

Politics is stalling. WE are the start-up.

# WE First Party Conference

25 - 27 November 2016

Victoria Warehouse, Manchester

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## Conference resolutions

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**Because equality is better for everyone**

## The Autumn Statement

The Women's Equality Party welcomes the reduction in Universal Credit taper and the rise in national living wage announced in this Autumn Financial Statement, whilst noting that both need to go further to lower barriers for women's full participation in the economy.

A rise in tax-free personal allowance is welcome news for some low earners, but there is very little in this statement for the lowest earners in our society, 65% of whom are women. Similarly, the rise in the 40p tax threshold disproportionately benefits the highest earners - the majority (72%) of whom are men.

Despite concrete evidence that investing in care delivers more jobs (including derived jobs) and bigger economic benefits than the same investment in construction, the government has, again, opted for creating jobs for men while stripping working and stay at home women of their livelihoods. By forcing women into financial dependency the government further marginalises women and puts them at an increased risk of violence and abuse.

WE acknowledge that maintaining a competitive tax rate is important to attract businesses, but businesses also need an infrastructure that works. The current infrastructure of the UK does not work for women or for families.

WE call on Theresa May and Philip Hammond to commit to building an economy that works for people of all genders.

WE call on the government to:

- expand their definition of infrastructure to ensure investment in health and social care;
- fulfill their commitment to close the gender pay gap by ensuring companies publish data on pay broken down by gender, ethnicity, age and disability status when pay transparency measures come into play in 2017;
- invest in childcare to boost the economy and allow women to fully participate in working life; and
- invest in non-transferable parental leave so that parents can share the joys and responsibilities of parenthood and businesses can get access to a more diverse workforce.

## Realising What Women Want

The Women's Equality Party celebrates the first results of the What Women Want 2.0 Campaign, which repeats a social survey from 1996 by asking women a simple question: 'What do you want?' The interim report clearly demonstrates that progress made on women's equality in the UK has stalled: this is not acceptable.



Women want choices on how to balance their work and family lives and they are calling out for investment in public services and responsive public policies. They want mothering and caring to be valued in our society, they are concerned about their sexual rights and bodily autonomy and are tired of limiting stereotypes.

WE are fully committed to amplifying women's voices and ensuring that the results of the campaign are translated into tangible policies and decisions. WE will not allow another twenty years of stagnation.

Based on the results of the campaign WE reiterate our commitment to:

- affordable childcare that enables women and working families to achieve the work/life balance they need. Too many women still have to choose between career progression and family life, which poses a threat to women's financial independence;
- valuing care, including by ending the use of the stigmatising term "economically inactive" for those working at home and ensuring all carers can accrue National Insurance credits;
- compulsory sex and relationships education in schools to work towards a culture within classrooms and on campuses that enshrines gender parity and women's bodily autonomy, helping young people build healthy relationships and understand consent;
- resolving the pension crisis resulting from the 2011 Pension Act which has disproportionately affected working women born in the 1950s;
- closing the gender pay gap which affects women across the United Kingdom and which can be magnified based on region, socio-economic status, ethnicity, age and disability;
- creating a level playing field in business and politics; and
- ending all forms of violence against women and girls.

What Women Want 2016 also highlighted concerns seen less in 1996. The findings demonstrated women's concerns with the inclusivity of the education system, both in terms of accessibility and curriculum. Based on that, WE call for:

- a more inclusive education system and higher education that is accessible to all;
- curriculum that reflects the diversity of society and education that builds tolerance, creates opportunities and brings an end to discrimination; and
- the implementation of anti-racist, anti-homophobic and anti-sexist education.

WE call on the UK government and all political parties across the UK – as well as businesses, professional organisations, unions and educational institutions – to work together to achieve these objectives. Their prevalence in the findings of What Women Want 2016 demonstrate their continued importance to women in the UK, which should be clearly reflected in all national and local decision-making.

