employees. A person employing a small number of employees is far more likely to be in regular direct contact with them. Without a required formal structure for consultation, common sense can be applied to how an employer relates to and involves employees in a dialogue.

3.8 We accept that there will be times when commercially sensitive information will need to be protected and that open consultation on matters such as takeovers could be damaging for the business concerned. In such circumstances employee representatives should be briefed and consulted in confidence.

# ***Diversity in the Workforce***

4.1 Diversity in the workforce is a positive factor that adds to productivity and the wealth of the nation. Regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, age, even physical appearance, each person has a contribution to make in the workplace and should be considered for employment on the basis of whether they can best do the job. We therefore begin with the premise that discrimination against individuals in the workforce unrelated to ability to do the job is wrong and, generally, should be outlawed. Nevertheless, we do not want to legislate with the outcome that employers regard diversity as a regulatory burden. We wish to create a workforce environment in which diversity is regarded positively as not only socially desirable, but also making good business sense.

## **A Commission for Equality and Human Rights**

4.2 Liberal Democrats note that the Government has proposed a new joint Commission for Equality and Human Rights. We believe that the proposals are to be welcomed, but we must press to ensure that the Commission is professional, properly resourced and completely independent of Government if it is to be effective.

4.3 Liberal Democrats also call for the comprehensive reform of equality legislation. We would simplify and streamline the existing framework of anti-discrimination legislation by introducing a new and comprehensive Equality Act, which would provide equal protection against each type of discrimination in a coherent, user-friendly framework.

4.4 It will be difficult for the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights to be effective unless it can work within a single, consistent legislative framework, to tackle discrimination in all spheres of activity and promote equality between people regardless of their age, sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation or disability.

4.5 We believe that discrimination issues are cross cutting and cannot be considered in isolation. The Commission should be a body to which businesses can turn for general advice on

improving diversity in the workplace. This should be a primary duty helping to create a positive attitude towards diversity. It should also be responsible for the prosecution of employers who flout anti-discrimination legislation. This approach is about changing attitudes and showing the benefits of diversity to the profitability of businesses rather than obliging employers to take actions whose benefits they doubt.

## **Age discrimination**

4.6 One of the biggest single areas of discrimination in the current workforce is based on age. Current legislation exacerbates the problems and causes the loss of rights to older workers and indeed the loss of many productive workers from the economy at a time when their skills are needed. We believe that compulsory retirement at 60 or 65 within pensions and benefits arrangements is an outdated concept. The population of the UK is aging. We are becoming increasingly reliant on a smaller proportion of the population, those of working age, to support increasing numbers of retired citizens, many of whom are living longer. This is a demographic time bomb which must be defused sooner rather than later.

4.7 As liberals we do not wish to force someone to retire who wants to keep working. Forced retirement is a withdrawal of a human right when a person is fully capable of working and wishes to do so. But we recognise the right of management to move people sideways to restructure the workforce and allow for the promotion of younger staff.

## **Gradual retirement**

4.8 We also appreciate however that many older workers wish to wind down their involvement in the workforce gradually. We believe they should be given the opportunity to do so without the drawbacks to their pension arrangements that currently exist. Under present arrangements, a person cannot pay into a pension and receive a pension from the same fund or employer at the same time. We will scrap this regulation. Our aim is to give older people the opportunity to retire gradually, rather than in one sudden move as happens now.

4.9 Currently, a person who is above the retirement age is not protected against unfair dismissal and is not entitled to redundancy compensation. This raises some concerns as it means that it is cheaper for an employer to dismiss a person over retirement age rather than a younger person who has worked for a shorter time. On the other hand, giving those over statutory retirement age a redundancy entitlement would discourage many firms from employing older workers. Accordingly, we do not think that it is appropriate to change redundancy regulations at this time. Instead, workers above retirement age should be protected by the rules on unfair dismissal in the same way as younger colleagues.

