Wales Manifesto

Because equality is better for everyone

womensequality.org.uk
In less than a year the Women’s Equality Party has grown from an idea to a mainstream political party with over 45,000 members and supporters. We are immensely proud to stand as candidates on behalf of the party in its first ever elections.

We have a range of political beliefs, but what brings us together is that we are not willing to wait another hundred years for gender equality. The time has come to correct the gender imbalance once and for all, and to make Wales the first country in the world where all genders are equal.

We want to fight for all the women who need an ally, for men who want to be hands-on dads, for mothers who want to work, for women whose voices are seldom heard and for the young people who want a different world where their gender doesn’t limit their opportunities in personal and professional life.

From ending violence against women and girls to equal representation, from equal pay to equal treatment in the media, from equal parenting and caregiving to equal education, we want more for the people of Wales. Equality shouldn’t be a footnote or an afterthought.

This manifesto outlines our vision and lists the first practical steps in making equality a reality.

Make your vote count on 5th May – vote Women’s Equality.

Sarah Rees, Sharon Lovell, Ruth Williams and Emma Rose, candidates for South Wales Central

womensequality.org.uk

Women’s Equality Party National Assembly for Wales Elections 2016
WE are the Women’s Equality Party, a new collaborative force in Welsh politics uniting people of all genders, ages, backgrounds, ethnicities, beliefs and experiences in the shared determination to put equality at the top of the political agenda.

Women and girls are falling behind in Wales. They are being told in schools that their gender limits their future options and they are more likely to be living in poverty and less likely to have a job. When women are in work, their roles are concentrated in lower paid, lower skilled and often part-time jobs, limiting their participation in the labour market and their contribution to the Welsh economy. Women experience harassment on our streets and on our public transport system. Domestic and sexual violence rates in Wales are increasing year by year. Women who are faced by multiple forms of discrimination are hit particularly hard.

Women’s and girls’ needs, rights and realities are being ignored and this hurts everybody, because equality for women is better for everyone. WE need women to be active citizens, decision-makers and leaders, to contribute to jobs and growth and to be valued for the work they do as carers.

WE are ready to lead Wales to become the first country in the world where all genders are equal. That means a fairer society, better politics, a more vibrant economy and a workforce that draws on the talents of the whole population. WE are standing for the first time in May with candidates in South Wales Central and WE aim to put forward candidates across Wales in future elections.

This manifesto sets out the first practical steps that will make equality a reality. Our candidates will do all they can to bring about these changes – and because WE are a collaborative, non-partisan party, WE will encourage all other parties to adopt our policies and will collaborate to implement them.

Vote Women’s Equality, because equality is better for everyone.
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Who WE are

The Women’s Equality Party was founded in 2015. In our first year, WE have grown into a robust political force with over 45,000 members and registered supporters.

WE are standing for election for the first time in May.

Our manifesto has been shaped by ideas and suggestions from our members and supporters. WE have also consulted with advocacy groups, campaigning organisations and policy-makers to build on existing expertise.

Our policies aim to recognise and address the fact that many women experience additional inequalities due to the intersections of class, poverty, ethnicity, sexuality, immigration status, gender identity and mental health needs. 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.

What WE stand for

WE work across the political platform to achieve our six core goals:

- Equal pay and opportunity at work and in our economy.
- Equal parenting and caregiving so that everyone has the same opportunity in family life.
- An end to violence against women.
- Equal representation in politics, business and industry.
- Equal treatment of women by and in the media.
- An equal education system that creates the same opportunities for all children.

WE do not take a party line on issues outside our remit: to bring about equality for women. WE have not taken a party line on the European referendum but note that many important rights and protections for women have emanated from Europe. Whether Britain stays in the EU or leaves, these rights and protections are vital and must not be rolled back but should instead be realised to the fullest extent.

WE work with other parties, with businesses, public bodies, organisations and institutions in Wales and all across the UK to achieve our goals.