## Ensuring that Brexit doesn't turn back the clock on gender equality in the UK

The Women's Equality Party notes not only that the Brexit debate lacked women's voices but also that the post-referendum debate and decision-making has failed to address the potential impact of Britain's exit from the European Union on the lives of women across the economic spectrum. The stagnation or diminishing of EU-derived social rights and the increase of xenophobia is likely to hit women the hardest, particularly BAME women and disabled women.

The government's actions have created an environment of unprecedented political uncertainty. The deliberate absence of responsible planning has left over 3 million EU migrants who live in the UK – along with their families, communities, employees and employers – in complete uncertainty, as well as the 1.2 million British-born people living in other EU countries. In addition, Theresa May has opted to add fuel to the fire by justifying the xenophobia her own party members and ministers ignited during the Brexit debate.

While the true economic consequences are still being debated, there are early indications that Brexit may significantly harm the UK economy in the long run. Leading business owners, academics, organisations and social campaigners have flagged major concerns of a “hard” rupture from Europe. The impact of Brexit on higher education in the UK, and on UK students pursuing education in EU countries, is also still to be fully evaluated.

The combination of a decline in the economy, less human rights protection and a decrease in educational opportunities and job opportunities will hit lives across the spectrum but is likely to affect women and minority women the hardest.

The Women's Equality Party calls upon the government to step up to its responsibility and deliver a Brexit process that:

1. does not sacrifice the rights of women and of vulnerable groups in our society;

2. commits to internationalism and strong continuing relationship with the European Union;
3. maintains full membership of the Council of Europe and fulfils all its obligations to the European Convention of Human Rights, to continue protecting and improving human rights in all 47 member states of the CoE;
4. protects the rights of EU migrants already living in the United Kingdom;
5. works with Europe to respond to the refugee crisis;
6. fully tackles the increasing xenophobia and racism that has stemmed from the divisive Brexit debate;
7. commits to uniting rather than dividing by listening to and addressing the concerns of those who voted to remain and those who voted to leave;
8. ensures that new trade deals do not bypass human rights and gender equality and are made for the best economic and social good of the whole country, not based on narrowly held political positions;
9. protects the opportunities for all to access a good-quality higher education; and
10. does not damage the peace process in Ireland or re-establish closed borders between North-Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

## **The laws against revenge porn should be strengthened**

The Women's Equality Party's first Party Conference notes the continuing pernicious effects of revenge pornography, and calls on the government to strengthen the laws of England and Wales against revenge porn as follows:

1. It should be illegal to post or intentionally redistribute any intimate image without the consent of the person depicted.
2. Perpetrators should have to pay damages to victims, with minimum amounts set by statute.
3. Victims should be able to prosecute their cases and seek civil remedies anonymously.
4. The law should apply to images that are doctored but still recognisable, instead of permitting perpetrators to escape liability if they make even a tiny alteration.

5. Websites that host revenge porn should be civilly and criminally liable if they do not take reasonable measures to prevent such images from being posted in the first place and, if posted, to promptly remove them.

The police and prosecutors should be given more resources for training in how to handle revenge porn cases appropriately, and to bring additional cases.

## **Crimes motivated by gender-based hatred, hostility or bias are to be considered a ‘hate crime’**

The Women’s Equality Party calls for all police forces across the UK to record misogyny and gender-based incidents as hate crime. The initiative in Nottinghamshire – where the police record misogyny as hate crime – has already allowed more women to step forward and report incidents of abuse or harassment, which might or might not be a crime but are then still investigated by the police.

WE further believe that violence and abuse (including online harassment) where the perpetrator has been motivated by gender-based hatred, hostility or bias should be treated as hate crimes. Such incidents should be investigated by specially trained officers, as are other incidents outlined in the College of Policing *Policing Hate Crime Manual*.

This approach requires a review and amendment of existing legislation, policies and practices, and the introduction of additional training for law enforcement staff, as well as increased support for victims. Furthermore, this crime of type should be included in the Home Office’s regular national review of police performance (carried out by the Office of National Statistics (ONS)) and in the Crime Survey for England and Wales. This will allow for a robust assessment of the prevalence of and confidence in reporting as compared to under-reporting. All forces should be asked to include this classification in their own service review processes such as victim satisfaction surveys and equality objectives (as required under the Equality Act 2010).