4.10 We appreciate however that an older workforce raises issues of health and reduced efficiency. An older person may no longer be able to cope with the demands of the job that they could have tackled effectively some years previously. In such circumstances it is only right that an employer should be able to replace the person with someone capable of doing the job. However, since employers already have the right to terminate a person's employment on the grounds that they are no longer capable of doing the job for which they are employed, we do not see this as a problem.

### **Code of Practice on job advertising**

4.11 There are many examples of inadvertent discrimination by employers which we wish to tackle. Too many job advertisements state that particular types of people are "preferred". For example, an advertisement may say that the holder of a full driving licence is "preferred" even though driving is not a part of the job in question. The preference is irrelevant and hints at a discriminatory attitude to non-drivers who are just as capable of doing the job as are drivers. The individual's capabilities should be the main factor behind that person's appointment to a job. Too often, irrelevant and discriminatory points are added to adverts acting as a bar to applications from people perfectly capable of doing the job.

4.12 Statements of preferences (explicit or implicit) that appear in adverts are, in many cases, unreasonable as they are not part of the requirements of the job. An advert that states a preference for applicants to have a degree discriminates against those people who have vocational qualifications instead, or are qualified

by experience; and effectively tells those people that they will not be considered.

4.13 We wish to end this type of job advertisement. However, we would rather that this came about through employers voluntarily subscribing to a Code of Practice than through regulation. We believe such a Code would be more relevant if put together by the CBI, Federation of Small Businesses, TUC and so on, rather than written by a government ministry, and we will ask them to draw it up.

4.14 Employers constantly make judgements on a range of issues when deciding the appropriateness of an individual for employment. Some judgements will be based on factors beyond the immediate control of the individual, such as physical looks. Other judgements will be based on factors the individual can influence, such as the way they dress or their personal hygiene. We feel that the state should generally not interfere with these judgements. There are however, instances when appearance or physical size is of importance to an employer when making appointments. For example, people using a piece of equipment may need to be of a particular size or fitness.

4.15 Whilst we feel it is inappropriate for the state to intervene in these judgements, employment practices that discriminate in favour of some individuals not covered by current anti-discrimination legislation should be publicly explained. We feel that the Code of Practice should cover this.

4.16 To encourage good practice in employment matters without the need for state intervention, we will require companies to state whether or not they adhere to Codes of Practice in their annual reports and to explain any policies they have adopted for promoting diversity in the workplace. For listed companies, this could be carried out under the OFR requirements of the Companies Bill considered by Parliament in 2004.

# ***Employment in the Global Economy***

5.1 One of the most striking features in recent history has been the tremendous growth in the size and integration of the world economy. The establishment and growth of associations such as the European Union have brought down many barriers to open trade in goods and services. The expansion of the EU to include many of the states of Eastern Europe in May 2004 itself saw an end to a long running economic division.

5.2 Globalisation is having various and complex effects on the working lives of UK citizens. The UK has undoubtedly benefited from the greater freedoms that come from the reduction of barriers. As a trading nation our economy has grown with the expansion of global trade. We have some unique advantages, such as the use of English as a world language and our geographical position as the gateway to Europe for both aviation and shipping.

5.3 To retain our position as the fourth largest economy in the world, we need an adaptable and flexible workforce with a high skills base that is a major stakeholder in the economic success of the nation. We reject the view that protectionism is needed to ensure the continued success of the British economy. Rather, we are wealthier because we are a member of the EU and therefore have access to one of the biggest markets in the world. Furthermore, we are a nation that trades extensively outside the EU and benefits from freer trade.

## **Opposing protectionism**

5.4 The advantages we have do come at a cost. As English is the language of international commerce and is spoken extensively throughout the world as a second language, businesses now find a ready supply of English speakers able to deal directly with UK customers to staff the emerging call centre industry in the Asian subcontinent. Advances in information and communication technology have encouraged this trend. Yet despite the high profile loss of some call centres to India, the call centre industry has continued to grow dramatically in the UK. Applying protectionism to safeguard some call centre jobs in the UK is both wrong in principle and could prove counter productive. Currently the

UK is not a net exporter of jobs. Foreign businesses are continuing to invest here and we need to call on other countries to export workers here to fill the employment gaps we ourselves cannot fill.

