

Dear LWN

Please find my answers below.

*Dear NEC Candidate,*

*Congratulations putting yourself forward as a candidate for Labour's National Executive Committee.*

*The NEC has a considerable role in ensuring we increase women's participation, representation, inclusion and safety in the Labour Party. We would therefore like to invite candidates to answer ten questions about your commitments to Labour women. Labour Women's Network represents a diverse sisterhood of women in the Labour Party, of all shades of red, and does not take positions on internal selections and elections. However, this opportunity will allow you to make public your pledges for Labour women, and help LWN members make an informed decision.*

As a general point, individual NEC members cannot ensure that good things happen. This needs building consensus, or at least a majority, and over 18 years I have shown my ability to work patiently and constructively with all wings of the party for common goals.

1. *Will you defend the principle and implementation of All Women Shortlists, and commit to a Labour manifesto pledge to change the law to extend these to mayoral, local government and police and crime commissioner elections, and to ensure their use is legal until parity is sustainable without them?*

Yes. In addition there is a flaw in current legislation, where if a Labour group has at least 50% women, we are told we cannot use AWS to maintain this. For instance if there are six women and four men, representing single-member divisions, and two of the women stand down, an AWS cannot be used to ensure that at least one division selects a woman. Could we try to fix this?

2. *Will you ensure Labour publishes data about the diversity of its candidates in all elections, in accordance with section 106 of the Equality Act?*

Yes, I will do what I can to achieve this.

3. *Will you support the urgent introduction of an independent complaints system for sexual harassment, from first contact to final outcome?*

Yes. I was one of the NEC members on the panels which heard complaints of sexual harassment in 2018. We had appropriate training and legal support, and I believe we took objective decisions based on the evidence before us. However the perception of possible bias cannot be eradicated where party members sit in judgment on other party members, and that is why I now support independent procedures.

4. *What actions will you take to ensure Labour tackles a culture of sexism and misogyny from the grassroots up?*

I wish I had the answers! In addition to sexism and misogyny there are issues around transphobia, racism, Islamophobia, anti-semitism, disability, homophobia and other forms of prejudice and discrimination as well as bullying, factionalism and uncomradely behaviour. These are amplified by social media but also affect the atmosphere at meetings, sometimes shouting fellow-members down, sometimes raucous whooping. (A woman member said to me: "I never knew applause could be so intimidating".)

The complaints and disciplinary procedures can and should be used to implement a zero-tolerance approach to unacceptable language online or in writing, but they are less good at dealing with complex interpersonal situations. I wondered if the party could ask constituency executive committees, after their election at the AGM, to spend a mini-awayday drawing up plans for the year ahead with a format which encouraged them to work together towards the shared objectives of enjoyable party activities and uniting to campaign for Labour. Where there are conflicts within the CLP it might be helpful to have an external facilitator, but I'm conscious of the workload on party staff. Or dedicated training for CLP and branch chairs and other lead officers. But I'm open to any ideas or suggestions.

5. *Will you sign LWN's campaign to #KeepTheGoodStuff from the Covid-19 crisis and reduce barriers to women's political participation by introducing a degree of long-term virtual access to Labour Party meetings and events? Sign here: <https://www.lwn.org.uk/keepthegoodstuff>*

Yes, I've signed. As secretary I've noticed that at our local Zoom calls around one-third of those joining have never attended a physical meeting. Online meetings may exclude those without access to the technology, but it's clear that we were previously excluding those with disabilities, caring responsibilities or transport issues. I'm already considering how we could use the best of both worlds going forward.

6. *Will you support the annual continuation of the Jo Cox Women in Leadership Scheme, which has successfully empowered women to stand for office and act as agents of positive change in their local parties, communities and workplaces?*

Yes. On the NEC I assisted with evaluating applications, and am aware of the depth of talent and potential among our members. It would be good to expand the programme.

7. *What steps will you take to improve the diversity of Labour Party staff in senior and strategic roles?*

I believe the general secretary still has final responsibility for staffing matters, though NEC members have become more involved in senior appointments recently. At minimum I would ask for regular statistics on diversity, and do what I could to work towards a position where the make-up of senior staff better reflects the membership that they serve.

8. *Will you ensure that Labour women have a formal voice at every level of the party, and that a meaningful and engaging Women's Conference takes place every year?*

As NEC vice-chair for women I steered the women's conference through to formal debate in 2017 to votes on motions in 2018 to the first free-standing women's conference for more than 20 years in Telford in February 2019. National conferences take a year to plan and, working with party staff, the equalities committee and the business board, I ensured that arrangements were in place by February 2018, well before the May elections took precedence. The next conference was pencilled in for February 2020, requiring action early in 2019, but sadly the momentum lapsed. If elected to the NEC this year I will work to bring it back. It is too late for a physical conference in spring 2021, but a virtual and meaningful women's conference may still be possible.

The 2018 party democracy review agreed women's structures (and structures for young, disabled, LGBT+ and BAME members) at constituency, regional and national level, and in 2019 conference agreed rules for women's branches within CLPs. I would work to encourage wider participation by women members, and to develop the formal role of women's branches within the CLP. There seems to have been less progress at regional level, with regional women's committees optional and regional women's conferences not yet in the rulebook. Given the demands on regional staff this may need to await resources, but I would also want to ensure that new structures would bring more democracy and not just more meetings.

9. *Will you take action to ensure no Labour Party event advertises an all male panel or uses gendered language?*

Yes, I will do what I can. I believe this is already practice at annual conference, and should be extended to Labour-organised events at every level.

10. *Will you ask Labour Groups to introduce formal parental leave arrangements for councillors, so baby leave is not a barrier to public life, and commit to a Labour manifesto pledge giving a legal right to baby leave for all forms of elected office?*

Yes. I would build on the determination and hard work of Cllr Alice Perry who has led for Labour on parental leave in local government, and I support this as a manifesto pledge.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to answer these questions. Please email your response to [contact@lwn.org.uk](mailto:contact@lwn.org.uk) as soon as possible, with the subject line NEC Answers.

We wish you every success with your election.

In sisterhood and solidarity,

**Labour Women's Network**