## Child maintenance

The Women's Equality Party expresses concern over the situation of single parents, who are twice as likely to be stuck in low-paid jobs as other workers and also far too likely to suffer in-work poverty. This is a threat to the physical and emotional wellbeing of children who live in single-parent households. Approximately nine out of 10 single parents are women.

Child maintenance support is fundamental to the large majority of single parents, who otherwise may not be able to afford meeting their child's basic needs. Still, only half of single parents receive child maintenance payments from the other parent. To seek help from the Child Maintenance Service, they must pay an application fee in addition to a 4% collection charge if the Child Maintenance Service has to step in to collect the money.

Party Conference calls on the government to urgently address this situation by speeding up the Child Maintenance Service inquiry currently under way by the House of Commons Select Committee on Work and Pensions, and ensure that the results draw from the best practices in other countries, e.g. where child maintenance services guarantee the payments of the support so that children do not need to suffer if their absent parent is not able to pay the maintenance on time.

WE also support the Gingerbread campaign for scrapping child maintenance charges and supporting single parents to bring in a decent income to their homes.

Party Conference furthermore reaffirms its policies on affordable, universal childcare, which would significantly reduce child poverty and improve the wellbeing of children who are raised in single-parent households, as well as that of their parents.

## Funding for services for disabled children and adult social care

The Women's Equality Party Conference notes with regret the impact of funding cuts on essential local services supporting disabled children, adults, and carers in the community. These cuts disproportionately affect women because a greater proportion of disabled people are women (54.4%),<sup>Bi</sup> more family carers are women (72%),<sup>Bii</sup> and most professionals working in the care sector are women (80% plus).<sup>Biii</sup>

WE are concerned that funding cuts have been such over the last few years that local authorities have no more "efficiency" savings to make.<sup>D-F</sup> Consequently, critical frontline services are being withdrawn and/or reduced in many areas in the country. We are concerned that many of these services are irreplaceable in terms of support for vulnerable families and individuals as talented, experienced care professionals leave the care sector.

WE do not accept that cuts to social care save money in the long terms, since more families and individuals will inevitably reach a crisis point without early support and then require more expensive care and/or hospital admission. Simply put, it is a false economy.

WE believe that investing in social care promotes the independence and quality of life of disabled children and adults, enables family carers to pursue other goals, including employment opportunities, combats isolation, relieves pressure on health and emergency services, and promotes jobs that are predominately held by women.

This Party Conference calls upon the government to:

1. urgently consider evidence regarding the impact cuts to social care funding have had on disabled children, adults, family carers, and the care sector, from a gender perspective; and
2. develop a long-term gender-sensitive evidence-based strategy of investment in social care on the basis that it results in significant savings in other areas, not least the NHS.

## Improving women's sexual and reproductive health services, especially access to contraception

Access to contraception is fundamental to gender equality. It is the right of all women to have access to sexual and reproductive health services, including a full choice of contraceptives, comprehensive information and advice.

The Women's Equality Party reaffirms its policies on sexual and reproductive health and calls upon the Houses of Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and all devolved bodies responsible for healthcare to:

1. Meet their obligation to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights<sup>1</sup> by increasing the provision of good-quality sexual and reproductive health services, including access to all forms of contraception and emergency contraception.
2. Ring-fence money for contraceptive services.
3. Conduct an inquiry into the cost of over-the-counter emergency contraception.

## Women entrepreneurs absent from supply chain opportunities

The UK does not know how many women entrepreneurs there are, the sectors in which they operate, or their representation in supply chain contracting.

This situation can easily be rectified by asking companies two additional questions.

The Women's Equality Party's first Party Conference calls upon the government to include the following questions on the annual confirmation statement for companies:

1. Are you a female-owned business (female-owned is defined as 51% or more woman- or women-owned, controlled and managed)?
2. Are you a male-owned business (male-owned is defined as 51% or more man- or men-owned, controlled and managed)?'

