



Because  
equality is  
better for  
everyone





Nowhere in the world do women enjoy full equality. This represents a shameful waste of potential, for women and for the countries that fail to harness their talents and the societies living at odds instead of in mutual respect. This also represents a huge opportunity. WE believe England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should not lag behind other countries but instead should take the lead and be the first countries in the world where all genders are equal.

The policies set out in this document are a blueprint for enabling women and girls to achieve their full potential.

WE are the Women's Equality Party, a new collaborative political force in UK politics uniting people of all genders, diverse ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, beliefs and experiences in the shared determination to see women enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men so that all can flourish.

When women fulfil their potential, everyone benefits. Gender equality means better politics, a more vibrant economy, a workforce that draws on the talents of the whole population and a society at ease with itself. The Women's Equality Party is working towards such a society.

WE celebrate the women's sector and the campaigns of generations, past and present, which have made so much progress. By bringing this campaign into the political sphere we can finally finish the work to which so many have dedicated their lives. WE also applaud the old parties for the work they have done to advance women. WE understand why they cannot finish the job. They are hampered by competing priorities and a combative culture that encourages politicians to emphasise difference rather than seek out common ground.

WE are taking a fundamentally different approach. WE are publishing the policies in this document to give a first look at what WE – and the candidates WE will field in elections from 2016 onwards – aim to achieve. Our strategy is straightforward: to win seats and influence, and in so doing put women's equality where it belongs, at the top of the agenda.

Parties often unveil policies purely to gain electoral advantage. WE are proud of the policies in this document but we encourage other political parties to work with us to deliver them, or simply to steal them. We just want to see them delivered, however that happens. These are practical policies. Transformative policies. Policies that explain who WE are and show what the countries of the UK could be.

WE: because equality is better for everyone.

# The WE model

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The Women's Equality Party is a focused mainstream party. WE will never take a party line on issues outside our remit: to bring about equality for women.

Our policies are designed to further these six core objectives:

- WE are pushing for equal representation in politics, business, industry and throughout working life.
- WE expect equal pay and an equal opportunity to thrive.
- WE are campaigning for equal parenting and caregiving and shared responsibilities at home to give everyone equal opportunities both in family life and in the work place.
- WE urge an education system that creates opportunities for all children and an understanding of why this matters.
- WE strive for equal treatment of women by and in the media.
- WE seek an end to violence against women.

**This, our first policy statement, sets out the first, essential steps WE believe are necessary to make progress towards achieving these goals in our United Kingdom.**

It has been shaped by our members and supporters, thousands of whom have contributed, working collaboratively with experts and policy makers online and at events across the country. WE have brought together the experiences and ideas of people of all genders from across the country - including those doubly or trebly disadvantaged, by their gender and other factors such as ethnicity, age, disability, family background, sexuality or religion. WE also recognise that the binary words "woman" and "man" do not reflect the gender experience of everyone in our country, and support the right of all to define their sex or gender or to reject gendered divisions as they choose.



**WE are powerful**

# Equal Pay

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*“ WE expect equal pay for equal work and will look for ways to tackle the existing imbalances that leave many women, such as those who are unpaid caregivers or in low paid jobs, especially vulnerable.”*

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Forty-five years after the Equal Pay Act, for every hour they work, women still earn just 81p of every pound earned by men. There are many ways of measuring the pay gap – pay for each hour worked, pay for each worker, total pay for all women, and for all men – but however you measure it, the story is the same: women earn less per hour, less per job and less overall.

In total, women earn just 52% of what men do every year because not only do they earn less, they are more likely to sacrifice the opportunity to earn a wage for the sake of their family. The contribution of women to our economy and our society is undervalued, both in paid work and at home. The OECD has shown that if we unleashed the true potential of women the economy could grow by an extra 10% by 2030 – adding an extra £180 billion to growth.

WE will ensure all women who want to work can do so and are paid fairly for it. WE will work to end the bias in pay for occupations perceived as ‘male’ or ‘female’ that means caring work is paid less than manual labour. WE will be ruthless in the fight against direct discrimination that sees women pushed out of work or held back because of their gender.

## ▶ Transparency on gender pay

Regulations first proposed by Labour and enacted by the Conservatives are soon to come in force, requiring larger companies to publish data on their male and female employees’ pay. The details are yet to be finalised but WE believe a comprehensive approach is necessary.

- WE will require companies with more than 250 employees to publish a comprehensive annual report covering the numbers of women and men – broken down by ethnicity and disability – at different levels in the company, their pay, their employment status and their working hours. Data on retention during and after parental leave should also be published.
- Within three years WE will extend this requirement to businesses with more than 50 employees and all those securing government contracts at any level.
- HM Revenue and Customs should gather data through PAYE and Self-Assessment forms on gender, age, ethnicity, disability status, industry and working hours. This should be anonymised and published to allow researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between gender, race, age, disability status and pay.

## ▶ Zero tolerance for workplace discrimination

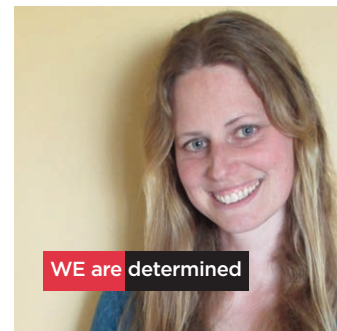
For a company to thrive, it needs happy staff: discrimination, sexism and intolerance undermine the working environment for everyone and hold businesses back. If we can stamp out workplace discrimination, the whole country will benefit. But this is not possible when those who find themselves victimised at work have no recourse to affordable justice; employment tribunal fees are now so high they are deterring people with legitimate claims and sending a message to employers that it is safe to discriminate. More claims should be settled through conciliation and mediation, and WE will strengthen and promote widely the role of ACAS.

- WE will remove barriers to justice for those who have suffered workplace discrimination by lowering the fee for issuing an employment claim from the current £250 to £50 and removing the hearing fee of £950 altogether; fee remissions for those on low incomes will remain in place.
- WE will restore the power of employment tribunals to advise employers who have been proven to discriminate on their broad employment processes.
- Recognising the challenge of undertaking legal proceedings with a new baby to care for, WE will give new parents a longer grace period of nine months – rather than the current three months – for cases involving maternity discrimination or parental leave.
- WE will restore the provisions of the 2010 Equality Act that permitted dual discrimination claims. This will, for example, enable BAME women who have been discriminated against as such – rather than solely on grounds of either race or gender – to bring a claim.

