

## **Briefing on the Supporter Scheme, by Miranda Roberts, Chair of the Federal People Development Committee (FPDC)**

This is an overview of the many detailed decisions FPDC made in December and January. FPDC is the Federal Committee that has responsibility for membership, diversity and training. The Federal Board asked FPDC to work up details for a supporter scheme after the consultation sessions at Autumn Conference in Brighton, as well as a series of regional consultation sessions and member webinars. The motion and constitutional amendments that are coming to York Federal Conference are the culmination of this process.

These decisions are the product of a great deal of research, detailed discussion and a democratic process. Many of the committee members started the process with sincere concerns, and I know that is likely to be the case for some members who are reading this briefing now. Please rest assured that every decision was discussed and based on logic and data. All of the FPDC decisions had clear majorities or unanimous support in the committee.

When something was very controversial, I've given a quick outline of the debate that we had that led to that decision.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of creating a supporter class of membership is:

1. To engage more people in our Liberal Democrat activities
2. To make our campaigns (both in seats and on issues) more successful
3. To raise more money from a wider group of people
4. To create a stepping-stone towards membership of the Party

### **Eligibility**

- That the minimum age for supporters will match the minimums for membership.
- People not on the electoral roll will be able to register as supporters (under 18s for example).
- We will not require UK citizenship or UK residence, as no money is changing hands. When we ask for money, we will make sure that any donation pages are clear about permissible donors under UK law.
  - We did have a short discussion about this. But particularly with Brexit, we felt it was quite possible that foreign nationals might want to lend their support and be kept in touch. This is in much the same way as many British Liberal Democrat members are part of American Democrat mailing lists and those of other foreign sister parties.
- Members of other parties will be permitted to register as supporters \* *See later note about eligibility to vote in Leadership contests*
  - We reached this view because there are seats where our squeeze/tactical voting message is so embedded, that members of other parties do vote for us regularly and even volunteer to help us. They know that their party of

membership can't win in that seat. For example, in Oxford West and Abingdon, there was a significant "Labour for Layla" presence. In other constituencies, there are deliverers and poster sites and donors who are Green party members, or very pro-European soft Conservatives, or anti-Corbyn Labour members. They can't be members of our Party, but if they're routinely supporting us, we should be finding ways to engage them in the Lib Dems. The supporter class is exactly how we help these people realise that they actually agree with our policies and want to resign their other membership to join us as full members.

### Process of registration

- In order to have a set of safeguards that is both meaningful and practical, we will: 1) check registering supporters against a list of current members, and those who have been expelled/suspended/rejected, removing those whose details match; 2) create a very quick and streamlined process to remove registered supporters who are found to act in ways that are not in sympathy with our values and philosophy; 3) introduce a 30 day 'cooling off' period, where either side may terminate the registration with no reason needed.
  - The cooling off period is essentially designed to protect the Party from people bragging on social media that they just registered in order to wreck something. We can just remove them immediately.
- Registering supporters will be shown a short statement outlining Liberal Democrat philosophy. FPDC recommended the 116 word version of the Preamble to the Constitution, but we have given staff flexibility in how this is communicated (for example, possibly by video rather than text). We asked that this be data-led and responsive to the results as the project is developed and goes live. This is designed to help inform supporters and improve interaction and retention.
  - We wanted to make sure that supporters who are attracted by one policy (like Brexit) do realise that we are not just a single issue Party.

### Benefits

Supporters will get:

- Regular emails from the Federal Party, with news, campaigns, donation requests and recruitment messages
- Contact from their local party, inviting them to events, campaign actions and giving them local news (if they opt-in to it)
- The right to attend Federal Conferences as non-voting members
- The ability to join Party affiliate schemes, like Ecotricity's deal which gives the party money
- Access to a specially designed "Supporters Area" of the Federal website, which will be based on the same idea as the members area, but with a narrower field of access and no sensitive materials
- The right to attend *some* Party training – the existence of supporters will mean that we may badge some training as 'members only' now, but clearly we want supporters to learn how to canvass etc so that they can help our campaigns effectively
- Emails inviting them to give their views on policy ideas, campaigns we may run or items we may design and sell. When they are invited to input into policy and

campaigns their input will be kept separate from that of members, and considered in that context.

- Serve on Policy Working Groups where they have expertise
  - This decision was based on a misunderstanding. We had been led to believe that this already happened, but FPC later informed us that non-member experts actually feed into the process in different ways. The Federal Board discussed this issue and voted to allow the supporters to join Policy Working Groups, as it was felt that they would only be chosen for participation if they were bringing in some useful expert knowledge. There will be no obligation for FPC to choose supporters for Working Groups, it just gives them the option of doing so.
- They can join AO's (associated organisations) in the Party. The SAO review that is being commissioned this year will be reviewing SAO regulations and we hope that this review will conclude that supporters will be able to join SAO's too.