5.5 The population of the UK is getting older. The demography of the nation is changing. Life expectancy is increasing but people are having fewer children. In coming decades we will be relying on fewer economically active people to support a growing army of retired citizens. This is not sustainable.

## **Managed migration**

5.6 We will therefore become increasingly reliant on non-UK born labour to maintain our wealth and prosperity. Although immigration is an emotive issue, the future of the British economy, and the ability of the nation to maintain public services and provide a reasonable standard of income for those in retirement will rely on our being able to staff our businesses with workers with a range of different skills levels. Failure to address this basic economic need will result in British economic decline and falling living standards for the nation as a whole. Whilst ensuring we maximise employment amongst British residents and workers, we have to be realistic and recruit labour from abroad as well. It is praiseworthy that this analysis is shared by the CBI and TUC.

5.7 Liberal Democrats believe that managed migration will ensure the UK maintains its strong position within the world economy and maintains decent standards of living for people living here. Legal, managed migration does not displace people from existing jobs in the UK. Instead, it helps fill vacancies with economically active and productive people who, through their taxes, contribute to the community as a whole, therefore allowing the nation to continue to invest in public services. Nevertheless, as a nation we must maintain decent standards to which we should work with regard to migration. We would therefore ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families. Recruitment of skilled workers will only take place in countries where the government has agreed to such activity.

## **Quotas and Green Cards**

5.8 The current system of work permits for non-EU citizens is chaotic. We will abolish it and introduce instead a green card system. This will be designed to address the manpower needs of the economy. We will set immigration quotas for different labour market sectors of the economy. The quotas will depend on the need for numbers and skills mix. The quotas will be set by the Department for Work and Pensions, on the advice of the major stakeholders in the economy, such as the CBI and TUC.

5.9 Liberal Democrats believe that as free as possible a movement of goods, services and people benefits individuals, communities and economies by adding to wealth creation. Nevertheless, we do need to ensure we do not inadvertently asset strip poorer countries of badly needed skilled labour to fill employment gaps in the British economy and public services. We believe that the green card system will establish overall numbers of migrant workers and could be used to set work migration figures for some employment sectors from individual countries where there is a danger of depletion of skills.

5.10 Such controls need to be balanced against the benefits a poorer country can obtain from training its own citizens for employment abroad. Many countries gain substantial foreign revenue from their own citizens working in richer countries and sending back part of their income to support their families at home. For some countries, such as Sri Lanka, working abroad constitutes the biggest single foreign income earner. Countries will also benefit from the return of people with enhanced skills.

5.11 In setting numbers for migrant workers, attention should therefore be paid to the benefits for both the UK and the country from which the migrants come. Whilst we would not impose conditions on the private sector for recruitment abroad, the public services can pay much greater attention to its recruitment procedures. Much greater care should therefore be paid by the NHS and other public bodies to the need to avoid denuding developing countries of their key skilled workers.

5.12 Though we would not make the learning of English compulsory for migrant workers, we can hold a reasonable expectation that they will make some effort to learn the language - as, indeed, the vast majority do. Many migrant workers in the UK come here to earn and learn English before returning to their home countries. For others whose primary concern is to earn, we will assist them to learn English through courses and textbooks, treating English as an additional language in public libraries in areas where there is a migrant population for whom English is not a first language.

## **Tackling illegal migration and exploitation**

5.13 A further advantage with the green card system and a more open, common sense debate on labour migration is the ability to clamp down on illegal migration. Enterprises that employ migrant workers brought illegally into the country undermine legitimate businesses by paying well below the minimum wage and avoiding the provision of the rights and benefits that accrue to legally employed workers. The Morecambe Bay tragedy in 2004 highlighted the dangers that exploited illegal migrant workers face. It also put a focus on the huge profits that can be made from the illegal trafficking of people offered a bright future away from poverty but who are, in effect, entrapped into a modern form of slavery. In an attempt to end people trafficking we would make it illegal to withhold, conceal or damage another person's passport or other identification documents in order to restrict their freedom of movement or maintain their labour or services. People who are the victims of trafficking should be regarded as precisely that - victims. Many have been brought in against their own will. People trafficking should therefore be regarded as a serious offence.

