

30<sup>th</sup> September 2017, The Times: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tories-look-for-an-injection-of-young-blue-blood-to-revive-the-party-hfd3bpwm6>

## **Tories look for an injection of young blue blood to revive the party**

Henry Zeffman

The Conservative Party is to resurrect its youth wing as it tries to win back young voters before the next election.

Conservative Future was taken over by the central party in 2015 after a bullying scandal, effectively shutting it down. After the general election, however, Conservative MPs complained that the dormancy of the youth wing meant that they did not have enough activists to compete with the campaigners drawn to the Labour Party.

A document of more than 20 pages, written by Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ) and circulated soon after the party's election disaster, lays out plans to create a "well-equipped, disciplined and engaged generation of members". The report also recommends new powers to control the youth groups.

The proposals, designed specifically to avoid "bullying and cliques", aim to dissociate the Conservative Party from "risky student politics" while making youth chairmen the second most powerful people in their constituency association.

Under the plans, university Conservative associations would no longer be formally part of the party, because they "have at times focused too much on social activity which has caused embarrassment to the party".

Instead, young members would have "two party identities", one at university "of an academic and social nature" and one through Conservative Future "of a training and official party nature".

Theresa May met her husband Philip at a disco organised by the Oxford University Conservative Association.

The plans are expected to be put before the party's 20-strong governing board this month.

Conservative Future became embroiled in scandal after the 2015 general election when Elliott Johnson, a young activist, killed himself after allegations of bullying. Mark Clarke, a former head of the youth wing, was banned for life over allegations of bullying and intimidation.

The document refers to Conservative Future throughout but there are understood to be plans to change its name, possibly to the Young Conservatives, the name of a previous organisation.

Conservative MPs welcomed the plans to revive the youth wing. Bim Afolami, who at 31 is one of the party's youngest MPs, said: "In principle it is a good idea. We need to banish the myth that young people aren't Conservative or that ends up becoming self-fulfilling.

"Reaching out to younger people is about style, policy and values but it needs to be integrated with our overall strategy. We must avoid the temptation to have separate policy ideas for the young as if they are a different species."

Ben Howlett, a former head of Conservative Future who lost his Bath seat to the Liberal Democrats in June, said: "I'm pleased the Conservative Party is recreating their youth movement. However, they must ask themselves why young people largely didn't vote Conservative at the last election. They must listen to the younger voters and try to present a narrative of hope and aspiration."

The average age of Conservative members is 72, compared with 66 in 2015. Young activists told *The Times* that they believed the party had a youth problem that it must work to solve.

Matthew Winn, 20, who joined the party when he was 16, said that most of his contemporaries at university voted Labour. "They need to look at university fees or interest payments and maintenance grants to get the younger people on board," he said.

Paul Davison, 28, a university research technician who joined the Conservatives last year, said friends could not believe that he was a Tory.

Tom Pickering, 18, who joined the party in March after two years as a Ukip member, said that the Tory MP Jacob Rees-Mogg was a hit with young voters and should be leader if a contest were held soon.