With this data the UK can start to build appropriate support and ensure equal opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

## **Giving self-employed parents the same family benefits as employed parents**

The Women's Equality Party's first Party Conference expresses concerns over the limited rights of self-employed parents to maternity, paternity and adoption pay and leave. Employed mothers are eligible to receive Statutory Maternity Pay for six weeks at the rate of 90% of their average weekly earnings or £139.58, followed by a weekly £139.58 for 33 weeks. Self-employed mothers, on the other hand, can only claim £139.58 for 39 weeks, with no eligible duration to claim proportionate pay.

Similarly, employed fathers or same-sex partners can claim 90% of their earnings for 1-2 weeks' paternity leave or longer as a part of shared parental leave – a right which people in self-employment do not enjoy.

This inequality in the benefit system impacts an increasing number of people. Currently over 4.6 million people are registered as self-employed, and between 2008 and 2011 women accounted for an unprecedented 80% of the new self-employed (ONS 2013).

WE call upon the government to urgently address this situation and ensure that self-employed parents have the same maternity, paternity and adoption leave and pay entitlements, as proposed in the 2016 Self-Employed Review conducted by Julie Deane OBE.

## **WASPI campaign to stop unfair pensions penalties for women born in the 1950s**

The Women's Equality Party reaffirms its position in support of the WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequality) campaign. The campaign addresses the injustice experienced by women born in the 1950s who have been unfairly impacted by the way that changes to the State Pension Age have been implemented. WE are in favour of the equalisation of state pension but not at the cost of the rights of women who never enjoyed the same career opportunities and income as men and have been doubly disadvantaged by societal expectations that within the family women would undertake the bulk of caring responsibilities as well as domestic work.

The government has repeatedly failed to adequately inform women of changes to the number of years of National Insurance contributions required to qualify for a full pension and changes to how spousal contributions support the partner's pension. The lack of information and shortage of time for women to prepare is woefully inadequate and is having a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of many women.

WE will actively and visibly support the WASPI campaign and call upon the government to acknowledge and honour the contract these women believe they entered into when they began paying National Insurance and to implement fair transitional pension arrangements for all women born in the 1950s.

## **A clear policy to decriminalise abortion in all parts of the United Kingdom**

Under the current law in England and Wales and Scotland a woman who ends her own pregnancy without the permission of doctors can be sentenced to life imprisonment. The 1967 Abortion Act regulates and allows for abortions only under special circumstances in England, Wales & Scotland. Abortion is therefore not fully decriminalised and remains illegal in Northern Ireland.

The Women's Equality Party reaffirms its commitment to the protection and improvement of women's reproductive rights and its support of the We Trust Women<sup>1</sup> campaign which seeks to fully decriminalise abortion across the UK and Ireland.



The Women's Equality Party calls upon the Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and all devolved bodies responsible for health-care:

- a. To remove abortion from criminal laws so that abortion is properly part of health-care provision and regulated as clinical procedure.
- b. To ensure that, after decriminalisation, a woman's access to abortion should not be hindered, for example by the requirement that 2 doctors approve the abortion, regional variation, lack of access to home termination drugs or by religious or moral objections by a healthcare professional or provider.

WE further insist that until abortion is legal and freely available in Northern Ireland the Government shall protect the rights of women in Northern Ireland by offering them support to access health care services in England, Scotland or Wales.

## **Weight discrimination within the fashion industry**

The Women's Equality Party notes with dismay that it is currently standard practice, and completely legal, for modelling agencies to ask models to lose medically dangerous amounts of weight. As a result, eating disorders are considerably higher among models than in the general population, and all but one body type has been almost entirely eclipsed from mainstream fashion imagery. This is harmful to both models and to women and girls at large, at whom fashion imagery is disproportionately targeted and who are nine times more likely than their male counterparts to suffer from an eating disorder. It should be illegal for models to be discriminated against in this way, and women and girls generally deserve to see a wider range of shapes and sizes depicted within fashion imagery.

The Women's Equality Party calls upon the government to redress this situation by:

- 1) passing legislation which bans modelling agencies from asking models to lose weight from the time they first meet; and
- 2) holding a select committee inquiry into designers' aesthetic choices and whether these encourage unhealthy practices.