5.14 The introduction of a green card system, allowing managed migration to fill the needs of the legitimate UK economy, will not end illegal migration. It will, however, help to reduce it.

# **Public Sector Employment**

6.1 It is hard to envisage any future circumstances where, aside from minimum wage regulations, the pay of workers in the private sector will be determined by the state. But all governments have to take a responsibility in the setting of pay for employees in the public sector. A key theme to the Liberal Democrat approach to government is devolution of power away from the centre to the nations, regions, local councils, communities and citizens of the UK. Naturally, we wish to apply the same approach, wherever possible, to public sector employment. In addition, we believe that public sector employers should be exemplary in all their employment practices.

## **National framework - decentralised bargaining**

6.2 It follows that we believe that it is right in principle that the negotiating and setting of public sector pay and conditions should be decentralised. Indeed, the additional flexibility that this affords would be in the interest of worker, employer, tax payer and the recipients of the service concerned. However, it is important that regional or localised pay bargaining takes place within a national framework in order to ensure that minimum standards are maintained in terms of both pay and conditions and of service provision, and that there is no discouragement against people moving freely from a job in one area to another in a different area.

6.3 Accordingly, we will ensure that within the civil service, NHS, local authorities and other governmental organisations, UK-wide negotiated frameworks will settle minimum terms and conditions and decide training and qualification requirements.

6.4 Within England, regional and local “top ups” will be settled in the areas concerned, not nationally, subject where appropriate to applicable minimum standards. Within the UK framework there will be national flexibility in Scotland and Wales. We will allow terms and conditions relating to time off for training, out of hours payments and pay levels to be the responsibility of the relevant employer (local authority, trust or whatever). If there is one overwhelming lesson

from the fire dispute it is that you cannot hold negotiations between employees and employers if the government is continually interfering and undermining the employers’ ability to negotiate.

6.5 The pay and conditions of employment of senior managers in the public sector should be a matter for local discretion. This is a competitive area and there is only a small pool of suitable people able to cross easily between the public and private sectors. We reject arbitrary limits on senior managers’ pay. Local authorities and trusts must be able to attract the best person for the job and not have their hands tied by central or regional regulations on pay levels. Nevertheless, as they are paid the market rate, senior managers must also face the same disciplines as they would in the private sector, where their livelihood depends on the success of the business they manage. Senior managers should be expected to perform to a high standard. Local authorities, trusts and branches of the civil service should be encouraged to set and enforce performance targets suited to their needs.

6.6 The last two decades have seen a transfer of service provision from the public to the private sector with the gradual development of the former as an enabler rather than a direct provider of services. This has implications for staff who are transferred. We believe that public sector employers should continue to be entitled to require companies undertaking outsourced contracts to maintain the pay and conditions of transferred staff. We do not support outsourcing as a way of reducing pay or conditions - it is only appropriate if it provides a better and/or more efficient service.

## **Training and Skills**

7.1 Despite pockets of high levels of unemployment, Britain has a relatively low level of unemployment. Generally, the issue nowadays is not so much about getting people into work but rather about the level of skills they have. A better skilled workforce will make the country more productive, improve wages and help us to compete in domestic and global markets.

7.2 Britain however has, overall, inadequate levels of intermediate skills. Levels of attainment for reading, writing and arithmetic are still too low. Furthermore, the old system of training for a job for life is breaking up. Technological development and changing markets and demands can make skills learnt in the past become out of date. Increasing skills levels whilst at work is, therefore, vital if we are to improve productivity, competitiveness and prosperity. People in the employment market must be able to learn so that they are adaptable to the fast changing conditions of the economy.