## ▶ Investing in childcare

The cost of childcare can be punishing, in particular for those on low incomes or wishing to undertake training or education. While many parents choose to spend time at home with young children, at least 600,000 stay-at-home parents would prefer to work if they could afford to do so. Evidence shows that a 10% increase in the proportion of mothers working could raise £1.5bn in increased tax revenue and reduced in-work benefits.

WE believe that childcare is a key area for government investment and have singled it out as one of just three areas where WE advocate significant additional expenditure, which WE will fully fund through our introduction of a single rate of tax relief on pension savings as set out below. This approach is simpler and more effective than the government's plans to extend childcare provision to 30 hours for the children of working families. Government plans will leave untouched the gap in support between the end of paid parental leave at nine months and the child's third birthday. They will also undermine the early education of children whose parents are not working.



**“Caring work is valued less because it’s done more often by women, not because of the skill level.”**

Natasha, Ramsgate



- Government-funded childcare should be available for all children from the end of paid parental leave at nine months. The first 15 hours a week – where the educational benefits of childcare for children are clearest – should be free, with the rest payable at £1 an hour by parents, as recommended by the Resolution Foundation’s Commission on Living Standards.
- Parents who work non-traditional hours and need more flexible childcare will have the option of a voucher alternative of equivalent value.
- For school age children, pre- and after-school clubs will also be available on school premises from 8am to 6pm.
- WE will incentivise companies to put in place on-site childcare by exempting on-site childcare facilities from business rates, paid for by a small uplift in the rate for large premises.

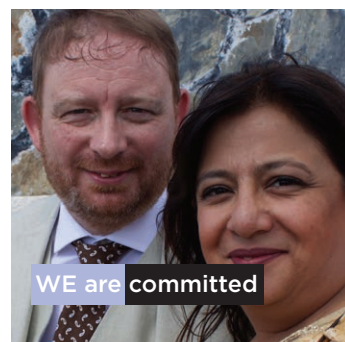
## ▶ Supporting savers and boosting women’s pensions

Women have historically suffered financially from our pension system, and are much more likely to live their retirement in poverty than men. Women are less likely to have an adequate state or private pension – not just because they earn less but because they are much more likely to take time away from work with caring responsibilities. Currently, women earn 34% of the wages in the UK and make just 33% of the pension contributions – even though they are likely to live more than two-and-a-half years longer in retirement and so need to stretch their savings further.

On top of this, women have suffered as a result of swift changes to equalise retirement age; while WE support the principle that men and women should be entitled to their pension at the same age, many women did not have enough warning to plan for their retirement. WE will work with those worst affected to identify and campaign for a just and affordable solution.

However, progress is being made. The New State Pension will have a single, higher rate which means low earners will no longer have a lower state pension than high earners, and means-tested Pension Credit, on which so many women rely, will no longer be needed on such a scale. But the biggest change that needs to be made is to incentivise those on low pay to save – especially those in part time work, who may miss out on the new “auto-enrolment” pensions.

WE support those who are calling for a new single rate of pension tax relief. It is not right that those on low pay get 20p back from the tax man when they save while those on high pay get 40p back. It would be possible to set a single rate of 30% or more without spending any more money on pension tax relief, which would provide a substantial boost to the pension savings of all low earners. This policy seems sensible when considered only in terms of its effect on socio-economic equality, yet it would not do enough to tackle gender inequality in our pension system because women would still spend so many years not saving at all.



“A fair society is one where everyone feels that their hard work, ability and achievement is compensated.”

Ian, London



By setting a single rate at of pension tax relief at approximately 25%, WE would free up to £6.5bn to fund the childcare policies set out above – enabling women to take up more paid employment and increasing women’s disposable income. This will make it easier for women to save more both each month and over a lifetime. The combined change to pension tax relief and childcare is the most effective way to tackle the gender imbalance in pensions savings in the long term and so prevent women retiring into poverty in huge numbers.

### ► Valuing experience: the workplace for older women

The pay gap widens for women after 50. There are many reasons for this: breaks in employment for children and other caring responsibilities, an increased chance of health problems or disability and the concentration of older women in low paid and part time work. Women over 50 are also vulnerable to “dual discrimination” – when women are penalised on the basis of both age and gender, rather than solely because they are women. The particular experience of menopause is not well understood by employers, and women who need support or to adjust their working patterns may feel unable to raise the issue, and choose simply to retire instead.

Changes outlined in the next chapter to enable flexible working by default will allow many more women to stay in work in older age, including when juggling caring responsibilities. But caring responsibilities are subject to sudden and unexpected changes which can leave family carers struggling to get to work, which is why temporary leave while a crisis abates or a new caring arrangement is put in place is so critical. And for older women who end up having to give up work altogether, WE will promote secure pathways back into work when they are ready.

- WE will begin an urgent consultation between government, employers and employees on strategies to help those with caregiving responsibilities balance these with working life. This would include consideration of longer term career breaks, similar to maternity leave, for those with caring responsibilities.
- As explained above, WE will restore the provisions in the 2010 Equality Act to permit dual discrimination claims where, for example, a woman feels she has been discriminated against as an older woman.
- WE will encourage detailed research into the experience of working women during the menopause, reducing stigma and spreading awareness among employers.



**“When I returned to work part-time after having a child my career was over. I was sidelined, undermined, bullied and harassed.”**

Nicola, Stockport



**WE are for everyone**

# Equal parenting and caregiving

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*“ WE are pressing for equal parenting and caregiving enabling everyone to share opportunity and responsibility in the workplace and at home.”*

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The joys and responsibilities of parenthood are not shared equally in our society. And in later life, care for elderly parents tends to fall to daughters, rather than sons. This holds back women in the workplace – but men suffer from this imbalance, too: denied the opportunity to care for and enjoy time with their children or parents and penalised if they do choose to leave or reduce their work for caring.

Our goal is to achieve truly shared parenting and caregiving. This will help reduce the pay gap, make it easier for employers to hold on to good staff, permit more women to take on decision-making positions in business and beyond, enable more men to take part in childcare, and allow more children to benefit from time with both their parents.

## ▶ Equal parenting: equal leave

The new system of Shared Parental Leave is a step-change from the previous split between maternity leave of 52 weeks and paternity leave of just two. However, there is still a long way to go to ensure a fully balanced system of parental leave, where mothers and fathers are both able to take time out from work to care for their young children. Most working mothers are entitled to six weeks leave at 90% of pay while fathers are guaranteed no such leave: their paid entitlement is only two weeks and paid at the statutory level of just £139.58 a week. International evidence demonstrates that the best way to increase fathers' take-up of parental leave is to allocate a longer and better compensated period on a “use it or lose it” basis – otherwise the stigma and cost of taking time away from work remain huge barriers to take-up.