This Party Conference further calls upon the British Fashion Council to conduct an internal inquiry on ways to encourage and aid designers showing at London Fashion Week to vary their sample sizes.

## Making equal health-care a core goal

Conference resolves to add a seventh objective to the core objectives of the Women's Equality Party, as follows:

Equality in healthcare and medical research to ensure better health outcomes and access and provision of treatment and support.

Conference further resolves to task the Steering Committee with temporarily appointing a spokesperson and a movement builder for health to the WE Policy Committee. These positions will then be elected at the next Party Conference

## Supporting Equal Human Rights

The Women's Equality Party's first Party Conference notes the Westminster Government's declared intention to repeal the Human Rights Act (1998) and introduce a new 'Bill of Rights' in its place.

The Human Rights Act is derived from the European Convention on Human Rights which is the cornerstone of human rights protection in Europe.

The Convention was partly a response to the appalling human rights violations that took place in Europe during the Second World War and ever since has provided protection of fundamental rights, such as the right to life, the right to a fair trial, the right to privacy, the right to liberty and security, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right not to be tortured.

The collaboration within the Council of Europe has also been a leading platform for the protection and promotion of human rights, including women's rights, notably through the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention). The UK should take pride in its leading role in forming the Council of Europe, rather than retreating from its principles.

The Women's Equality Party calls upon the Westminster Government to:

1. Retain all the protections currently provided by the Human Rights Act (1998).
2. Ensure that access to and enforcement of those protections is strengthened or maintained in any subsequent legislation.
3. Ensure that the said protections, access, and enforcement remain fully applicable to, and available to, all human beings within the UK.

Furthermore, WE call upon the Government to ratify the Istanbul Convention and take on a leading role within the Council of Europe to promote the protective frameworks applied through the Convention.

## **Workplace provisions for carers**

The Women's Equality Party notes that despite existing legislation in the area, the flexibility in the workplace that is essential for carers to be able to fully contribute to the working environment and to the economy is sadly lacking.

In negotiations around the granting of flexible working arrangements, the balance of power, in practice, is still heavily weighted towards the employer.

WE reaffirm our commitment to making the workplace work for carers.

WE applaud the Scottish Government for its 2015 commitment to remove Employment Tribunal fees, and urge all other Governments and Assemblies in the UK to do the same as a matter of urgency.

WE call for the penalties that Employment tribunals can impose on employers who fail to deal with requests for flexible working in a reasonable manner to be set at a level which acts as an effective deterrent.

WE call for strengthening of workplace legislation to ensure that a carer's request for flexible working is met whenever it is reasonably practicable.

WE call on employers to give employees more control over their pattern of working hours. There is scope for more dynamic flexible working options in the labour market and WE call on both employers and legislatures to put in place more opportunities for flexible, part-time, and job sharing work in general. Flexibility should be the norm, not the exception.

WE encourage ACAS to update their employer training and employee awareness programs in the area of flexible working.

## **Improving women's position in the workforce and reducing the gender pay gap and income inequalities**

The Women's Equality Party is seriously concerned by the gender pay gap and the vulnerable position of women in the workforce. The Party expresses concerns over the vulnerability of women, especially women from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to chronic poverty. The gender pay gap for full time work currently stands at 13.9% (Fawcett Society). 38% of women in EU member states are considered

‘economically inactive’ because caring responsibilities keep them from paid employment, while 80% of women do substantial amounts of unpaid housework on a daily basis, compared with 45% of men. Women continue to be disproportionately affected by low wages and insecure employment conditions, particularly in part-time work. This situation is exacerbated by cuts to benefits and public spending, rising childcare costs, and the continued persistence of gender stereotypes.

