

Campaign for Minority Ethnic Liberal Democrat MPs

1. Conference welcomes the increasing proportion of Liberal Democrat women MPs since the 2001 General Election, from 16.6% in 2001 to 37.5% in 2005. However, Conference regrets that the Parliamentary Party of the Liberal Democrats contains no elected member from a visible minority ethnic background.

Conference notes that:

2. The Gender Balance Task Force had a significant effect in improving the number of women PPCs and the proportion of our new MPs that are women.
3. That no candidate from a visible minority ethnic background was selected to contest a target seat.
4. As things stand, there are no plans or strategy for developing PPCs from a visible minority ethnic background to be selected in winnable seats in order to achieve a fair representation of visible minority ethnic MPs.”

Conference believes:

5. That the under-representation of black and minority ethnic citizens is unhealthy for democracy, projecting an image which deters them and suggests that the party is failing to make the best use of all available skills and abilities.
6. It is the responsibility of the Party and individuals at all levels to ensure that the situation is improved.
7. That there are three key barriers currently preventing members from the visible minority ethnic background from reaching their potential of getting elected to Westminster. These barriers are:
 - a. Their different culture often means that 'training and development' is key to raising the skills of visible minority ethnic candidates and to getting them to become aware of the policies, practices and organisational & political culture of the Party in order to equitably compete with indigenous candidates in getting short-listed and selected for winnable seats.
 - b. Selection committees often either lack the courage or face stereotypes that prevent selection of visible minority ethnic candidates for starred or target seats, especially where there is only a small minority ethnic population.
 - c. Lack of Party wide awareness about the barriers faced by visible minority ethnic candidates and thus Lack of any positive action for visible minority ethnic candidates in the selection processes.
8. It is the Party's responsibility to remove any such barriers to enable the election of visible minority ethnic candidates to parliament and other elected offices across all levels of government in order to achieve a fairer representation.
9. The positive campaign approach to ensure that increasing number of Women get short-listed and selected in all types of seats has overcome the stereotyping against the Women has worked. A similar campaign is needed to overcome stereotyping of visible minority ethnic candidates and which will allow them to be short listed for all types of seats.
10. The approach of training, mentoring and support developed by the Gender Balance Task Force (now known as the Campaign for Gender Balance) has proven to be an effective vehicle for tackling the problem of gender imbalance and would serve as a viable template for an effective campaign to improve the position of black and minority ethnic members within the Party.

Conference calls for:

11. The Party to work towards a long-term goal of ensuring proportional representation of visible minority ethnic citizens at all levels of representative government in the United Kingdom.
12. As soon as possible, the Party should set-up an Ethnic Balance Task Force (EBTF) in the same way as the one set up for Gender Balance and to follow a similar structure with clear aims & objectives, elected Chair and Vice Chairs, to report to and be accountable to each Federal Executive and each Federal Conference, and to be financially resourced to employ a full-time co-ordinator for training, development, mentoring and assistance of visible minority ethnic candidates to get selected to winnable seats.”
13. The Party to set a target of at least 2 visible minority ethnic candidates to get elected to Westminster by the next General Election.”
14. For all Parliamentary seats, where there are visible minority ethnic candidates on the long list, the selection committee should ensure that at least one visible minority ethnic candidate remains on the final shortlist and allow him/her to compete for final selection.
15. For all European and Assembly candidates’ lists, where there are visible minority ethnic candidates on the long list, the selection committee should ensure that at least one visible minority ethnic candidate remains on the final shortlist and allow him/her to compete for final selection.
16. The local Parties should aim for to have their executives and Council Groups to be representatives of local community by promoting visible minority ethnic members election to council and council executive posts.
17. The Party should actively promote awareness amongst party activists about the removal of barriers and of allowing equal opportunities for candidates of all backgrounds.