WE will not rest until equality for women has been achieved.
Forty-five years after the Equal Pay Act came into force, women still earn less than men for work of equal value. The pay gap can be measured in different ways – by pay for each hour worked, by pay for each worker, by total pay for all women and all men. However you measure it, the story is the same: women earn less per hour, less per job, and less overall. Women earn, on average, only £8 out of every £10 earned by men.

Women in Wales are both skilled and well educated, but are still found in low-skilled and low-paid jobs and taking on the larger share of unpaid work and emotional labour. Transport also affects women's ability to access quality employment, as women are less likely than men to own a car and therefore are more likely to rely on public transport, particularly in rural areas. The creative industries are nowhere near as creative as they could be because they fail to harness all available talent.

Women do not experience equal opportunity at work. Workplace discrimination systematically holds women back, including discrimination against older women, pregnant women and women returning to work after having a child. The stark gender inequalities in unpaid work, lack of quality part-time jobs and the gender pay gap leave too many female carers with only one option - to stay at home.

It's time to enforce the equal pay legislation of the 1970s and build a society where women who want to work can do so and are paid fairly for it.

**WE will:**

- Build a universal system of affordable, high quality childcare, available for all children from the end of paid parental leave (at nine months) to the start of primary school. The first 15 hours a week - where the educational benefits are clearest - should be free, with the rest payable by parents at £1 an hour.
Ensure that the new childcare system is responsive to the needs of parents who work non-traditional hours and need more flexible childcare. Building on the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare plan, we will start with an independent review of childcare in Wales, as suggested by Oxfam Cymru.

Design a brokerage service to help parents find their nearest childcare provider, using digital technology and open data from local Family Information Services. Work with local authorities to streamline support to families with children.

Encourage pioneer projects in local areas making pre- and after-school clubs available and affordable on school premises. Review the effectiveness of the Out of School Childcare Grant.

Implement transparency in all recruitment for the Welsh Government, the National Assembly for Wales, and for public bodies.

Partner with Chwarae Teg to implement the ‘Evolve Exemplar Employer’ framework at all levels of Welsh government.

Work with local authorities to offer business rate reliefs to incentivise businesses that close the gender pay gap and adopt the ‘Evolve Exemplar Employer’ standard.

Push for increased diversity in tech, encouraging tech companies to sign up to a certified ‘tech inclusion’ accreditation scheme, such as the TechTalent Charter.

Acknowledge approved apprenticeship suppliers who deliver 50:50 young women and young men to employers in careers across the board.

Identify ways to incentivise public and private employers to pay the living wage and take action to close the gender pay gap.

Work with banks and investors to encourage lending to women-led businesses and investment in female talent.

Work with private and public employers to apply best practice to prevent and deal with workplace discrimination. Prioritise action against the alarming rates of pregnancy and maternity discrimination.
The joys and responsibilities of parenthood are not shared equally in our society. Women make up the majority of those who take long or short breaks from work to take care of children and disabled and older relatives. Most women are carers at some stages of their lives. However, care is neither recognised nor properly valued.

Long work hours and high costs of childcare and after-school activities make it impossible for parents who want or need to work to balance their jobs and family life, so that all mothers, fathers and children can flourish. This holds back women in the workplace – but men suffer from the imbalance too: they are denied the opportunity to care for and enjoy time with their children or parents, and penalised if they choose to leave or reduce the hours they work to become a carer. This perpetuates stereotypical gender roles and limits our choices and opportunities.

This is not beneficial for women, men, government, business, the economy or society as a whole.

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

WE will:

- Work with private and public employers to remove barriers that stigmatise and prevent fathers from taking paternity leave, including by increasing awareness of the existing rights to parental allowance.
- Require all hospitals to adopt existing ‘best practice’ as a matter of routine, permitting new fathers and same-sex partners to be with their partner and newborn child on labour and post-natal wards, if the mother chooses. However, midwives should also meet the expectant mother alone for parts of each appointment to address issues the mother might not want to speak about in front of her partner, e.g. prior pregnancies and potential domestic abuse.
- Require all public jobs to be advertised as suitable for flexible working and job sharing by default, unless there is a good business reason not to. Encourage private employers to do the same.
Support pioneer firms and local authorities in offering good part-time and job sharing opportunities.

