



Manifesto

General Election 2017

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Nowhere in the world do women enjoy full equality. This inequality represents a shameful waste of potential, not only for women but for the economies and institutions that fail to harness women's 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 nations but instead should take the lead, to be the first countries in the world where all genders are equal.

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

WE are the Women's Equality Party, a 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.



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Sophie Walker

Leader of the Women's Equality Party
WE Parliamentary candidate for Shipley

Foreword

This General Election, we can do things differently.

We can put hope and opportunity on the agenda by designing a system that works for the furthest first and as a result makes things better for everyone.

We can breathe new life into our economy by challenging the myth that social justice and equality are somehow separate from our economy.

We can heal our divided society by finding common ground with people right across the political agenda to build a progressive approach based on equality.

And we can drive change in our democracy by making room for outsiders. Right now the political establishment is a club that excludes too many vital views and perspectives and we are in this election to change that.

This manifesto is a manual for a new kind of political movement. It's a manual that reflects the lives of the people who too often find their needs relegated to the back of the manifesto and the bottom of the to-do list.

WE will prioritise the building of a caring economy. One that offers truly shared parental leave, universal,

free childcare and health and social care that works for all of us.

WE will repair the broken funding model for essential services, including those who support survivors of violence, so that refuges can open their doors again, and specialist organisations can get back on their feet.

WE will not allow women, who paid for austerity, to pay again for Brexit. WE will work hard to ensure that the voices of all women - including those of BAME women, disabled women, migrant women, working class women and LGBT+ women - are heard throughout this process so that we have a fair deal for all, or no deal at all.

WE are committed to internationalism, a strong relationship with the European Union and continuing membership of the Council of Europe. We expect new trade deals and a new immigration system to ensure human rights and gender equality so that they provide the best economic and social good for the whole country.

Sophie Walker



Who WE are

The Women's Equality Party was founded in 2015. WE have grown into a robust political force with over 65,000 members and registered supporters.

Our manifesto has been shaped by their passionate engagement and clear vision for the world they would like to see. 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 socio-economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, immigration status and gender identity. WE also recognise that the binary words "woman" and "man" do not reflect the gender experience of everyone, and support the right of all to define their sex or gender or to reject gendered divisions as they choose. We do so recognising that, globally and in the UK, women are the biggest single group subject to disadvantage, discrimination and oppression, and that is why WE are called the Women's Equality Party.

What WE stand for

WE work across the political spectrum to achieve our seven 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.
- ▶ An equal education system that creates the same opportunities for all children.
- ▶ Equality in health care and medical research to ensure better health outcomes and access and provision of treatment and support.
- ▶ Equal treatment of women by and in the media.

WE do not take a party line on issues outside our remit: to bring about equality for women for the benefit of everyone.

WE work with other political parties, with businesses, public bodies, organisations and institutions all across the UK to achieve our goals. And WE will not rest until equality for women has been achieved.



Our priorities

This manifesto outlines our vision for the UK. WE believe the countries of the UK can become the first gender equal countries in the world. Our policies will create economic and social benefits and opportunities for everyone.

If elected to Parliament, WE will prioritise building up a sustainable caring economy. WE are committed to a truly shared parental leave, universal, free childcare and health and social care that works for all of us. WE will work tirelessly to replace the broken funding model for violence against women services so that specialist services can get back on their feet.

All the policies in this manifesto are costed and will serve to grow our economy. The Women's Budget Group, a network of economists, researchers, policy experts and campaigners, have demonstrated how the economy can work for women as well as men. WE rely on their expertise throughout this manifesto. WE have also sought inspiration from women's organisations, business organisations, academics and think-tanks across the UK.



Caring economy

Stability has become the catchword of this election. And stability is a wonderful thing, provided you already have everything you need.

The rest of us must hope for a better future. That includes most women in our country, who have borne the brunt of this decade's economic policies where £86 out of every £100 saved through changes in the benefits and tax systems has come directly from women's pockets.

We all need care at some point in our lives. Yet the old political parties treat care as separate from the economy, as if our communities and businesses could survive without the paid and unpaid care work that is mainly undertaken by women. Those who care at home are classified by statisticians as "economically inactive", and many employers dismiss time spent on caregiving in the same way. Parents and carers know better. Caring is not only essential work but a huge learning experience that broadens perspectives and enhances organisational and interpersonal skills.