### **Training for young people**

7.3 In our policy paper *Working for Success*, Liberal Democrats explored the need for apprenticeship for 14 to 15 year olds and work based training. We believe that, by 14, pupils should have satisfactory attainment in the ‘three Rs’ and a good grounding in the full range of other subjects. They can and should then be given a much wider range of choices about how they continue their education. With the help of a mentor (who will also ensure they carry a full timetable until they are 16), pupils will be able to choose between learning in a school on the traditional academic route, in an FE College, perhaps on a more vocational route, or in the workplace on an apprenticeship or other accredited training scheme. Crucially, we believe they should be able to mix the three, with funding for the courses they take following the student rather than being given in one block to one institution. We believe that this would increase the number of young people taking work-based training courses, because leaving school to start work would no longer have to be an “all-or-nothing” decision.

7.4 The only compulsory elements for all students will be Key Skills Tests in literacy, numeracy, ICT and a modern foreign language - but these would focus on the day to day application of skills rather than on theoretical learning. For instance, in literacy, a student would learn how to write a clear letter and to understand written and oral instructions. The publication of the Tomlinson report in October 2004 focused attention on the need to improve skills and educational standards of 14-19 year olds. The challenge for the government is to convert the proposals on reforms to the exam system, many of which are supported by the Liberal Democrats, into action that tackles the worryingly low levels of basic education and skills of too many young people.

7.5 For adults, the adult learning budgets of Learning and Skills Councils should be focused on those of any age who do not have an initial Level 2 qualification, and those aged under 25 who do not have an initial Level 3. We will give under 25s a statutory right to time off for training and education. We will also allow LSC budgets to focus on work-based training. Inevitably, this would have to be at the expense of those wishing to add further GCSE level qualifications through evening classes to those gained in full time education. We understand the importance of this and the benefit that it brings to individuals that take such courses but we believe that governmental support is best directed to ensuring that as many people as possible are able to contribute productively to our economy. The government currently pay 75% of tuition costs to do this. Liberal Democrats would reduce this and increase the budget available for those who don’t have these qualifications at all. This funding should be equally available to work-based learning providers as to FE Colleges, and so will help to increase the numbers of “mature” learners able to take apprenticeships and other work-based courses.

7.6 Work-based learning is a crucial part of our education system but at the moment it is too often used to pick up people who were failed by the system earlier on. This does a disservice to young people and to the employers who work with them. Instead, it should be a standard part of

the 14-19 curriculum, with many more people taking apprenticeships, by opening up the option of doing this in parallel with other courses. For example, under our system a 15 year-old who wants to be an electrician and who has ambitions to run his own business one day would be able to take a part-time apprenticeship with an electrician for two days a week, spend a day a week in an FE College taking an electrical engineering course, and spend the remaining two days in school preparing for the Key Skills Tests and taking an academic Business Studies course.

### **Adult training**

7.7 If an adult has not got an initial Level 2 or Level 3, we believe they should be given every opportunity to get these basic qualifications, and that the work-based route should be as open to them as any other. However, we maintain that work-based learning will not come into its own until the rest of the education system is promoting vocational and work-based learning as equal to academic learning, and until there are opportunities for students to enter the work-based route earlier.

7.8 Trade unions already have a history of promoting education and training, for example, through the Workers' Education Association and Ruskin College. We also recognise the important role of Trade Union Learning Representatives. We believe there is a continuing role for the trade union movement in this area but it is not necessary to legislate for this. Indeed, we believe this would be counter-productive, inevitably tying up trade unions in red tape and bureaucracy.

7.9 Economic development and skills issues are often closely linked. The government has, however, created a separate system of regional development agencies and learning and skills councils. These need to be brought together.

7.10 This is a key function of regional government in England, whether elected or appointed. Liberal Democrats will reform and simplify existing regional governance, bringing various functions, especially economic development and skills training, together within each region. Regions themselves will decide their own structures and how best to involve stakeholders, especially trade unions and employers.

