

# First time at conference? Being online makes it easier than ever to get stuck in

**I've been a member for many years but like many others, I'd never taken the plunge and dived into conference.**

That all changed last year when I went to the 2019 Lib Dem Party Conference in Bournemouth.

I didn't know what to expect, but before I knew it, I was meeting fellow Lib Dems from across the country, sharing stories, learning new tricks, and feeling at home with over 3,000 like-minded members who share my values.

How's that for a great weekend by the sea?

Thanks to Coronavirus, this year's going to be a little different. Well, very different actually. Conference will be exclusively online – but that just makes it even easier to access all the great events on offer.

And for anyone who feels daunted by turning up as a newbie, there's nothing to worry about. Here's what to expect...

## **Meet fellow Lib Dems**

There are loads of ways to meet other Lib Dems. Why not start off by dropping in at the Federal Conference Committee virtual stand and asking any questions you might have about the weekend?

Enjoy a virtual stroll through the exhibition centre. Talk to members with a plethora of diverse interests. Chat to teachers and women's groups, or see how the Liberal Democrat Seekers of Sanctuary are standing up for asylum seekers in the UK.

In each auditorium session, members can use the online chat function to bounce ideas around.

## **Hear from the party leaders**

Welsh leader Jane Dodds, Scottish leader Wille Rennie, and newly-elected party leader Ed Davey will all be taking to the virtual stage to discuss the issues facing the Lib Dems and laying out their vision for the future.

## **Get stuck in on key debates**

Are you a fan of the Universal Basic Income? Where do you think our country should go in a post-Brexit world? If like me, you enjoy getting stuck into the debate, this is your chance.

At conference, Lib Dem members come together to debate and vote on the key issues of the day – and decisions made by delegates (that's you!) go on to become national party policy.

[See the full list of motions and debates, and find out how to participate here.](#)

## **Check out the fringe**

A particular highlight for me will be Lib Dem spokesperson for home affairs and constitutional reform Alistair Carmichael and the Social Liberal Forum discussing alliances, electoral pacts, and whether the Lib Dems could 'do business' with Labour.

Saturday night is comedy night with the Liberal Democrat Creative Network. In just one of the excellent fringe events, watch comedians battle it out to pitch a new law for post pandemic life, with the winning idea being taken to parliamentarians.

[Browse fringe events in the conference directory.](#)

## **Help shape the future of the Lib Dems**

Some newbies will go on to become Members of Parliament or stand for council, others will leave their mark by helping to shape party policy.

**Forging a path to electoral success depends on every single one of us standing up and fighting for a better future.**

Whichever direction your Lib Dem journey takes you, conference has a training session to help you along the way. Learn digital campaigning skills from the experts, get advice on reaching out to new members and growing your local party, or find out how to become a target seat. There's a huge amount on offer.

**I left conference feeling motivated and uplifted.**

Meeting crowds of Lib Dems – whether virtually or in person – goes to remind you that there are thousands of people across the UK who believe in the same values of openness, tolerance, and freedom that we as Lib Dems stand for.

And if you see me in the chat, feel free to say hello. I'll be there trying to get around as many events as possible!

[Register for conference today.](#)

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# [Election plans and budgets for next year: Steering Group review](#)

Saturday sees the first full meeting of our new Steering Group, [created by the Federal Board](#) in a pilot to find ways of improving how we run the party. As the [Thornhill Election Review](#) found in frank detail, failing to run the party well hinders our election prospects.

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## [Hong Kong Security Law: two months on](#)

The new law, aimed at stamping out protests that have racked Hong Kong for the past year, can “prevent, stop and punish any acts or activities” that severely endanger national security.” Such charges are often used in mainland China to silence dissidents and other political opponents. It has already been used to silence people.

This new law crushes what was left of the ‘one country, two systems’ framework.

The legislation, which has been described as a “death knell” for Hong Kong, also allows Beijing’s security forces to operate in the city.