- WE believe a fully equal system of parental leave would guarantee both parents (including same-sex couples and adoptive parents) six weeks away from work on 90% of pay, with an additional 10 months of leave at statutory pay to be shared between the parents. Single parents should be able to nominate a second caregiver of their choice for this entitlement, and fathers' or same sex partners' entitlements should not be reliant on whether a mother is working or not.

- WE also want to protect low-income women, and those who are struggling to find work – a struggle which can become impossible during pregnancy. Unless you have been in the same job since about a week before your pregnancy, you are not entitled to any leave at 90% of pay. It would be better if state-funded Statutory Maternity Pay, including the six weeks' entitlement, was available to all working mothers.
- Carers have diverse needs, and WE want to examine existing leave systems of all kinds to understand who takes what and for how long, and challenge any inequalities we find.

Our preferred system of parental leave will require a substantial investment. WE believe that as the economy grows, this should be a priority for increased funding, but recognise that this will take time. Therefore WE will support all efforts to move towards this approach, and will prioritise the extension of non-transferable paternity leave, paid at a statutory rate, to six weeks as a first step.

## ► Flexibility for all

Enlightened businesses now understand that, managed properly, flexible working is not a cost but a benefit to all involved, regardless of gender. Opening hours can be stretched and doing business with other time zones is easier; home working can save money by enabling you to use less office space; and flexibility can enable you to retain talented workers who otherwise would retire, move jobs, or devote themselves full time to caring responsibilities at home. WE will work with the business community to make flexible working the default.

- Job adverts – starting with all those on the government's own Universal Jobmatch platform and adverts posted by companies with 250 or more employees – will have to state what forms of flexible working the post is suitable for by means of a checklist: instead of opting in to job sharing, home working or flexible hours they will have to find a business reason for opting out.
- WE will require Local Enterprise Partnerships to support small businesses in their area with the initial costs of investing in remote working.
- Employees who submit a request for flexible working need to know it has been taken seriously. So WE will permit them to submit a claim for unreasonable refusal of a request and for unreasonable refusal to offer a trial period – with compensation where this is proven to have taken place.
- It is vital that those who work part-time or wish to return to work after having a baby are able to do so without harming their career or salary expectations. WE will promote internship/returners programmes for all ages, providing subsidies to high quality schemes based on the funding model for apprenticeships.



WE are contributing

"I would love to see more flexibility in the workplace for both women and men."

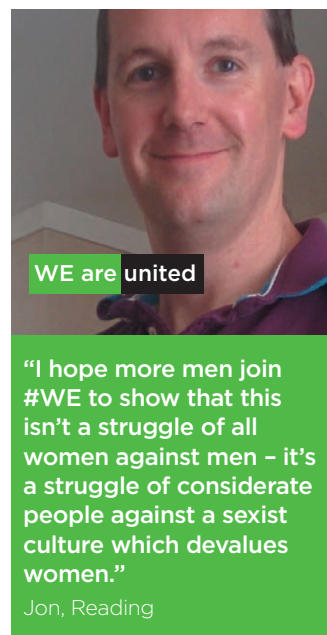
Linda, Warwick



## ▶ Dads matter: changing the stigma

It is no wonder many fathers feel unable to take time away from work for their children when this is widely portrayed as unmanly, and services – from playgroups billed as “Mum and Baby time” to nappy-changing facilities located in the female toilets – seem built exclusively for mothers. WE will tackle the stigma and reform services, both public and private, to make it clear that a parent’s gender or sexual orientation does not determine their ability to care for their child.

- Fathers and same-sex partners should have paid leave to attend ante-natal scans with their partner.
- New fathers and same-sex partners are not “visitors” on a labour or post-natal ward, but new parents who should be permitted to be with their partner and new child at all times, if their partner chooses. WE will require all hospitals to adopt this approach.
- WE will require baby-changing facilities to be equally available to all genders in all public buildings, and work with businesses to ensure this is delivered in privately owned premises, too.
- Fathers, mothers and same-sex partners will both be expected to be present to register the birth of their child, with separate interviews so questions can be raised by the birth mother alone if needed.
- WE will review all government publications and services – and material handed out in public premises – to ensure they promote a narrative that raising children is a whole family responsibility however families are formed.



## ▶ The value of care

Care is undervalued despite its vital importance in nurturing our children, helping our families and friends through adulthood, and providing support and dignity at the end of life. It is often taken for granted that women enjoy caring and they often find their work sold short as a result. Meanwhile, men who wish to stay at home or enter the caring professions – in particular with children – are penalised and sometimes looked at with suspicion.

Those who care at home are classified by national statisticians as “economically inactive”, and most employers see time spent caring at home as a black hole, even though most parents and carers understand it is a huge learning experience that can enhance your skills. This must change.

- All carers should accrue National Insurance credits for the time spent doing this vital work. WE will review the rules to ensure the system is as simple as possible and wherever possible credits are awarded by default to parents and carers.
- WE will change the Labour Force Survey to end the use of the stigmatising term “economically inactive” for those working at home.

- WE will encourage and support men who wish to take on caring roles in work and in the home through our efforts to tackle gender stereotyping in schools (set out in the Education chapter) and our commitment to making parental leave a reality for fathers and same-sex partners.

## ► Shared parenting and relationship breakdown

48% of couples divorcing had at least one child aged under 16 living with the family. When a child's parents separate, the best thing for the child is to have a good relationship with both parents and for its parents to continue to co-operate. Of course, this is not always possible, and single parents need support, advice and – where relevant – a reliable system of child maintenance support. Nevertheless, WE will work to build a general social and legal expectation of the full involvement of both parents in the lives of their children even if the parents are not together, unless there is a pattern of violence or clear risk to either parent or child.

- WE will work to provide publicly-funded relationship support which promotes child-centred shared parenting arrangements, co-parenting and financial mediation for all families going through separation.
- WE will conduct a full review of the benefit system to rethink the requirement that one parent is “resident” and the other “non-resident”, as this significantly limits the options for shared parenting among low income families.
- WE will enact legal protection for cohabiting couples who have children or have been together for more than two years, including access to mediation, advice and support. This will include protecting those married under religious law without having been married in a civil ceremony.





