



# WE Party Conference

15 – 18 October 2020

**Title:** Removing GCSEs from the English and Welsh Education System

**Proposed by:** Caroline Hunt

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**Type of motion:** Policy motion

**Motion Text:**

- 1 The Women's Equality Party calls on the Westminster government to abolish GCSEs,
- 2 as the first step along the way to building a wider curriculum that creates, not limits,
- 3 choice and opportunity for all students.
  
- 4 All students will follow a comprehensive curriculum until the end of Year 11. At that point
- 5 they will receive a record of achievement and a reference to be used when applying for
- 6 A-Level courses and training opportunities.
  
- 7 This stops irreversible gendered choices about education being taken too early.



## Motion rationale:

8 Less than 10% of 13 year olds choosing to study Health and Social Care are boys, while less than  
9 10% of 13 year olds choosing to study applied manufacturing or engineering, are girls<sup>1</sup>. GCSEs  
10 are, generally, chosen at 13 and the choices are consistently gendered, funnelling girls onto a  
11 path where they are more likely to enter lower paid work, and funnelling boys away from caring  
12 professions, further enforcing gendered divisions in the workplace and gender stereotypes in the  
13 minds of young people.<sup>2</sup>

14 Ideally students would be pursuing a broad curriculum until the age of 17. Those extra years are  
15 key to individuals finding their confidence to go against gendered stereotypes. Finland is widely  
16 regarded as having one of the best education systems in the world<sup>3</sup> yet has no mandated national  
17 exams. Finland is also one of the world's leading countries in gender equality<sup>4</sup>. The removal of a  
18 narrowly restricted curriculum; the presence of highly qualified and highly trained education staff;  
19 mandatory psychological counselling; and individualised curriculums allow for support of students  
20 in a way that the UK schools systems do not.<sup>5</sup>

21 The 5 GCSE Grades A-C (or 5-9 since 2019) have long been considered the basic level of  
22 qualification for entry into work and university. However in 2018 research showed that 18% of  
23 young people leave school at 18 without having achieved it, with that number rising to 37% for  
24 those who receive free school meals and 45% for children with Special Educational Needs<sup>6</sup>. This  
25 is not a system that works. Constant resit cycles throughout Years 12 and 13 have proved  
26 demoralising and unproductive for the students not achieving high enough Maths and English  
27 grades<sup>7</sup>. But most importantly to the Women's Equality Party, GCSEs provide one of the earliest  
28 barriers to gender equality by forcing young people into choices about what they should and  
29 shouldn't be learning. Under a no-GCSE system, ALL students would receive a comprehensive  
30 education until the age of 16.

31 Narrowing of the education curriculum, forcing students to choose paths, is inextricably linked to  
32 forcing young people into gendered pathways. They are particularly susceptible to this at the  
33 age that GCSEs are chosen, usually around 13 years old. With education or training in England  
34 and Wales being compulsory until the age of 18, GCSEs have created an unnecessary  
35 bottleneck of pressure that compounds gender inequality.

36 There is widespread support for this move, with 86% of school leaders believing that  
37 assessment at 16 should be changed or scrapped and 40% saying they believe GCSEs should  
38 be scrapped entirely.<sup>8</sup> As this is a popular move among educators and will benefit gender  
39 equality it should be a key part of our education policy.

## References

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-gcse-key-stage-4>

<sup>2</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/777458/Attitudes\\_towards\\_STEM\\_subjects\\_by\\_gender\\_at\\_KS4.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777458/Attitudes_towards_STEM_subjects_by_gender_at_KS4.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/11-best-school-systems-in-the-world-a7425391.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/14/feminism-finland-gender-equality-sanna-marin>

<sup>5</sup> <https://minedu.fi/en/education-system>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/cco-briefing-children-leaving-school-with-nothing.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/gcse-resits-2-3-students-make-no-progress>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.tes.com/news/reform-or-scrap-gcse-say-86-cent-heads>