Legal observers and human rights advocates say the national security laws not only target protesters and their supporters, but permanently undermine the city’s freedoms and rights as promised under the “one country two systems” framework.

During the Handover, the late Paddy Ashdown passionately argued that the people of Hong Kong should be given the right to live in the UK if they held BNO passports.

From Paddy Ashdown to today, the Liberal Democrats have always shown courage on the issue of Hong Kong – unlike the Conservatives.

It’s our duty to [#StandWithHongKong](#) and uphold the promises the UK made. Add your name to back our campaign > <https://t.co/ZELgzFejchpic.twitter.com/fcZf9ibvhP>

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [February 25, 2020](#)

The UK Government's extension of visa rights for BNOs is welcome news.

However, it is not good enough for this offer to only apply to BNO status holders and their dependents, as the Government have so far suggested. This leaves behind many young Hong Kongers who have been at the centre of the calls for democracy.

**The Government need to go further.** All Hong Kongers must have their rights and freedoms protected, regardless of BNO status.

It is time to step up and stand with Hong Kong.

**That's why Alistair Carmichael has tabled a Bill that would re-open the offer of a British National Overseas (BNO) passports for Hong Kong citizens and extend the scheme to provide the "right of abode", allowing a person to live or work indefinitely in the UK.**

We are calling on the Government to support our Bill, which will have its second reading in Parliament on 23rd October 2020.

The UK government to ensure that no one is left behind. **It is time to step up and stand with Hong Kong.**

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## [Reforming the Associated Organisations of the Party](#)

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# Remembering Alan Kurdi

Alan, his mum and his five-year-old brother had drowned as they attempted to cross from Turkey to Kos in a small inflatable boat, having fled the violence of ISIL and Assad's civil war.

The Conservatives voted against providing a safe haven for children who've been forced to flee their homes and separated from their families.

When that photo appeared on front pages the next day, politicians around the world could no longer ignore the awful human tragedies happening every day as refugees like Alan and his family make perilous attempts to cross the Mediterranean in search of sanctuary.

Here in the UK, the Conservative Government was forced into action at last. The Prime Minister promised to resettle 20,000 refugees from Syria – a commitment that the Government will finally fulfil this year. But still, the Conservatives resisted calls from the Liberal Democrats and others to offer sanctuary to refugees already on the move across Europe – those like Alan Kurdi's family.

They even voted against the Dubs amendment, which would have committed the UK to take 3,000 unaccompanied child refugees. That's right. **They voted against providing a safe haven for children who've been forced to flee their homes and separated from their families.**

Thankfully, we defeated the Government and forced them to implement the Dubs scheme, providing a route for the children in Calais camps to come to the UK safely.

But the Conservatives closed that scheme in July, after resettling just 480 child refugees. Without safe routes, desperate people – including children – will continue to take unsafe ones: including attempting to cross the Mediterranean and the Channel in small boats.

We must do all we can to protect vulnerable refugees and safe lives

**And we will continue to see more tragedies like the death of Alan Kurdi.** Just a fortnight ago, the body of a young Sudanese man, Abdulfatah Hamdallah, was found on a beach near Calais.

He had drowned while trying to cross the Channel in a little rubber dinghy with his 16-year-old friend.

We must do all we can to protect vulnerable refugees and safe lives. The UK has a proud history of providing sanctuary to those in need, and we cannot

let this Conservative Government turn its back on them now.

**That's why the Liberal Democrats are fighting to secure safe and legal routes to sanctuary in the UK.**

That must include a new long-term commitment to resettle refugees directly from conflict areas like Syria and the surrounding region. And the Government must reopen the Dubs scheme, with a commitment to resettle 10,000 unaccompanied refugee children from elsewhere in Europe over the next ten years.

Five years ago, we responded to that photo of Alan Kurdi with compassion and urgency. Five years on, both those impulses are needed as much as ever. **We cannot let them fade now.**

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