Increase acknowledgement of the value of paid and unpaid care, push for the living wage across all caring sectors and end the reliance on zero-hours contracts.

In the long-term, build a system of truly shared parental leave, aiming for a UK-wide non-transferable paternity leave guaranteeing both parents (including same-sex couples and adoptive parents) six weeks away from work on 90 per cent of pay, with an additional 10 months of leave on statutory pay. This again reduces the pay gap, prevents brain drain from businesses, and enables more children to benefit from time with both their parents.

Develop a system of universal childcare available at the end of parental leave, as outlined in our equal pay section.
From street harassment to rape and from domestic violence to abuse, rates of male violence against women and girls are on the rise. By diminishing women’s freedom to participate in their societies, violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive barriers to gender equality. No woman is free in a society where rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence and even murder are so common. Wales is also a destination for sex trafficking, which involves some of the most brutal human rights violations of our times.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) women, disabled women, LGBT+ women, women who are living in poverty, suffering from addiction or whose immigration status is insecure, are more likely to experience violence and are also exposed to different forms of it.

None of this can be dismissed as individual or isolated incidents; this is structural violence, which limits women’s opportunities and restricts their freedom in public spaces as well as at home. Men and boys are also affected by violence and abuse and the protective frameworks suggested in this manifesto apply to them as well.

By failing to give our young people the tools and information they need to develop healthy and consensual relationships, we are creating a culture that allows negative attitudes towards women to flourish, including everyday sexism, street harassment and objectification.

Violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality and the Welsh economy is losing millions of pounds every year as a result. Domestic violence alone costs Wales over £300 million, excluding the human and emotional costs, which are over £520 million.

Women cannot afford to pay this price. Neither can our communities. This has to stop, and that demands collective action and unprecedented resources.
WE will:

- Improve and prioritise the implementation of the current government strategy on violence against women and the recent Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015, not stopping until all forms of violence against women and girls have been eradicated.

- Ring-fence a part of local government funding for Welsh refuges, rape crisis centres, and other specialist services that are operated locally and are for, and led by, women, including BME, LGBT+ and disabled women. No woman who has been victimised by gender-based violence should have to wait in line for essential services.

- Abide by the key principles of the Istanbul Convention on Action against violence against women and domestic violence, and put pressure on the UK Government to ratify the convention with immediate effect. We will put prevention, protection, provision, participation and justice at the heart of all our policies.

- In collaboration with specialist organisations, including BAWSO, design and establish a Welsh Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) clinic that can serve both urban and rural communities.

- Ensure that being the victim of sexual assault is added to the list of extenuating circumstances that may affect a student’s performance and ability to attend courses and exams at all Welsh Universities.

- Ensure publications informing victims about support services are available in Welsh and all main minority languages in the country.

- Provide training for front-line staff in public services to recognise domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women.

- Ensure that those victimised by domestic violence (most often women and children) are not forced to leave their homes and, when they are, they are treated as a priority group in housing allocation.

- Demand an end to the abuse of women and girls through the sex industry and ensure women, men and children who have been victimised by the sex trade receive the support they need.

- Design and fund cutting-edge public campaigns, in collaboration with the women’s sector, to defeat harmful myths and victim-blaming around all forms of violence against women and girls.

- End street harassment with a holistic and well-funded policy that puts prevention and public campaigns at the core, and moves on to provision and prosecution to ensure the maximum deterrent, recognising street harassment as a fundamental barrier to women’s freedom to move around public space.
Equal representation

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

Women are under-represented in decision-making in Wales. This is true for politics at all levels, for businesses, and for government institutions. As the Electoral Reform Society Cymru has pointed out, history shows that a Welsh-born woman stands more chance of becoming Prime Minister of Australia than a Plaid Cymru or Welsh Conservative MP. The remarkable progress that was made in 2003 – when women held half of the positions in the National Assembly – has been partly reversed as women's representation in the Assembly has declined, and women make up only one-third of the Welsh Government Cabinet. Only one of the 22 Councils in Wales is led by a woman. Three-quarters of county councillors are male and almost all of them are white and heterosexual. Women make up the majority of Welsh Government staff, but men still largely dominate the Management Board.

Many Welsh businesses have realised the benefits of having women in senior leadership positions, but still there are only two women Chief Executives in all of Wales' top 100 businesses.

Progress is not fast enough and we are still failing to draw on the talents of the whole population. Not only is this unfair, it is also a huge waste for the economy and for society as a whole. It has been widely established that drawing on the experiences and expertise of people of all genders – and from diverse groups of women – leads to better decision-making.

WE will:

- Push the Welsh Government to ensure women, including BME women, disabled women and LGBT+ women, are represented in all decision-making and that 50 per cent of ministerial posts are held by women.
- Introduce temporary quotas on Public Services Boards until gender balance has been achieved.
- Work with successful businesses to offer training and mentoring programmes for women who are interested in board membership.

Our policies

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Build on the success of the National Assembly, which has repeatedly been recognised as a top employer for working families, to expand family-friendly practices to all public and private employers and decision-making bodies.

Work with businesses and public institutions to increase gender, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity across all sectors, as well as ensure the economy and the workforce can benefit from the talents and expertise of disabled people.

Work with entrepreneurs and pioneer businesses to develop ‘gender friendly’ approaches to recruitment, based on the Sport Wales model.

Establish and promote a Women’s Equality Standard kitemark for organisations that meet the highest standards of gender equality.

Open an inquiry into the possibility of applying gender equality criteria to procurement and tendering, aiming at better representation of women across all industries.

Continue supporting and working with the 50:50 campaign and work with all political parties to immediately introduce temporary special measures to increase women’s representation in the Welsh Assembly.
Equality in education

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

Girls are outperforming boys in almost all areas of the curriculum at school. However, this doesn't translate into equal opportunities when they leave education. Gender stereotyping in education leads to gender segregation in the workplace and at home. By the age of 13, girls are already beginning to assess career options that could help them balance work and care. Across the UK almost seven out of 10 female students have been subject to verbal or physical sexual harassment, significantly threatening women’s equal opportunities for education.

While many schools do an excellent job of challenging gender stereotypes and pushing both girls and boys to fulfil their potential, more action is needed. Education is key to achieving gender equality.

Girls need to know they can be astronauts and train drivers as well as nurses and teachers, 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 norms.

Boys can learn to play creatively and sensitively and should be allowed to express emotion without fear of mockery.

Schools also need to be places where both girls and boys learn about healthy, respectful relationships and about sexual consent. It is reckless to continue to ask our children to navigate the complexities of sexting, revenge pornography and sexual consent with such limited support.

WE will:

- Promote the ‘whole-school approach’ to gender equality, learning from Chwarae Teg’s Fair Foundations programme. This will include staff training; pupils’ and parents’ involvement; a commitment to diversity and equal opportunities; and building up a positive environment for all genders.
- Include gender equality in the guidelines that set out what under-5s should learn.
Work with schools to ensure they are challenging gender stereotypes in education and the school environment, rather than reinforcing them.

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.

Encourage more girls to take subjects that will lead to careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) industries and end the ‘leaky pipeline’ that prevents talented women from entering and thriving in STEM industries. Extend variety and choice for young people to improve their technology skills and include relevant project-based lessons covering a more diverse spectrum of roles and functions in tech, from planning through to design, coding and implementation.

Make sure physical education promotes sports equality, rather than increasing the gap between girls’ and boys’ sports skills at an early age.

Design and fund a plan for schools in Wales to be recognised for best practice in delivering age-appropriate, specialist sex and relationships education across all school levels. This would include education about consent, mutual respect, sexual health and sexual orientations.

Work with schools and experts to free all children from biased career guidance and stereotypical work placements.

Work with the Women’s Equality Network (WEN) Wales to undertake gender analysis of apprenticeships and prevent them from pushing young people into stereotyped careers, also looking at equal opportunities for BME and disabled women.