Social care is not a drain on the economy. It is the glue that keeps it together. Yet the budget for our health care, social care and education is being cut without any proper assessment of the impact. Women do not stop needing domestic violence services because the Chancellor adjusts numbers on a spreadsheet, and the need for social care is not determined by the funding allocated to it. Approximately one in 10 people over the age of 50 in England has unmet care needs – and the majority of the people who give up employment to care full-time

are women. It has been estimated that the economic value of the unpaid care provided by women in the UK is around £77 billion per year.

When care is compensated, it is underpaid. Trying to fulfil their statutory duties, local authorities have turned to zero-hour contracts for social care, pushing women, who make up 82% of the workforce, into poverty, which then causes them to retire into poverty. Yet it is widely accepted – as the Women's Budget Group has repeatedly pointed out – that investment in care creates twice as many jobs as investment in construction.

The tunnel vision of our economy renders women and their contribution invisible. It fails to see the value of anything that cannot immediately be monetised; the air we breathe, the water we drink, and our green spaces. It views libraries as prime real estate for redevelopment, rather than community hubs, spaces to meet and read and learn or simply sit quietly. It accepts food banks not as an emergency measure, but a permanent fixture – and then questions the work ethic of those who rely on them.

It is time for a change. It is time to build a caring economy that has sustainability at its heart.

WE will:

- ▶ build a sustainable caring economy where paid and unpaid care is valued;
- ▶ match investment in physical infrastructure with investment in social infrastructure by allocating half of the Chancellor's infrastructure investment fund to social infrastructure, and double the fund as further detailed at the end of this manifesto;
- ▶ ensure that when social care is devolved sufficient resources follow;
- ▶ invest in universal childcare so that all parents have access to good quality, free care for their children from the end of shared parental leave, as further detailed below;
- ▶ invest in shared parental leave so that all parents can share the joys and responsibilities of parenthood, as further detailed below;
- ▶ close the funding gap in social care, end zero-hour contracts for care workers and move towards the living wage for all care workers;
- ▶ invest in integrated health and social care, which will ease the pressure on our health care system and offer better support to unpaid carers;
- ▶ stop the use of the stigmatising term "economically inactive" for those working at home, including by changing the Labour Force Survey;
- ▶ overturn the Family Cap and the Rape Clause that forces women to choose to relive the trauma of rape or suffer economic difficulty;
- ▶ introduce a right to 5-10 days paid care leave in the workplace and ensure that carers who take time off work are entitled to return to their jobs;
- ▶ review the carer's allowance to allow more flexibility for carers who also work and increase the carer's allowance to ensure carers and their families are not suffering financial hardship;
- ▶ encourage and support men who wish to take on caring roles in work and in the home, including by tackling gender stereotyping, encouraging more men into the teaching profession, and making parental leave a reality for fathers and same-sex partners;
- ▶ urgently examine evidence regarding the impact that cuts to social care funding have had on disabled children, adults, family carers and the care sector from a gender perspective, and restore critical frontline services where needed;
- ▶ develop a long-term gender-sensitive evidence-based strategy of investment in social care, recognising that it results in significant savings in other areas, not least the NHS;
- ▶ end the promotion of faith-based laws and services that are filling the vacuum created by cuts to welfare. This development has a disproportionate impact on the fundamental rights and freedoms of women and other minorities; and
- ▶ build a national policy for affordable housing in collaboration with all political parties, housing charities, property developers, local authorities, the community and voluntary sector and other experts. Review the bedroom tax and ensure women who need to flee their homes because of abusive partners can find shelter and are supported with housing so that they are never forced to return because of adverse financial circumstances.



Brexit

David Cameron proposed the Brexit referendum in an attempt to unite his party around a renewed status quo.

It was a spectacular misjudgment that put short-term party gain ahead of the national interest. His successor is continuing this ignoble tradition and in so doing is exacerbating the profound and damaging divisions among the wider population that turned out to be the price of Conservative unity. Theresa May aims to push through Brexit at any cost. Hers may be the loudest voice, but just as the debate ahead of the referendum ignored women, so the process it set in motion threatens to sideline our needs and views, to the detriment of everyone.