Each State Party will be asked to decide whether to invite supporters to attend their State conferences and other member only events, and how their attendance would be managed.

York Federal Conference will decide whether to add a vote in Party Leadership elections to that list. FPDC has not taken an official view on this issue, it is for Conference to decide.

**Whatever happens at York conference, Members will still be the only ones who can:**

- Speak and vote at Federal conferences, setting policy for the Party
- Nominate candidates for Party Leader
- Vote to select local Council candidates, Westminster PPCs, Assembly and Parliamentary candidates and vote in internal Party elections for President and Federal Committees
- Apply to be candidates representing the Party in public elections
- Serve on Federal Committees
- Access Members Area of Federal Website
- Access member only training

It may also be that as we get more used to having both members and supporters we can think of new ways to give members more benefits, like exclusive webinars or discounts or special events that are just for members.

**How could votes for Party Leader work, if it is passed by York Conference?**

- Because of the impossibility of intensively vetting every supporter, FPDC recommend that we have minimal barriers to become a supporter, but then create a much more tightly controlled selection register within the supporter scheme, for those supporters who wish to vote in Party Leadership elections.
- To get onto the supporter selection register, we suggest that a member will have to provide a bank card, which will be debited £1 and then refunded £1, or some other form of acceptable ID if they do not have a bank account. The principle is that it will need to be a provable piece of identification. Options for those without bank accounts might include receiving a piece of posted mail and returning it as proof of address.

- We discussed this at length and received two very helpful critiques from Party members describing the challenges in different forms of identity checking. The truth is that there is no system that is absolutely secure. Everything has some flaw and can be hacked or cheated if a person is determined and well resourced. However, the same can also be said for our membership where checks are minimal. Using a bank card to check the supporter's identity would be a fair parallel with the checks we perform on new members joining.
- Supporters will also be required to have resigned any other party memberships they hold, before they apply to join the electoral roll. It will not be acceptable for members of other parties to vote in our Leadership elections.
  - We do recognise that this is going to be very difficult to enforce, as we do not have access to the membership databases of other parties. But the same is true for people joining as members. We will have to take this on trust and then have a quick and robust system to remove people who are found to have lied.
- To match the Membership rules, supporters who are under 10 years old will not be permitted to join the supporter selection register for Party Leadership elections.

### **Engagement**

- Content that will be sent to supporters will be owned and directed by the Membership team in HQ, working with the new CMC (Campaigns, Membership, Communications) group in the HQ structure. FPDC will feed back to that team on any concerns that arise.
- Local Parties, States, Regions, AO's and SAO's will all be encouraged to involve supporters in appropriate ways and HQ (working with volunteers) will produce guidance for each group as to how best they can do this.
- Supporters will be visible inside Salesforce instantly, and on Connect within 24-48 hours, and the contact permissions they have given under GDPR will be listed.

### **Maintenance and monitoring**

- If a supporter does not open our emails for six months, we will put them on pause, letting them know we are doing so. If they go a full year without interacting with our emails, ignoring the warnings at 6, 9 and 12 months we will auto-resign them. This will clear the list of out of date emails and people who have lost interest.
  - We did consider removing people from the lists at six months, but it was felt that there may be good reason for people not interacting for that length of time, for example, a bereavement.
- Conversion rates of supporters becoming donors and upgrading to full membership will be tracked and reported to FPDC.
- There will be a robust complaint system, which will openly, one-sidedly favour the Party. The proposal is in essence, that the Party reserves the right to revoke registration from supporters for any behaviour that we feel contravenes our rules, values or supporter code of conduct. This is fair because they are making no monetary commitment to us. FPDC is proposing that requests for the removal of supporters go to the Membership Subcommittee of FPDC, and be overseen by FPDC.

The volume, particularly at first, may be high, so we are keen not to overwhelm any other party system.

The big concern that we all started from on FPDC was that having supporters might hurt our membership retention and recruitment. We asked a huge number of questions of the HQ team about payment rates, resignations, renewals and so forth. We looked at cutting edge research from academics studying political parties and movements. We looked at privately commissioned polling. We came to the conclusion that we believe that having registered supporters will be a positive step for the Party. There will undoubtedly be a few members who feel disillusioned and decide to resign or downgrade their membership to supporter level. While this is very sad, we feel confident that there is good evidence that this will be overshadowed by the number of new people this proposal attracts into the membership.

Our brief as a committee is to increase Member recruitment, retention and engagement. We feel the addition of supporters to the ways that people can involve themselves in the Party is a positive step and we commend our decisions to you.

***Miranda Roberts, Chair of FPDC, February 2019.***