**WE are empowered**



# Equality in education

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*“WE urge an education system that creates opportunities for all children and an understanding of why this matters.”*

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The damaging impact of entrenched ideas of gender has been overlooked because these days, girls outperform boys in exams. This success masks a real problem: from the moment they are born, our children are fed gendered expectations about their future life that undermine our ability to make progress. This has to change. Many schools and teachers are at the forefront of this debate, but there are too many places where gender assumptions remain unchallenged.

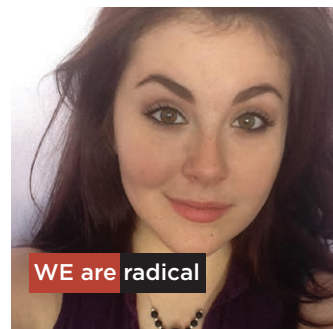
By focusing on the environment in which our children are raised, we can make progress on every one of our other goals. We can teach our children to challenge what they see in the media. We can teach mutual respect in sexual relationships and tackle the underlying causes of violence against women and girls. We can show boys as well as girls that caring for others does not make you weak, and start to set an expectation of shared parenting for the next generation. We can use our nurseries and schools as engine rooms for possibility, inspiring young women and men to achieve their full potential, free from gendered expectations about the life they should lead.

Gender equality will become a stand-alone criterion for the inspection of schools – carried out by Ofsted (in England), Education Scotland, ETINI (in Northern Ireland) and Estyn (in Wales). Education, skills and early years settings will produce self-assessments on the implementation of their action plans for gender equality, which inspectors will take into account.

## ▶ Beyond pink and blue: the earliest conceptions of gender

Girls need to know they can be astronauts and train drivers as well as fairies and princesses, and that it doesn't matter whether they want to do it in pink sparkles or blue checks. Boys, too, can be liberated by letting go of the gender rules. Our sons can learn to care for a doll or express emotion without fear of mockery.

- WE will include gender equality in the guidelines that set out what under-5s should learn, as set out by the different governments of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- All schools – including Academies and Free Schools – should conduct a gender audit of their curriculum to ensure they are using opportunities to promote role models that challenge gender stereotypes – like Marie Curie for chemistry or Grace Hopper for IT.
- WE will work with campaign groups like Let Toys Be Toys and Let Clothes Be Clothes to challenge unnecessary gender bias from clothes and toy manufacturers and retailers.



**WE are radical**

**“As a 15-year-old girl, I witness and am subject to many acts of sexism, especially within school, with young boys having less respect for girls than they do for other boys.”**

Dora, London

## ▶ Equal opportunities in teaching and school leadership

Nurseries and primary schools are overwhelmingly dominated by women, building an expectation among young children that looking after and educating them is not work for men. At both primary and secondary school level, men are far more likely than women to be in senior leadership roles, embedding the equally troubling assumption that men should lead and women follow. While many schools do an excellent job of challenging those assumptions, all need to show gender equality in practice as well as teaching their pupils about it.

- WE will work with campaigners, schools and experts to recruit more men into childcare and primary teaching.
- WE will explore the feasibility of implementing gender quotas for primary level teacher training and women as head teachers.
- WE will support more women into leadership positions in schools with mentoring, advice and training.
- To encourage fathers to engage more closely with their children's education, WE will promote the Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) scheme introduced by the Fatherhood Institute in nurseries and primary schools.

## ▶ Supporting all young people into adulthood

Schools are right to focus on their pupils' achievement in exams, but too often this happens to the exclusion of all else – including supporting children to become able participants in society. In England, “destination data” is now collected, tracking what happens to pupils after they have left school, which WE hope will be the beginning of a shift in schools' approach, to think more about life after school. However it needs to be improved: destination data should be broken down by gender, race and whether pupils were eligible for Free School Meals, so heads can identify problems that are disproportionately affecting some of their pupils.

- Independent careers guidance should be compulsory in secondary schools, and provided by external experts who can be audited for gender bias.
- WE will reintroduce compulsory work experience in secondary schools, and develop awards for employers that support girls and boys into non-traditional roles.
- All teenagers should study either English or one STEM subject up to the age of 18 through GCSEs, A-levels or other qualifications.
- WE will work with FE colleges and large scale recruiters of school leavers and graduates to ensure they use appropriate marketing materials for vocational courses to appeal to both sexes.



## ▶ Sex and relationships education

There is a taboo around sex and relationships education which means many politicians dare not raise it for fear of being attacked. The tone of the debate has made it incredibly difficult to make progress from our bizarre set of rules where the mechanics of sex are taught in science lessons by specialist teachers – but vital discussions about relationships, consent and sexually transmitted diseases are reserved for optional lessons elsewhere in the curriculum, and taught by those with little or no expertise. It is reckless and cruel to continue to ask our children to navigate the complexities of sexting, revenge porn and sexual consent with so little support.

- WE will make age-appropriate relationships education – including on sexual consent – a compulsory part of the school curriculum for all state-funded schools from the start of compulsory education, and ensure it is taught by specialist teachers and providers.
- Universities and Colleges should hold compulsory workshops for all new students and staff on respect, equality and consent.
- All universities, colleges, schools and apprenticeship providers should have a formal sexual harassment policy in place that includes support for victims, disciplinary procedures and mechanisms for reporting and investigating sexual harassment.
- WE will work with universities to challenge student societies, events or service providers that encourage sexist or discriminatory behaviour or rhetoric.





**WE are speaking out**



# Ending violence against women and girls

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*“WE seek an end to violence against women and girls and recognise physical and sexual violence as a public health problem.”*

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The Women’s Equality Party’s work will not be complete until violence against women because of their gender has been ended. It is a stain on our society that women can be murdered, violated, assaulted or oppressed because of their gender. No woman is free until she is safe: by diminishing women’s freedom to participate in their societies, violence against women and girls acts as one of the most pervasive barriers to gender equality.

To end this violence we have to recognise what it is: structural violence, overwhelmingly carried out by men. It is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. WE recognise that men and boys are also affected by violence and abuse. The protective framework suggested in these policies should also apply to men, children and older people who experience domestic violence and sexual abuse.

WE consider any denial of reproductive rights to women to be an act of violence and will always oppose any attempt to limit access to contraception, termination or medical support during pregnancy.

## ▶ Sanctuary for those fleeing abuse

Fleeing an abusive partner can be the most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence and her family. WE believe in the absolute right to a place of sanctuary for women, children and other victims of domestic abuse. While current legislation helps in some instances, the most effective way to save lives on a large scale is to improve police practice and protect the vital services that support women exiting abusive relationships. WE recognise it is essential to fund independent specialist women’s support services to help women rebuild their lives, particularly while they might choose not to use the criminal justice system.