The triggering of article 50 granted powers to the executive to recast EU law into British legislation without the approval of Parliament. Laws that currently protect the rights of working women can be rewritten in back rooms. WE warned against this before the referendum, and after it WE collaborated with the Green Party – and with the widest cross-party support of any initiative to mitigate the dangers of the article 50 bill – to table an amendment to guarantee Parliament’s sovereignty over all EU-derived secondary legislation. The amendment was thrown out, along with all the others. But WE will not stop here.

WE believe that the decision last June was clouded not only by the exclusion of women’s perspectives from the debate but by inadequate and sometimes false information, to the detriment of democracy.

WE believe that the best way to strengthen democracy is to reassert the primacy of Parliament. Many in both Houses will join with WE in seeking a transparent process that holds the government to account as it negotiates Brexit, and which results in an outcome reflecting not the narrow party political interests of the Conservatives but the best interests of the whole population.

In the coming years, we will see our economy and our laws restructured. We will see new trade deals and a new immigration system. Decisions will be made that will shape the future of generations to come. WE will not allow women’s voices – including those of BAME women, disabled women, migrant women, working class women and LGBT+ women – to be drowned out again. WE are committed to a meaningful vote on the final deal that will allow women’s voices to be heard. WE also believe Parliament has the right to decide whether the outcome should be put to a second referendum. Whatever that outcome, WE stand for internationalism, a strong relationship with the European Union and continuing membership of the Council of Europe. WE remember that European collaboration was born out of conflict and human rights abuses on an industrial scale. Women’s rights are human rights and must never be surrendered.

WE will:

- ▶ bring power over EU-derived secondary legislation into Parliament so that MPs can protect the rights of working women, including rights to annual leave, overtime pay, rest breaks, return to work after parental leave, rights of pregnant workers on night shifts, protections against long hours and more;
- ▶ scrutinise the Great Repeal Bill to ensure that EU protections such as equal pay, pregnancy safeguards, and part-time workers' rights remain part of UK law;
- ▶ retain the European Protection Order, to ensure victims and survivors of male violence who have been granted protection from their perpetrators will get similar protection when they travel or move to other EU countries;
- ▶ map the impact of potential withdrawal of EU funding for UK organisations that work with and for women, and find ways to protect vital services;
- ▶ work with universities to minimise the potential harmful impact of Brexit on higher education and ensure new deals work for our cultural and creative sector as well;
- ▶ maintain full membership of the Council of Europe, fulfilling all the obligations in the European Convention of Human Rights by retaining the protections currently provided by the Human Rights Act (1998);
- ▶ take a leading role within the Council of Europe;
- ▶ unite, rather than divide, by listening to and addressing the concerns of those who voted to remain and those who voted to leave;
- ▶ insist on a meaningful assessment of the final Brexit deal, ensuring it contributes to reducing inequalities rather than increasing them;
- ▶ ensure that new trade deals do not bypass human rights and gender equality and are made for the economic and social good of the whole country, not based on narrowly held political positions; and
- ▶ ensure the EU negotiations do not damage the peace process in Ireland, or once again result in closed borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.



Immigration

Immigration was a core concern of the Brexit debate. However, the government has yet to give any indication of the kind of post-Brexit migration system they intend to build.

People migrate for many reasons and women often cross borders and continents for different reasons to men. Women are more likely to embark on these journeys to join their spouses or families, while men tend to relocate for work. Women are therefore more liable to be dependent on male family members' right to stay in the country. The inflexible minimum earning threshold imposed on would-be migrants to the UK makes it doubly difficult for women to come here independently because of the gender pay gap. Stamping women's passports with "no recourse to public funds" means they may not be able to access life-saving services, including maternity care and services for victims and survivors of gender-based violence.

Our migration system ignores women's unpaid labour. This is what underpins the growing toll of female EU citizens refused "indefinite leave to remain" because they have taken time off work to care for children or others. Our migration system

treats women as second-class citizens, whose contribution to our economy and our communities is rendered invisible.

The global refugee crisis is also gendered in its nature. Over 65 million people – a record high number – have been displaced from their homes due to conflict and persecution. Asylum seekers are predominantly men, whose only choice has often been to leave home alone in search of protection for their families. Women are therefore more likely to be left behind in war-torn areas or in refugee camps, taking care of children, the sick, the wounded and the elderly, with limited income options. This has made women and children vulnerable to both labour exploitation and sexual exploitation.

A new immigration system needs to respond to the gendered realities of migration and the multiple marginalisation of women refugees. WE are the only party that offers a gendered lense on migration and WE will build an immigration system that works for women, and serves to reduce – rather than increase – gender inequalities.

WE will:

- ▶ protect the rights of EU citizens already living in the UK and ensure women who are EU citizens are not punished for having taken time off work to care for their children or relatives;
- ▶ abolish the “no recourse to public funds” status, which leaves migrant women unable to access vital services;
- ▶ end the detention of pregnant women, shut down Yarl’s Wood detention centre and review the asylum process to limit detentions altogether;
- ▶ ensure that pregnant women who are seeking asylum or have an uncertain immigration status are given free access to NHS prenatal, birth and postnatal care;
- ▶ ensure migrant mothers and expectant mothers are treated with care and respect, in accordance with the Respectful Maternity Care Charter;
- ▶ ensure women with dependent visa status are able to apply for independent visas following one year of residency, rather than five years as it is now;
- ▶ review the minimum income threshold so that women’s low-paid and unpaid work is valued and considered a contribution to society;
- ▶ reduce the costs of applications and court fees for immigration and asylum cases and restore legal aid to ensure access to protection and justice;
- ▶ recognise transnational marriage abandonment – where men who are citizens or residents of the UK deliberately abandon their foreign national wives in their country of origin – as domestic violence. This often leaves women at risk of poverty, destitution, social stigma and abuse, without being able to seek justice across legal jurisdictions;
- ▶ ensure victims of domestic abuse, forced marriage and other forms of violence against women are always entitled to the autonomous right to stay in the UK in the event of a divorce or a relationship breakdown, in accordance with the Istanbul Convention;
- ▶ ensure a gender-sensitive approach to asylum applications, including by recognising that gender-based violence against women, especially in conflict, can be a form of persecution;
- ▶ ensure victims of violence against women who are in need of protection will never be returned to a country where their life would be at risk or where they might be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;
- ▶ put universal human rights, including women’s rights, at the core of international law so that all trade deals need to consider the impact on women and on women’s protected rights;
- ▶ use the UK’s position in the Security Council to promote gendered analysis in conflict resolutions;
- ▶ make gendered analysis an integrated part of the UK’s international development policy;
- ▶ increase the number of quota refugees, focusing on women and children who are left behind in war torn areas; and
- ▶ work with the EU and the UN to respond to the refugee crisis.



Equal pay

For every hour they work women still earn just 81p of every £1 earned by men.

There are many other ways of measuring the pay gap – pay for each worker, total pay for all women, and for all men – but however you measure it, the story is the same: 45 years after the Equal Pay Act, women earn less per hour, less per job and less overall than men.

Girls outperform boys in most academic subjects, yet too often fall behind in the workplace, hampered by conscious and unconscious bias and other obstacles. Men are almost twice as likely as women to become entrepreneurs, while women are routinely pushed towards low-paid, undervalued employment sectors and part-time roles with lower potential to progress. Women are under-represented in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and our education system is not working to change this. The economy is losing out.

There has been a huge growth in female self-employment but, for many women, starting their own business is not a choice; it is a consequence of public sector job losses, increases in retirement age or driven by a need to balance unpaid caring with an income.

The pay gap widens for women after 50, and older women who have taken a career break to care for others struggle to get back into work. Women also more often retire into poverty because they are likely

to have earned less than men and to have taken time away from work to meet caring responsibilities. On top of this, women are suffering as a result of changes to equalise retirement age that were imposed without allowing the women impacted sufficient time to plan for their retirement.

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

In total, women earn just 52% of what men do every year because not only are they paid less, but they also are more likely to sacrifice opportunities for paid work for the sake of their family. 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. The Women's Business Council has estimated in 2012 that there were 2.3 million women who wanted to be in work but were not, and a further 1.3 million who wanted to work more hours. Across the country working mothers of young children are effectively paying to work. This is not only bad for women and for the wider economy, it is bad for children.

The underfunding of the government's 30-hour free childcare scheme for working parents of three- and

four-year-olds has resulted in nurseries not being able to sign up to it and 50,000 eligible children in England missing out. In the devolved nations, the situation is not much better, despite important efforts taken by the Scottish Parliament and Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies. Very few councils in Scotland have enough childcare capacity to meet the needs of working parents; Wales has the lowest rate of female employment across the UK; and in Northern Ireland half of all parents reduce their working hours or leave work altogether because of the cost of childcare.

WE are the only political party putting forward a solution that works for everyone and gives children the best possible start in life: universal free childcare, available from the end of shared parental leave. Other parties approach these vital issues piecemeal and without addressing the ways in which they are connected. Our plans will boost the economy, create up to 1.7 million jobs across the UK and save as much as £37 billion through higher tax revenues and lower benefit payments. Evidence shows that a 10% increase in the proportion of mothers working could raise £1.5 billion in increased tax revenue and reduced in-work benefits.

Overall, 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, and McKinsey has estimated that bridging the UK gender gap in work would create an extra £150 billion on top of business-as-usual GDP forecasts by 2025. This could translate into 840,000 women getting to work and gaining financial independence.

It is time to end the occupational segregation and the pay bias for occupations perceived as “male” or “female” which means caring work is paid less than manual labour. Women who want to work should be able to do so and be paid fairly for it.

WE will:

- ▶ offer free childcare all across the UK from the end of paid parental leave at nine months. Childcare will be centrally funded but where decision-making is in the hands of devolved governments or local authorities, funds will depend on the provision meeting the criteria of being universal and not for profit. Parents who work non-traditional hours and need more flexible childcare will have the option of a voucher alternative;
- ▶ extend the recent requirement for gender pay reporting for businesses, organisations and public bodies with more than 250 employees to smaller businesses of 50 employees or more, and monitor the impact of the gender pay gap reporting in Scotland where public authorities with more than 20 employees are to be required to publish their gender pay gap;
- ▶ require gender pay gap reporting to be broken down by age, employment status, ethnicity, race, disability, industry and working hours, as well as gathering data on retention during – and up to a year after – parental leave;
- ▶ increase the capacity of public authorities to undertake an equal pay audit review, broken down by other protected characteristics, and publish the results, along with an action plan to close the gender pay gap and reduce occupational segregation. Define ways to expand this to all organisations contracting with the government;
- ▶ work with HM Revenue and Customs to gather data through PAYE and Self-Assessment forms on gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability status, industry and working hours. This data should be anonymised and published in an open data format to allow researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of disparity in pay;
- ▶ 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 scrapping the hearing fee of £950 altogether. Monitor the Scottish Government’s intention to abolish employment claim fees. Fee remissions for those on low incomes will remain in place;

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- ▶ restore the power of employment tribunals to advise those employers who have been proven to discriminate;
 - ▶ investigate the most appropriate way to introduce split Universal Credit payments to ensure women's financial independence;
 - ▶ give new parents a longer grace period of nine months – rather than the current three months – for cases involving maternity discrimination or parental leave discrimination;
 - ▶ activate the provisions of the 2010 Equality Act that permit dual discrimination claims;
 - ▶ require the criteria that protect women from being made redundant while on maternity leave to be extended to pregnant women before they start maternity leave;
 - ▶ require employers to provide time for, and a place where, women can breastfeed or express milk in the workplace;
 - ▶ support the development of a fully qualified workforce in early years education with pay scales that are commensurate with the importance and value of pre-school and early years care;
 - ▶ make pre- and after-school clubs available and affordable on school premises from 8am to 6pm;
 - ▶ 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 rates for large premises;
 - ▶ encourage detailed research into the experience of working women during the menopause, reducing stigma and spreading awareness among employers;
 - ▶ build on the progress that has been made with the New State Pension and incentivise those on low pay to save – especially those in part-time work, who may miss out on the new “auto-enrolment” pensions;
 - ▶ join forces with those who are calling for a new single rate of pension tax relief. It is not right that those on low pay, who are more likely to be women, get 20p back from the tax man when they save while those on high pay, who are more likely to be men, get 40p back;
 - ▶ honour the contract the WASPI women believe they entered into when they began paying National Insurance, and implement fair transitional pension arrangements for all women born in the 1950s;
 - ▶ commission a public education campaign to raise awareness of the level of unpaid care work placed on women, and encourage men to share the load;
 - ▶ hold businesses to a higher standard when they publish data on the gender pay gap so that they show the number of men and women working part-time, the number of BAME and disabled women, and retention rates before and after maternity leave; and
 - ▶ ensure that the social security system works towards creating gender equality rather than increasing inequalities.



Equal parenting and caregiving

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 roles in business, politics and beyond, enable more men to take part in childcare, and allow more children to benefit from time with both their parents.