7.11 We believe that businesses benefit from training their staff. A greater level of skills in the workforce benefits the economy as a whole. There is no evidence that poaching by employers of trained and skilled employees is an inherent problem that reduces the willingness to provide training. The free movement of labour is a basic characteristic of a market economy. No action needs to be taken by the government on this point.

7.12 We do not wish to put a compulsory requirement on businesses to train staff. Levels of training provided by an employer are a business issue to be decided within a business itself. After all, a well-trained staff is a competitive advantage in a multi-company market. Nevertheless, we do believe that the government should set a pro-training environment and at least ask businesses to report on their training activities. We will therefore require a statement on training undertaken by employees at the behest of the employer in the annual report submitted to Companies House.

7.13 A further reason for avoiding compulsory training is the problems that this would cause for businesses employing only a small number of people. Large employers are in a much better position to deal with workplace training. They can buy in services or employ their own trainers. This is not an option readily available to individual SMEs. However, SMEs require trained staff too and we believe that in this area, as in many others, they can be helped to tackle their particular problems by organisations offering business advice or through RDAs and local authority units dealing with economic development.

### **SMEs working together**

7.14 Even more importantly, were they to work together to tackle this sort of issue, they could effectively be in the position enjoyed by large employers. Many SMEs already buy in services by clubbing together. For example, payroll, accountancy, secretarial services and so on can be purchased from a service pool provider. We believe training (or the staff cover necessary to allow it to happen) can be purchased in the same way. Again there should be no compulsion by government. SMEs should be free to come to arrangements that suit themselves. Nevertheless, RDAs can help to facilitate the development of business clubs for purchasing services.

7.15 To assist this process and to ensure skills and training needs are addressed generally, each region, through the RDA and LSCs will be given the power to assess the requirements of the region and make provision to address them. We do not intend setting a national model on how this should be done. Regions must be free of the deadweight of central control.

7.16 Increasing the basic educational and the skills levels of people in the jobs market increases the overall productivity, flexibility and adaptability of the workforce. Ensuring there is scope for attaining greater education and skills qualifications is an important element of an individual's work/life balance. The Investors in

People approach to encouraging the development of appropriate work/life balances within a firm's workforce is endorsed by Liberal Democrats and we wish to see Investors in People and similar schemes extended. Businesses themselves will be free to engage with this process and we believe that market conditions will push many to follow this route to increase the value of their workforce and encourage staff to remain whilst helping them to flexible address their own life needs. To accommodate the increasing need for flexibility especially on training, we will introduce a statutory 'right to request' training for employees and a 'duty to consider' by employers.

# **The Role of Trade Unions**

8.1 Liberal Democrats believe that the right to free association is a fundamental human right. Since an individual employee cannot balance the power of an employer, especially in larger firms, it is particularly important that that right exists in connection with the workplace and for such associations to be able to federate beyond an individual's workplace. Furthermore, an individual should not be subject to sanctions for being a member (or, indeed, for refusing to be a member) of an association such as a trade union or workplace employee organisation: an individual must therefore be free to decide whether or not to join a trade union.

8.2 The primary function of trade unions is to represent their members both collectively and individually. The role of representing individuals is becoming increasingly important with the growth of tribunals and internal disciplinary procedures. Trade unions win hundreds of millions of pounds compensation for their members through representing individuals. And, with recourse to the law often proving expensive, trade unions can provide advice and assistance which, for many, is otherwise beyond reach. The authors of this paper encourage Liberal Democrat members and supporters to join a relevant trade union and campaign for it to follow a liberal agenda and promote liberal values.

8.3 Indeed, throughout history, one of the first actions of a dictatorship has been the destruction of free trade unions. A productive liberal economy however relies on stakeholders cooperating together for mutual gain. For such a system to operate successfully, no stakeholder should have a dominant position able to dictate terms to other stakeholders. The smooth functioning of the economy and wealth creation can be disrupted if any stakeholder accumulates too much power.

8.4 We welcome the current responsible approach to employment and the economy generally followed by the trade union movement. We believe trade unions are an important stakeholder in the economy and can play a significant role in helping to improve productivity to the benefit of employee, employer and consumer alike.

8.5 Unions predominantly represent people in their existing jobs. This can mean that there is structural inertia that can sometimes impede their acceptance of future changes in the job market. It is, therefore, to the benefit of all stakeholders that unions are encouraged to recognize the changing nature of work and the vital importance of training and retraining. Indeed many Unions are at the forefront of pressing for better training for their members. Of course, not every organisation moves forward at the same speed and a small minority of trade unions still seem to favour the confrontational approach to industrial relations that was prevalent in the 1970s. The Government's role is to encourage and promote a change of attitude and opportunities to develop forward looking unions that are in tune with the needs of their members and the needs of the workplace. The government can take a lead by itself behaving as an exemplary employer.

8.6 Having established the right to be a member of a trade union, or staff association, it is appropriate to define a Liberal Democrat view of their role, functions and status. We believe that trade unions are primarily "friendly societies" whose members come together of their own free will for their own mutual benefit. We do not believe trade unions are an estate of the realm. Thus they should have no privileged, statutory position but neither should they be unduly regulated.

## **Reviewing Trade Union regulation**

8.7 Our policy paper *Setting Business Free* (adopted in 2003) took an approach based on minimal but sensible regulation of commerce aimed at maintaining competitive markets whilst protecting consumers, employees and the environment. We take a similar approach to trade unions. We will therefore review all regulations on trade unions to consider whether they are still required. In addition, we will place a sunset clause on any new regulation on trade union activity, in precisely the same way as we have proposed for commerce, so that periodic consideration will be required by Parliament as to whether there is a continuing need for it.

## **Political fund**

8.8 In this context, the requirement to conduct a ballot of members once every ten years on maintaining a political fund can no longer be justified. We believe that a trade union should decide through its own mechanisms whether or not to maintain such a fund. In any event, the current requirement does not cover how the funds may be spent and whether the union may affiliate to a particular political party even though such decisions are of greater importance than whether or not a union maintains a fund that can be spent on 'political' activity. Some unions are involved in campaigns, which are not associated with a particular political party, but are defined as "political" under legislation. The current position is clearly anomalous.

8.9 We believe that a union should be free to take a decision on political affiliation by its own procedures. We would, however, require a union that is affiliated to a political party and has a political fund to split that fund into affiliated and non-affiliated sections, so that the union can only support the party to which it is affiliated through the contributions of those who are content for their money to be used in this way. Many unions are also involved in non-party political campaigns and these can, of course, be paid for by the non-affiliated element of the fund.

8.10 We do not propose a change to require people to contract in to paying the political levy. The decision to have a fund is a corporate decision of the union reached through the due processes of that union. A member who disagrees with that decision should be a liberty to opt out of that decision. In a democracy, people are free to make their own political choices and judgements. Therefore, a union member should not be required to donate to a particular political party by proxy through the political levy if that person does not support the party to which the union is affiliated. That same person may, however, wish to contribute to the general campaigning of the union. That person should therefore be entitled to pay the political levy into the union's non-affiliated fund. A clear informed and transparent choice between fund contribution, or no contribution at all, should be available to each individual trade union member. The union's own decision making processes will determine the causes on which the non-affiliated fund can be spent, though the party to which the union is

affiliated will not be entitled to any part of the non-affiliate fund.

## **Trade union ballots**

8.11 Trade unions are currently required, in some circumstances, to elect senior national officials such as general secretaries who are, in effect, employees of the union. Liberal Democrats believe this is an example of unnecessary regulation. It should be a matter for a trade union whether it wishes to elect paid national officials. We will therefore remove the requirement for full time, paid officials to be elected except if they are members of their union executive with a vote, sitting alongside non-paid executive members. If they are not a voting part of the executive of the union, but are employed to advise the executive and to carry out its decisions, we see no reason to require them to be elected.

