

## Scottish elections 2016 – Response from the Scottish Liberal Democrats

*Ahead of the 2016 Scottish elections, the Campaign for Science and Engineering (CaSE) wrote to the leaders of all political parties with at least one MSP, inviting them to set out their party's policies on science and engineering.*

*Below is the response from the leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrat, Willie Rennie.*

Dear CaSE,

I am proud that Scotland boasts world leaders in fields as diverse as computer modelling to livestock health and genetics to geology and that we have a strong record of supporting science in Scotland. However, much more needs to be done to ensure that such talent continues to emerge and that Scotland can be a more enlightened and productive place because of it.

In coalition in the first Scottish Parliaments, Liberal Democrats worked hard to develop and support science and engineering. Action ranged from establishing the Life Sciences Strategy to setting ambitious targets for renewable energy to drive investment and research. Our ministers in the last UK Government helped ensure the science budget was ring-fenced, delivering investment of almost £25 billion over the duration of the Parliament.

At this election Scottish Liberal Democrats will build on that record in the next Scottish Parliament.

Scottish Liberal Democrats are committed to making sure that Scotland remains at the forefront of science and engineering research and innovation as crucial cornerstones of the knowledge based economy and high-skilled jobs of the future.

Scottish Liberal Democrats have proposed a penny for education – an increase of 1p on income tax to raise £505 million next year for a transformational investment in Scottish education. This will reverse the cuts to education, repair colleges which have lost 152,000 places since 2007, establish a Scottish pupil premium which will give extra support in every classroom and expand quality early education.

Scottish education has the potential to lead the world once again. But under the SNP we are headed in the wrong direction. While Scotland has traditionally excelled in education and many aspects of the system remain world class, its international advantage is slipping, there is an urgent need for new measures and investment.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills' survey showed 19% of Scottish employers can't get the skills they need – higher than anywhere else in Britain. Our Penny for Education will ensure that

businesses, including many in the science and engineering sector, can find the people and skills they need to grow and succeed. It will also help attract more businesses and research to Scotland.

Scottish Liberal Democrats will also act to ensure that STEM subject attract the brightest and best from across Scotland and embed measures to get more underrepresented groups, in particular women, into science and technology courses and workplaces. For example, our plans to use Scotland International and the Global Scots network to create a special programme for young women potentially interested in a career in science will draw on the talent of inspiring women scientists from around the world.

Elsewhere, we are committed to championing science funding and supporting Scottish universities to continue to secure high levels of UK science funding and will keep pressure on the UK Government to allow overseas graduates to continue to make a contribution.

Given the post has been vacant since 2014, a top priority is to appoint a new Chief Scientific Adviser and ensure that, through that role, evidence is always gathered, assessed and considered in future policy-making decisions. We will trust scientists on matters of policy and listen to the opinion of experts, something that has been sadly lacking in recent years. This approach will be also be embedded in the Scottish Parliament's procedures through the establishment of a new Science and Technology Committee.

Scottish Liberal Democrats are determined to make Scotland the best again and we recognise the key role that science and engineering have to play in driving its future success.

Our manifesto was published on 15 April 2016. You can find a copy at [www.scotlibdems.org.uk](http://www.scotlibdems.org.uk) and I hope you will take a moment to look at our detailed proposals for transforming Scottish education, supporting science and improving productivity.

I do hope that you find my letter helpful in setting out my position on these important issues.

Willie Rennie

Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats