

Campaign for Science & Engineering
Gordon House,
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Tim Farron

Leader of the Liberal Democrats

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Dear Professor Reid and Dr Main,

Thanks very much for your letter and the opportunity to set out the Liberal Democrat position. Research and innovation play an enormous role in driving our economy and creating societal benefit, and it's absolutely vital that we have a clear strategy in place to ensure the UK remains a world leader in science and engineering.

We are extremely concerned about the potential impact of the government's Brexit plans. The referendum vote to leave the European Union has already started to affect existing and proposed research programmes. But the threat of Brexit is not just about money, it's also about free movement. If researchers cannot easily collaborate with other colleagues, if students find it harder to study abroad, or if visa issues stop people attending conferences, we will do ourselves huge damage.

Liberal Democrats are fighting hard to avoid a bad Brexit deal. We want to stay members of the single market, and we want the British public to have the final say on the deal, rather than politicians, through a referendum. This will give people a chance to scrutinise the deal and to say whether it is good enough, with the option to remain in the EU if it is not.

Here are some of the key Liberal Democrat policies which address the concerns outlined in your letter:

1. Liberal Democrats believe that **open and accessible education** is crucial for the future of our country. This obviously begins at the school level, and this is why we have committed to nearly £7 billion extra expenditure to protect the schools budget in England from planned cuts, to uprate the Pupil Premium which targets help on disadvantaged pupils and to ensure that no school loses out as a result of the move to a National Funding Formula. To ensure high quality teaching we will require all teachers in state-funded schools to be fully qualified or working towards Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) from January 2019, and introduce a clear and properly funded entitlement to genuinely high quality professional development for all teachers – 25 hours per year by 2020, rising to the OECD average of 50 hours by 2025. We will support proper long-term planning of initial teacher training places, prioritising close partnerships with higher education and specialist routes such as Teach First in order to recruit the highest-quality teachers in shortage areas such as STEM. It is also essential to challenge gender stereotyping, working with schools to break down outdated perceptions of gender appropriateness of academic subjects.

Apprenticeships are an important route for many young people into gaining engineering skills. We have set a goal of doubling the number of companies that take on apprentices, and have also committed to ensuring that all the receipts from the Apprenticeship Levy in England are spent on training.

At University level, we are committed to reinstate maintenance grants for the poorest students, ensuring that living costs are not a barrier to disadvantaged young people studying at university. We would also ensure that all universities work to widen participation across the sector, prioritising their work with students in schools and colleges, and require every university to be transparent about selection criteria.

2. We recognise the **need to ensure that the UK remains a desirable destination for international students and professionals** in science and engineering. That's why we have committed to unilaterally guarantee the rights of EU nationals in the UK, ending their ongoing uncertainty. We will call for the overhaul and simplification of the registration process and the requirements for EU nationals to obtain permanent residence and UK citizenship, as the current system is not fit for purpose. Obviously we will be seeking to secure the same rights for UK citizens living in European Union countries.

We would also reinstate post-study work visas for graduates in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths) subjects who find suitable employment within six months of graduating, while removing university students from official migration statistics. We want to give the devolved administrations the right to sponsor additional post-study work visas, and to continue to allow high-skilled immigration to support key sectors of our economy, such as science and engineering.

3. It is very worrying that a confidential survey of the UK's Russell Group universities conducted by the Guardian found cases of British academics being asked to leave EU-funded projects or to step down from leadership roles because they are now considered a financial liability. The House of Commons' Science and Technology Committee has said that they are not convinced that the needs of science and research are at the heart of the Department for Exiting the European Union's thinking and planning for Brexit. I believe that it is **crucial for the science community of our country to retain access to the substantial research funding programmes and exchanges that exist within the European cooperative framework.**

Already, a number of mechanisms exist to enable scientific institutions and researchers in non-EU countries to participate in, and receive funding from, EU Framework Programmes. Thirteen countries (including Norway, Israel and Switzerland) have 'Associated Country' status and contribute to Framework Programme budgets proportionally to their GDP. This enables their researchers and organisations to apply for Horizon 2020 projects with the same status as those from EU Member States. Associated Country status is open to countries that are members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), and current EU candidate nations.

The Liberal Democrats are campaigning to keep the UK within the Single Market, which would make us qualified for Associated Country status. We also wish to maintain membership of Euratom, ensuring continued nuclear co-operation, research funding, and access to nuclear fuels.

4. Our manifesto commits to **protecting our domestic science budget**, including the recent £2 billion increase, by continuing to raise it at least in line with inflation. Our long-term goal is to double innovation and research spending across the economy, which would achieve the 3% of GDP target. In the case of a hard Brexit, we would guarantee to underwrite funding for British partners in EU-funded projects like Horizon 2020 who would suffer from cancellation of income.

We plan to build on the Coalition's industrial strategy, working with sectors which are critical to Britain's ability to trade internationally, creating more 'Catapult' innovation and technology centres and backing private investment in particular in green innovation.

We will develop the skilled workforce we needed to support this growth with a major expansion of high-quality apprenticeships including Advanced Apprenticeships, backed up with new sector-led National Colleges. We will develop a national skills strategy for key sectors, including low-carbon technologies, to help match skills and people.

5. The Liberal Democrats have always been proud to be a party committed to **evidence-based policy**. To cite just one example, our Manifesto proposals on drug reform are based recommendations from an independent expert panel following a careful study of recent

international developments. I welcome the proposal to appoint Chief Scientific Advisers in every Department.

6. Intelligent **regulation** can be a key tool in promoting innovation and the uptake of new technologies. Our Manifesto calls for reform the Regulatory Policy Committee to reduce regulatory uncertainty, and support new markets and investment, particularly in low-carbon and resource-efficient innovation. In terms of influencing trade and access to markets, obviously the key priority is for the UK to be at the top table when regulatory standards are being set. That is why we continue to believe membership of the EU is the best option for Britain.

The Liberal Democrats take the protection and promotion of British science and engineering very seriously. We look forward to working with you over the coming months as we fight on these issues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Farron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tim Farron
Leader of the Liberal Democrats