Require all educational institutions, as well as apprenticeship providers, to have a formal sexual harassment policy in place that includes support for victims, disciplinary procedures, and mechanisms for reporting and investigating sexual harassment.

Encourage universities and colleges to provide workshops for all new students and staff on respect, equality and consent, and tackle the ‘lad’ culture in higher education and create truly equal educational opportunities for all.

Take action to guarantee equal opportunities in teaching and school leadership and work to recruit more men into childcare and primary teaching.

Establish the office of Education Governor within the Welsh Government to oversee the implementation of equality education at all levels.
The way women are represented in the media feeds into a wider culture that reinforces inequality. Although the UK tabloids have, on average, the same number of articles about women as about men, the articles about women mostly focus on three things: clothes, bodies, and boyfriends. Welsh women are subject to this kind of misrepresentation in the media, leading to a lack of successful female role models for young women in Wales, which again reinforces gender inequalities. This harms us all and 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.

Women deserve to be seen and heard on the same terms as men: represented and portrayed as diverse, multifaceted human beings with different opinions and different backgrounds and experiences. Similarly, positive action is needed to protect women’s freedom of speech throughout social media platforms, some of which have permitted a culture where abuse, trolling, revenge porn and threatening behaviour are tolerated or even endemic.

Equality in the media will support every other policy in this manifesto, whether it is by helping to show that dads can care, that female politicians shouldn’t be asked about their shoes, that girls don’t need to be stick-thin or that boys don’t need to be macho to be men.

**WE will:**

- Develop a guiding gender equality framework for the media and call for a pledge from all Welsh media outlets to adapt it. This will include information on how to report sensitively on stories about violence against women.
- Work alongside Welsh sportswomen who have called for equality in sports coverage, including an equal number of stories relating to women’s sport and female athletes across radio and TV.
- Use Wales’ voice on the renewal of the BBC Charter to push gender equality and women’s representation to the forefront.

Equality in the media

WE aim to address the ways in which the portrayal of women in the media impedes progress towards equality.
Partner with the creative industry to identify barriers to women’s participation in the arts, music, TV, and more, and take action to increase space for women’s creativity.

Encourage broadcast media to monitor and publish data on the airtime given to women and men in each programme and across their schedules.

Call for social media platforms to have and enforce clear codes of conduct and offer simple ways to report violations and abuse.
Public policies may come across as gender-neutral, but a closer look shows just how different their impact can be on women and men. From transport to sports, childcare to infrastructure, housing to taxes, decisions can either shape a more equal society or reinforce existing inequalities.

Austerity measures that take most government savings from women’s pockets – and refer to traditional men’s jobs as investment but to women’s jobs as expenses – increase the gender inequalities and put women’s financial independence at risk. Fiscal reforms that close vital services for women who have been victimised by violence do not only put women’s lives at risk, but also make women less likely to be active citizens and to influence society. Similarly, in times of prosperity, when women are pushed from the decision-making table for being ‘too risk averse’ the economy loses out and the inequalities are allowed to grow.

WE will put gender at the heart of all policy-making and all decisions. WE will not allow the Welsh budget to increase inequalities between men and women and WE will never accept sacrificing the rights and well-being of the most vulnerable women in our society.

WE will:
- Put gender at the heart of all government decisions and ensure that the Welsh Government budget works for gender equality and for all of us to have a fair chance.
- Raise the bar from the current Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment and implement a holistic gender budgeting strategy, in order to build public finances that reduce, rather than increase, inequalities.
- Ensure all public data is disaggregated by gender and the other protected characteristics, allowing researchers and policy makers to analyse the state of play and build plans to move towards a more equal Wales. Make the data openly available and machine-readable where possible.
- Implement gender mainstreaming across all boards and organisations under the Welsh Assembly.
- Work with local authorities to ensure policies and budget decisions are designed to make equality a reality.
Encourage broadcast media to monitor and publish data on the airtime given to women and men in each programme and across their schedules.

Call for social media platforms to have and enforce clear codes of conduct and offer simple ways to report violations and abuse.