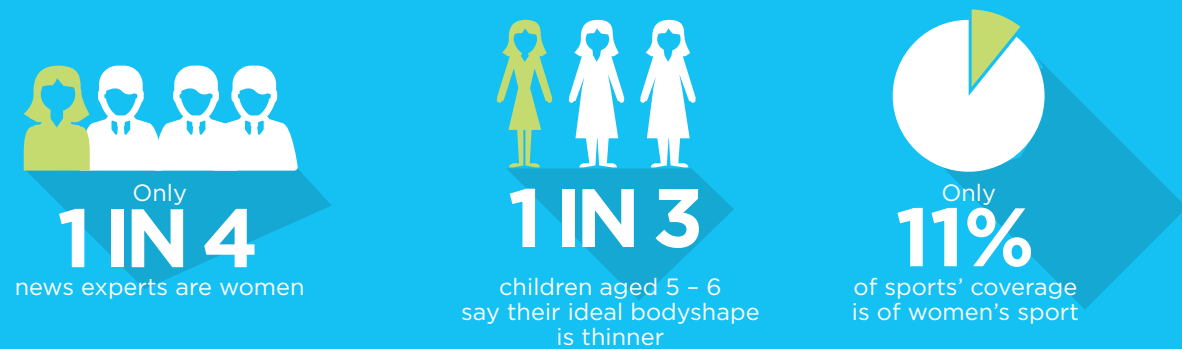
WE believe all families have value, whatever their shape or size. WE therefore cannot support the Married Couples’ Tax Allowance, which grants a tax benefit only to married couples with one partner who earns less than £10,000 a year. This money – more than £800m by 2018 – 19 – would be far better spent supporting the families who are struggling the most. WE will therefore recycle the money into a support fund to:

- Restore legal aid for all cases involving domestic violence and provide specialist counselling and support for abused partners.
- Extend Respect-accredited perpetrator programmes for those with a history of abuse where their partner wants to stay in the relationship.

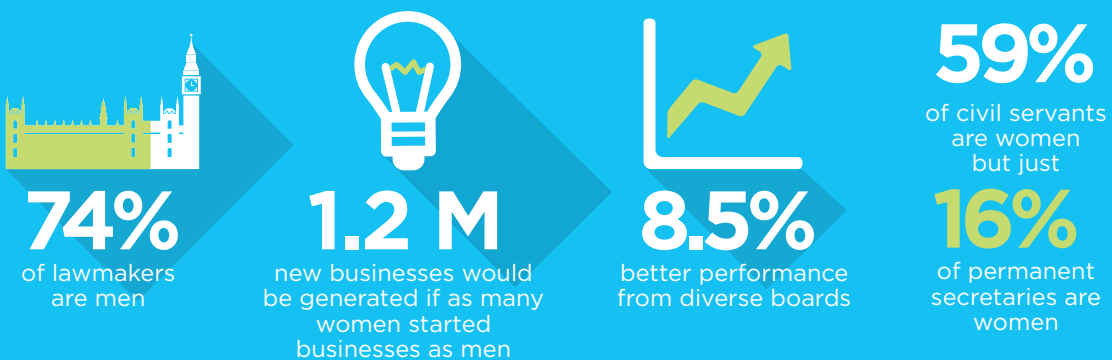
## Ending violence against women and girls



## Equality in the media



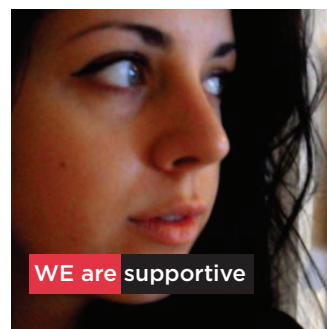
## Equal representation



- Expand services to ensure we can provide a stable place to live for all women and children fleeing domestic abuse, starting with crisis and refuge services and moving into more permanent housing.
- WE aim to ensure that all women and girls who experience sexual, domestic or other violence have access to specialist support and advocacy services in their community that are for, and led by, women and culturally appropriate.

In addition, to protect victims and those at risk, WE believe:

- GPS-enabled electronic tagging should be used to enforce restraining orders and non molestation orders against perpetrators of domestic violence and abuse.
- “Claire’s Law”, the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme, should be retained and improved, in close consultation with service providers. It should be backed by a national awareness raising campaign so that all who are afraid for their safety or that of a loved one know about their right to information.



**“It’s ridiculous that two women a week still die at the hands of their partners. It’s ridiculous that I’m encouraged to think of regular street harassment as ‘normal’.”**

Chelsey, Camden

## ► Prosecuting violence against women and girls

Prosecution rates for sexual violence remain shamefully low. WE will work tirelessly to change the culture of disbelief that pervades our criminal justice system and ensure services are available that encourage and enable victims to come forward, and allow evidence to be collected. WE will:

- Create a compulsory online “unconscious bias” training programme for all jurors to complete before participating in a jury and incorporate training on sexual violence and unconscious bias for all police, magistrates, and judges.
- Explore the case for integrated courts for domestic violence cases involving both the criminal and civil law, where a single judge oversees a family’s case and can provide ongoing support and supervision.

## ► The importance of specialist support

Women from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, with disabilities, insecure immigration status, in poverty or suffering from addiction, often face deeper and different forms of violence, so our approach must be as complex as the problem. Many women do not want to use the criminal justice system to take action against their families; WE will ensure support services are available for all who need protection, not just those ready to report problems to the police.

- WE will establish a national monitoring system to anonymously record all incidents of forced marriage, Female Genital Mutilation and honour-based violence to deepen our understanding of these crimes and better target prevention resources.
- WE support the global campaign to end FGM and will work to raise awareness and so end the practice. All teachers – starting with those in high prevalence areas – should be trained to recognise the risk factors and signs that this abuse may be occurring.



- There have been many reviews into the allegations of sexual violence against detainees at the Yarls Wood Immigration Detention Centre. The outcome of pending reviews must ensure detainees have access to the criminal justice system that is equal to other victims'. As a first step, WE will end the practice of detaining pregnant asylum seekers.
- WE will assess the reported high numbers of women in the criminal justice system who have been victims of violence and provide suitable support to prevent further marginalisation.

Many migrant women fleeing an abusive partner cannot access refuges for safety, for example because their immigration status is dependent on that partner, and they have “no recourse to public funds”. WE will change this and ensure that access to services for domestic violence or trafficking survivors is not dependent on immigration status.