8.12 We will, however, maintain the requirement for those who seek to represent the union members in the running of their union in an unpaid capacity to continue to be elected by the members through secret ballots. We will also retain secret ballots before industrial action can be taken by a union. Liberal Democrats, through our predecessor parties, took a lead in the 1980s in pressing for trade unions to be returned to their members. We succeeded in influencing employment legislation of the Conservative government to ensure there was provision for secret ballots for unpaid officials and strike action. We are proud of those achievements. We believe the era of much more responsible trade unionism we are now enjoying has been improved by the use of secret ballots. We wish this to continue.

8.13 The level of support a trade union provides to its members is a matter for individual trade unions. It is not appropriate for Government to prescribe the functions which a union must or may discharge - that would be contrary to the principle of free association. Were a union to become dysfunctional, the remedy lies with the union's members and not the state. Unions that fail to move with the times will, inevitably, cease to have a positive influence on the welfare of their members; it is therefore in the members' interests to change matters for the better.

8.14 Overall, however, we believe the trade union movement generally is responsible and willing to work with other stakeholders in the economy, and indeed with other parties in the political world. We do not wish to damage this through excessive regulation but we do look to unions to continue to develop. We believe that businesses where unions are both recognised and work with management are better businesses.

8.15 To promote the culture of co-operation within business, we would encourage the reporting of employment relations in the annual report of listed companies with an expectation that good practice will percolate down into smaller companies and firms over time. We are pleased therefore that this will be a requirement under the OFR of listed companies from 2005. Only if this osmosis of good ideas fails to happen would we consider minimal legislative action to encourage better practices.

8.16 We appreciate the need to ensure trade unions have as much relevant information as possible when negotiating a claim with an employer. We will therefore place a duty on employers to provide representative bodies of employees appropriate information about the financial state of the firm so that a considered judgement can be made on the scale of the claim employees are putting forward.

8.17 Although the ability to strike has been seen as a fundamental right, in the UK it does not apply to all employees. The police and those in the military service are not allowed to strike. The history of using a strike as a primary weapon in industrial relations has, thankfully, been put behind us and UK workers rarely use the strike weapon as a negotiating tool.

### **Binding Arbitration**

8.18 Nevertheless, there are groups which could impact greatly on the wider economy were they to strike. Those maintaining major parts of the country's infrastructure or employed on services that keep the country running could significantly damage the wider economy. Liberal Democrats believe that the state must have the right to intervene to settle industrial disputes that threaten the wider economy or the national interest. We recognise that there is ample opportunity for such intervention to back-fire and believe that any procedure should be implemented

as a matter of absolute last resort - for instance when a failure to bring a dispute within a strategic sector of the economy to a conclusion could potentially materially threaten the economic and civil rights of millions of people not directly involved.

8.19 We reject any extension of the ban on the right to strike as such. We believe that the employers and employees should continue to aim to settle their own disputes without intervention or through mutually agreed arbitration and conciliation. However in the very rare cases where this fails and material damage to a strategic area of the economy would follow from a strike, we believe that the state has a duty to intervene to bring about a settlement.

8.20 In strategic areas of the private economy we propose the following framework for ending disputes. This framework will only apply where a strike ballot has already produced an affirmative vote, and the subsequent two-week cooling-off period has expired. It is at this point, when all formal procedures have been exhausted and the workforce has clearly demonstrated an intent to strike, that the government will be in a position to consider statutory intervention. If the government decides a strike will cause far reaching damage to the economy and the national interest, they will be empowered to lay an Order before both Houses of Parliament to require both sides to go to compulsory arbitration. A majority in both Houses will be required.

8.21 Compulsory arbitration will therefore be a matter of last resort and will only be implemented if all negotiating procedures have been exhausted, the workforce have voted to strike and both government and Parliament believe there is a threat to the national interest if industrial action were to take place.

8.22 In the public sector, as a matter of policy, a Liberal Democrat government would aim to negotiate with the trade unions a comprehensive conciliation and binding arbitration agreement.

*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. If approved by Conference, this paper will form the policy of the Federal Party, except in appropriate areas where any national 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 Trade Unions and Employment**

*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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