WE call upon all political parties and the government to take the following urgent actions:

- Commission a public education campaign to raise awareness of the burden of unpaid care work placed on women, and encourage men to share the load;
- Incentivise businesses to publish data on the gender pay gap within their organisation by introducing financial penalties for failure to comply and, further, introduce a standardised method of calculating the gender pay gap within an organisation;
- Fund schools to provide free adult learning and employability skills classes for low-income women living in the local area;
- Introduce a compulsory element of gender equality education into the curriculum for every state-maintained school, and allocate funds that schools can access to run education programmes to engage children in learning about gender equality – this will incentivise those schools that do not have to comply with the National Curriculum;

Incentivise companies to ensure their boards and executive teams have a target of 50% representation between men and women.

## Economic equality for women

The Women’s Equality Party reaffirms its commitment to end gendered economic inequality in the broadest sense and moves to engage the Policy Committee and members on these issues. Economic equality is not simply achieved through equal pay at work but also through an understanding and appreciation of women’s unpaid work.

WE call upon the governments, assemblies and local authorities throughout the UK to explicitly recognise that:

- women are disproportionately affected by cuts to services and by changes to social security that women rely on more than men. Over 85% of such cuts and changes affect women, and BAME women and disabled women are hit particularly hard;

- women are more likely to experience poverty, including wage poverty and family poverty;
- women predominantly earn at the lower end of the wage scale and enjoy less job security, including through zero hours and near zero hours contracts;
- women undertake the majority of unpaid work, including caring, which also damages their pensions in retirement; and
- men are in the majority of those who benefit from tax breaks for high earners, and they are more likely to make use of tax havens, so avoiding contributing to the societies they live in.

WE further call upon governments, assemblies and local authorities throughout the UK to enhance measures to end the economic inequality between women and men as a matter of extreme urgency by:

- implementing gender budgeting and gender-sensitive policy-making at all levels of decision-making;
- improving quality part-time work;
- ending the gender pay gap;
- ensuring that the social security system works towards gender equality rather than increasing inequalities;
- investing in the social infrastructure on which women more heavily rely, including affordable childcare for all, rather than enforcing the current system where only higher earners can afford to work;
- adopting a truly shared, non-transferable parental leave; and
- recognising women's paid and unpaid labour as carers for children, the elderly and disabled people.

Investing in women will pay back immediately in the form of increased tax revenues, more spending and an overall higher GDP.

## Equality for women in selection and promotion at work

The Women's Equality Party reaffirms its commitment to ensure women enjoy equal opportunities to employment as well as to promotions and appointments at all levels, in both the public and the private sector.



WE call upon all governments, parliaments, assemblies and local authorities in the UK to develop a holistic approach in collaboration with businesses, unions, employers, academia and charities to end the inequality at work. The holistic approach should include:

1. Bias-blind recruiting to ensure that companies assess candidates prior to interview without knowledge of their sex or age.
2. Holding employers to account on their recruiting policies as well as their promotion policies. This should be subject to corporate governance and made a compulsory part of corporate social responsibility reporting for annual reports to track progress.
3. Unfettered access to legal and procedural redress for women who have been subject to unfair policy – either in a single or repeated instance.
4. The end of discrimination against the promotion of part-time workers, by increased enforcement of existing UK law which already prohibit such discrimination, and monitoring of outcomes for part-time workers.
5. Building a culture that assesses people on their skills, capabilities, ability to do the job and commitment to the role, not on the basis of a ‘chum’ or ‘jobs for the boys’ culture.

Valuing women’s contribution in the workplace so that their ideas and achievements are correctly attributed to them and acknowledged and rewarded by employers.

## The case for proportional representation

The Women’s Equality Party’s first Party Conference notes with dismay the continued under-representation of women in our Westminster legislature, with only 29.4% of MPs being female and the United Kingdom being ranked 48th in the world in terms of gender representation in national legislatures.

WE are disappointed that the current Westminster electoral system (First Past the Post) further perpetuates the inequality in the system, as do all majoritarian or plurality voting systems that exist in western democracies.

WE call on the government to fix this by:

- 1) launching a consultation as to the best electoral system for equality of representation in the House of Commons, looking at other democracies with over 40% female representation as the best examples; and

- 2) proposing a change of the electoral system to a more proportional system that uses multi-member constituencies (such as Party list PR or AMS).