## ▶ Changing culture

To end violence against women and girls, the whole of society needs to change: all women need to be able to walk down the street in peace. Our country has a gendered culture where men are seen as entitled to dominate, a media which portrays women as sex objects and minimises the significance of rape and domestic abuse: this creates an environment in which sexual violence is tolerated, condoned and enabled. Our policies to tackle misrepresentation in the media, and to teach comprehensive sex and relationships education in our schools, will help change this.

- Women need to feel empowered to, challenge not tolerate, sexual violence and gender-based abuse. WE will work to provide clear and safe pathways to reporting crimes - including the acts of everyday sexism that pervade our culture and must not be trivialised.
- Our commitment to compulsory sex and relationships education in schools will help build a culture of mutual respect in relationships and an understanding of consent in the next generation. However, public awareness campaigns must be rolled out on a wide scale to spread messages about the nature of sexual consent and the importance of reporting sexual violence to adults and those beyond the reach of our schools.
- WE believe all front line public service professionals should be educated to understand the nature and impact of sexual violence and psychological abuse and appropriate responses.

## ▶ An end to trafficking and sexual exploitation

Violence against women and girls is a global problem and calls for international co-operation as well as local solutions - in particular on defeating the cross-border crime of sex trafficking. The UK should adopt and implement all international treaties focused on eliminating violence against women and girls, including the Istanbul Convention, and be a leading force internationally to persuade other countries do the same.

Traffickers and pimps operate and make a profit from exploiting women because there is demand for the sexual services their victims provide. Without that demand, there would be no reason to abuse women in this way.



WE are brave

“I want to know what it feels like to come home at night without fearing being attacked, I don’t want to be catcalled in the street, belittled, or told to ‘smile, darling’, and I want to know that I have the exact same opportunities as everyone else.”

Nicola, Soham

Many women entering the sex trade are living in poverty and many more have been sexually abused as children. This leaves women exposed to exploitation and coercion by pimps and creates vast power imbalances that drive the commercial sex industry.

The current laws do not work. There has been an increase in sex trafficking and many women are forced into situations comparable to slavery. The sex industry is closely associated with organised crime, poverty, drugs, sexual violence and child abuse. Women who sell sex are vulnerable to violent crimes, including assault, rape and murder, as well as sexually transmitted diseases which may pose a risk to their lives. They also experience barriers to accessing sexual health services.

- WE demand an end to the abuse of women and girls through the sex industry and promote women's right to safety, health and non-discrimination.
- WE will change the law with immediate effect so that women never risk being prosecuted for selling sex.
- WE want to see funded support for victims of the sex industry – including a legal right for trafficked women to remain in the UK.

But freeing women from sexual exploitation also means providing safe alternatives for all those currently reliant on selling sex for their livelihood, including the small percentage who work in the sex trade voluntarily and independently of pimps and drug abuse.

There are two clear options for how to achieve this, in addition to fully decriminalising those who sell sex:

1. Criminalising the purchase of sex and providing women who sell sex with support services including help to those who wish to exit the sex trade. This approach penalises the demand for commercial sex, as well as pimping, while decriminalising individuals who sell sex and providing them with support services. Referred to as the Sex Buyer Law or the Nordic Model, this approach recognises sexual exploitation as a form of violence mainly directed at women and children.
2. Decriminalising and regulating the sex trade. This approach calls for a regulated sex trade. It legalises the purchase of sex with Registered Sex Workers only. Registered Sex Workers will be guaranteed regular health checks, a named contact in local policing and given access to support and exit services.

Both of these options would be an improvement on the current situation, especially once the UK signs up to and vigorously implements all international treaties. However, WE believe the first is the better option, while recognising that some of our members will support the latter.

WE will make the case for a managed process to end demand for the sex trade in the UK, by legislation that first establishes and funds necessary support and exiting services and then moves on to criminalise the purchase of sex after one to two years to remove the demand.

However, WE also recognise that this issue divides individuals, organisations and political parties across the UK. There needs to be a national debate that raises awareness of the realities of the sex trade, so that anyone buying sex understands the likelihood that women who sell sex may well have been trafficked, forced or abused, and understands how the expectation that women and girls can be bought and sold feeds into wider misogyny. The status quo cannot prevail.



**WE are collaborative**

# WE do believe  
in the power and  
strength of women.

# Equality in the media

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*“ WE aim to address the ways in which the portrayal of women in the media impedes progress towards equality.”*

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Equality for women requires real cultural change, and the media has to be at the centre of that. Women have the right to be taken seriously as human beings but media coverage is all too often casually reductive. Young women are sex objects or victims; older women are cougars or victims or invisible. All this harms young girls, the vast majority of whom believe the media should ensure women are properly represented.

We all know that the picture of women presented in the media is false. It has to change to ensure our girls and boys grow up comfortable in themselves. It has to change so women can be heard, and to make sure women get an equal chance to shape the way our society thinks. Equality in the media will support every other policy in this document, whether that is in helping show that dads can care, that female politicians shouldn't be asked about their handbags, that girls don't need to be stick thin and boys don't need to be macho to be men. Although many broadcasters and journalists are taking steps to improve the representation of women, and WE celebrate that, it needs to happen now: it needs to change so that the equal country WE want is the one we read about in our newspapers and watch on our TVs.

## ▶ Sexualisation and violence against women

When violence against women is trivialised, women are discouraged from reporting it, and offenders feel freer to continue. Sexualisation and “asexualisation” have different effects on different groups of women, in particular those who are marginalised for other reasons in our society. For example, disabled women are often portrayed as asexual, BAME women as hypersexual, and Muslim women who choose to wear a headscarf as oppressed regardless of their own views. All these stereotypes reduce women's healthy exploration of their sexuality and identity and undermine efforts to create a culture of consent and end to violence against women and girls.

- WE will mobilise our members and supporters to challenge any reporting of sexual violence that minimises its importance or blames victims.
- Adverts that portray sexualised imagery should not be permitted next to journalistic material on the topic of sexual violence.



**WE are newsworthy**

**“To me, WE is hope. It's the hope that our daughters will not have to live in a world where almost every industry, movie, advert, newspaper and online outlet treats us as secondary.”**

Natasha, London

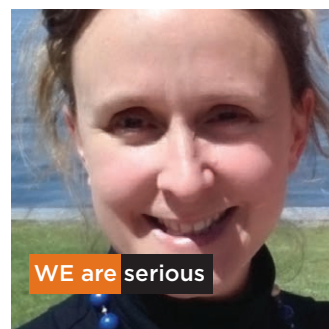


- Sexualised material and pornography are widely available online in relatively unregulated environments where children can reach them. Our education system needs to equip children for the online environment, to understand and respond to the likely behaviour of others and understand the consequences of their own behaviour.

## ▶ Gender stereotypes and ideals

When children are force-fed gendered stereotypes in every advert they see, teachers and parents face an uphill struggle to challenge them. And when images are deliberately manipulated – legs lengthened, wrinkles smoothed, lashes thickened – to sell products or magazines, is it any wonder women feel under increasing pressure to focus on unattainable ideals of beauty instead of other forms of achievement?

- Women have the right to be taken seriously as human beings, not to be seen as clothes horses or sex objects. Journalists describing a woman’s clothing, relationship status or asking whether or not she has children should ask themselves if they would take a similar interest in these details if their subject was male. WE will highlight and campaign against any coverage that does not meet this basic standard.
- WE will require a warning notice to be included on any images of models with a very low unhealthy body weight.
- WE will update Advertising Standards Authority guidelines on airbrushing to require disclaimers notifying viewers or readers that a person’s image has been altered, including an explanation as to why the image has been retouched. No airbrushing of children’s bodies will be permitted.
- WE will work to promote positive, realistic portrayals of women in the media and celebrate examples of excellence in challenging gender stereotypes with an annual awards programme nominated and voted on by our members.
- WE will speak out against media portrayals that stereotype gendered parenting roles, including those which demean fathers as bumbling or incompetent carers and homemakers.



**“Who cares how much Theresa May’s dresses cost? I am hoping WE will normalise the presence of women in discussions about issues that affect us all.”**

Su, Mitcheldean

## ▶ Representing the people

Researchers have shown that in the most popular TV programmes across three genres and four channels, men outnumber women by a ratio of almost 6:4. WE value the dynamism and creativity of the UK’s media industry and recognise the UK’s strong tradition of free speech, but believe more must be done to ensure fair and balanced representations of women.

- WE will require broadcast media to monitor and publish data on the air time given to women and men in each programme and across their schedule.

- WE will encourage major broadcasters to set out in their commissioning diversity guidelines the requirement for greater diversity in the kinds of women we see on-screen (including older women, BAME women, disabled women, LGBTQ women and working-class women) as well as greater diversity of the types of roles women are presented as occupying. This will be included in the review of the BBC's charter.
- Recognising the particular importance of representing women in news-gathering and reporting, WE will work with the broadcasters to encourage them to set clear targets for increasing the numbers of women featured on these programmes and used as experts.
- WE will work with sports broadcasters, asking them to pledge to double their coverage of women's sport – of all kinds – in the next five years and double it again in the next.

Mainstream media organisations hold a unique position in any society. It is vital that women's voices are heard at the top of this industry, just as it is vital that women are represented in political life. Ofcom and the Independent Press Standards Organisation should monitor gender data published by all media organisations under the requirements set out above under Equal Pay. These regulators should then work with the industry to set monitored targets for improving gender diversity at senior level.

## ► Online and social media

Social media have enabled people to connect and communicate throughout the world in an unprecedented way. These new methods of communication are welcome and thrilling to be part of. However, some platforms have permitted an atmosphere to develop where abuse, trolling, revenge porn and threatening behaviour are tolerated or even endemic; restoring mutual respect and decency to people's online interactions will benefit us all.

- WE support recent measures taken to tackle revenge porn, but will amend the law to hold website operators who intentionally post – and refuse to remove – revenge pornography accountable; introduce a civil remedy for victims to be able to seek justice against perpetrators, trolls and website operators; and grant victims of sexual cyber violence anonymity when seeking justice.
- The Crown Prosecution Service must commission guidelines for police officers on how to handle evidence of online abuse: 75% of victims reported that police officers did not know how to respond.
- WE will campaign to encourage service providers and social media platforms to publish clear and rigorous codes of conduct, clarify their position publicly, and take whatever steps are necessary to enforce them. Those who meet high standards for enforcement and responsiveness should be awarded a kitemark for providing a safe platform.
- WE want to see an easily accessible 'Report' button available on all social media platforms and for providers to publish data about the outcomes of report actions.





**WE are the future**



# Equal representation

*“ WE are pushing for equal representation in politics, business, industry and throughout working life.”*

Power is not shared equally in our society, and this hurts us all. The problems outlined in the other chapters of this policy document would not be so profound if women were equal decision-makers in our political and economic systems. If women held equal power, the whole country would benefit. Women’s experiences would be better reflected in the decisions Parliament takes. Our economy would grow more strongly. Violence against women and the specific needs of women in our health service would be taken more seriously.

In this area, WE have concluded that – as a temporary measure – quotas will be necessary to drive substantial change. Progress otherwise will simply be too slow. Quotas will not, as some claim, permit mediocrity: on the contrary, drawing on only half this country’s talent in politics and business diminishes the effectiveness of our whole political system and economy.

## ▶ Equal Opportunity in Politics

It should be simple: half the population are women, so half of our legislators should be women, too. WE recognise that across the world, proportional voting systems tend to be better at electing women, and that an appointed House of Lords is neither equitable or democratic. But WE also know electoral reform may never happen – and everyone is losing out in the meantime on the progress a more diverse Parliament could achieve. Therefore WE will put Parliament into “special measures” for two elections.

Women make up 29% of MPs and 24% of Peers: to correct this women should make up at least 66% of new MPs and 75% of new Peers for the next two elections. Political parties must:

- Ensure 66% of candidates replacing retiring MPs and 66% of other candidates are women; different parties may choose different methods of achieving this but WE support the use of all women-shortlists.
- Grant 75% of new peerages to women.

Based on current retirement and appointment rates, and current rates of improvement in the representation of women in parliament, this will achieve a 50:50 Parliament in 2025. No further affirmative action will then be necessary unless one gender’s representation falls below 45%. During this period:

- In Wales, 60% of Assembly candidates should be women, and in Scotland, 65% of Scottish Parliament candidates should be women until parity is achieved.



**“I’m a fairly senior woman in a large corporation and the primary breadwinner in my home where we are lucky enough to have my husband as a stay at home parent. I am sick to death of the slow pace of change, of both my husband and I being judged because of our roles and our genders and generally of the obnoxious treatment of women in society. Enough is enough.”**

Abi, Edinburgh

- At local level, parties should also follow this approach to choose the appropriate percentage of female candidates for council elections.

Efforts also need to be made to increase the diversity of the women and men elected to better represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the UK and to ensure people with disabilities participate fully in our democracy.

Politics itself also needs to change to enable a wider group of people to participate: WE will campaign for changes to the working practices of Parliament, the devolved assemblies and local councils – starting with family-friendly working hours, electronic voting and formal parental leave.

## ▶ Women on Boards

Many British businesses have woken up to the benefits of having women in senior leadership positions. But progress is not fast enough and we need to support women in the so-called “pipeline” to board level, so they do not continue to fall behind their male peers in their 30s and 40s because of family responsibilities. WE believe quotas will be necessary as a short-term measure – not just at Board level but at Executive Committee level too.

- WE will expect a balanced board in all listed companies by 2025, with businesses making progress every year towards that goal. That means by 2020, 40% of board and Executive Committee positions should be held by women.
- WE will permit some flexibility in individual companies to accommodate a deviation of one or two individuals. The legal requirement will be that no more than 60% of these posts should be filled by either gender.
- WE will encourage private companies to reach the same goal.

With 10 years’ notice businesses will have time to invest in changing the working practices that drive women away from the leadership career path, mentoring women with board potential and changing the way they recruit to drive out unconscious bias. WE believe a similar approach is necessary to increase Black, Asian and minority ethnic representation on boards and will support campaigns for this change.

## ▶ Help to Fly

In the UK, women are much less likely than men to start their own business, and this reduces the dynamism and diversity of our economy. Too many aspiring female entrepreneurs are held back by gender stereotypes, a lack of role models and a lack of access to finance and childcare. The very networks designed to support new businesses – Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) – are shockingly unrepresentative, with women making up just 15% of board members. As a result, women’s specific needs are often sidelined in local growth initiatives. WE will invest in the support structures women need to take the leap as an entrepreneur.

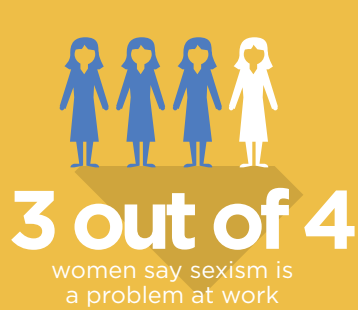
- WE will require all LEPs to have 50:50 representation within five years, and develop a bespoke local plan for supporting women-led businesses.



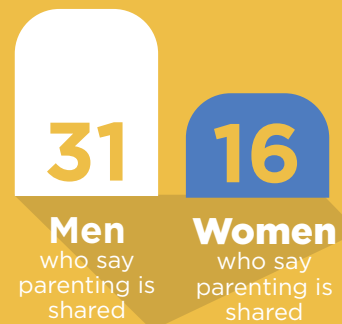
**“I want my children to grow up in a world where it is “normal” to treat all people as equal”**

Karen, Gourock

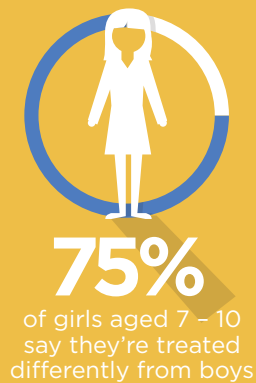
## Equal pay



## Equal parenting and caregiving



## Equality in education



- WE will work with banks and investors to trial gender-blind application processes and other such innovations for finance and investment, in order to explore the role of unconscious bias in decision-making.
- This could include funding working hubs for entrepreneurs with on-site childcare facilities, providing capital through peer-to-peer lenders for local female entrepreneurs, and supporting individual businesses with mentoring and direct advice.

## ▶ Leading the way from government

Government at all levels, from councils through the devolved legislatures to the UK government in Whitehall and Westminster, ought to lead the way on diversity, not be pushed into action by others.

- 50% of ministerial posts, including 50% of the Cabinet, should be held by women with immediate effect.
- 65% of public appointments should be of women until balance is achieved; this will include appointments made by the national governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and appointments made by local government.
- WE will not allow all-male companies, those with all-male boards, or those without a gender diversity policy in place to supply to government at any level.

# Putting it into practice

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WE are a political party, and WE seek election. But WE are also not willing to wait for change, and WE are unique in our collaborative model: in addition to campaigning in elections, WE will work with all those who share our goals to deliver change through legislation, voluntary action, public advocacy and in the communities WE seek to serve.

WE will:

- Campaign in our communities and through our branch network to encourage businesses, organisations and individuals to change their behaviour.
- Work with others in political parties, campaign organisations and beyond to strengthen the voice of all those who share our goals.
- Promote better research and understanding of the challenges women face, and the impact this has on our society, by working with academics and policy experts.
- Establish a Women's Equality Standard kitemark for organisations that meet the highest standards of gender equality, and do all they can to achieve our six objectives.
- Continue to share the stories of our members and supporters to give voice to the everyday experience of women in our society and maintain momentum for change.
- Use our members, supporters, branches and online channels to gather more and deeper evidence about the problems our six goals address – and mobilise individuals to seek change.



# WE are so grateful

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Rubinstein • Natalie Seatter • Sarah Bailey • Melinder Jhittay • Ruth Campbell • Marie Burnett • Alison  
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Vivien Lewsey • Fiona Caselton • Jennifer Wilson • Tracy Fishwick • Judith Felton • Richard Clifford •  
Genevieve Liveley • Zinthyia Ganeshpanchan • Jill LeBihan • Alana O'Neill • Jim Turner • Sophie Price •  
Amanda Boorman • Sarah Bond • Beverley Yu • Gill Whelan • Tam O'Neil • Belinda Parmar • Chris Foley  
• Rebecca Donnelly • Cecily Crampin • Marilyn Beckwith • Veronique Denyer • Jenny McGrother • Juliet  
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Jane Cholmeley • Andrew Mallick • Jane Fleming • Shona McGee • Victoria Manning • Alison Hargreaves  
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Thorne • Sarah Weir • Maggie Cross • Francesca Spencer • Shani Newbold • Amanda Simpson • Jane  
Nissen • Alexandra Sporidou • Andrew Morton • Kate Atkinson • Helen Hosker • Pippa McCathie • Helen  
Watson • Danielle Cooper • Marlis Kornrumpf • Judith Parsons • Sally Walker • Carolyn Forsyth • Jill  
Salen • Maggie Watson • Lorna Verso • Kate Hall • Cleo Thompson • Sophie Garner • Sheila Rowell •  
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