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.

As enlightened businesses now understand, managed properly, flexible working is not a cost but a benefit to all involved, regardless of gender. This can be crucial for workers who also have caring responsibilities.

By building up a caring economy, WE will ensure care is valued. As women and men start sharing the joys and responsibilities of care more equally, our economy will thrive and families prosper.

WE will:

- ▶ implement a fully equal system of nine months parental leave at 90% of pay. It will guarantee each parent (including same-sex couples and adoptive parents) three months away from work, with an additional three months they can split in whichever way they want. Currently, mothers are entitled to six weeks leave on 90% of pay and fathers to just two weeks. Mothers will still be entitled to a year off work. Statutory pay will remain in place for non-working parents, for those whose earnings are lower than the statutory pay and for those who wish to take longer parental leave;
- ▶ ensure that single parents are able to nominate a second caregiver of their choice for the shared parental leave entitlement, and that fathers' or same sex partners' entitlements are not reliant on whether a mother is in paid work or not;
- ▶ ensure that self-employed parents have the same maternity, paternity and adoption leave and pay entitlements, as proposed in the 2016 Self-Employed Review conducted by Julie Deane OBE;
- ▶ protect low-income women, and those who are struggling to find work – a struggle which can become impossible during pregnancy – by making parental leave available to all working mothers irrespective of how long they have been in the same job;

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- ▶ ensure fathers and same-sex partners who work have paid leave to attend ante-natal scans with their partner;
 - ▶ start an inquiry into the rights of pregnant women and new parents in casual and precarious work to ensure they can attend their antenatal appointments, have safe working environments and take sick days without fear of losing their job;
 - ▶ reform health and safety protections for pregnant women and new mothers to ensure that employers assess the risks affecting individual women and swiftly address them;
 - ▶ examine existing leave systems of all kinds to understand who takes what and for how long, and challenge any inequalities identified;
 - ▶ work with the business community to make flexible working the default, starting with all those on the government's own Universal Jobmatch platform and adverts posted by companies with 250 or more employees – making it a requirement 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, such companies will have to find a business reason for opting out;
 - ▶ require Local Enterprise Partnerships to support small businesses in their area with the initial costs of investing in remote working;
 - ▶ permit employees to submit a claim for unreasonable refusal of a request for flexible working and for unreasonable refusal to offer a trial period, with compensation where this is proven to have taken place;
 - ▶ promote internship/returners programmes for all ages, working towards subsidies to high quality “returnship” programmes based on the funding model for apprenticeships;
 - ▶ require baby-changing facilities to be available to all genders in all public buildings, and work with businesses to ensure this is delivered in privately owned premises too;
 - ▶ 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;
 - ▶ build a general social and legal expectation of the full involvement of both parents in the lives of their children – emotionally, practically and financially – even if the parents are not together, unless there is a pattern of violence or clear risk to either parent or child;
 - ▶ work towards better support for parents who are separating, promoting child-centred shared parenting arrangements and co-parenting;
 - ▶ conduct a full review of the benefit system to rethink the requirement that one parent is “resident” and the other “non-resident”, as it significantly limits the options for shared parenting among low income families;
 - ▶ 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; and
 - ▶ scrap child maintenance charges and speed up the Child Maintenance Service inquiry currently under way by the House of Commons Select Committee on Work and Pensions. Ensure that the results draw from the best practices in other countries, e.g. where child maintenance services underwrite the payments so that children do not have to suffer if their absent parent is not able to pay the maintenance on time.



Equality in education

Girls outperform boys in exams. This fact is often taken to mean that girls are thriving – and that their career prospects are equal to boys’.

But despite gains in school and higher education, young women are facing stark inequalities. The gender pay gap is not falling for women with A-levels or degrees, there are more young women not in education, training or employment than young men, and one in three teenage girls is suffering from anxiety or depression. This has to change.

From the moment they are born, our children are fed gendered expectations about their future that undermine our ability to make progress. Girls as young as six believe that brilliance is a male trait, and boys internalise the message that reading is a ‘girl thing’. Early sexualisation, bullying on- and offline, and uncertainty about the future are piling on stress. Many schools and teachers are at the forefront of this debate, but there are too many places and circumstances in which stereotypes 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.

Nursery and primary school workforces are overwhelmingly female, building an expectation among young children that caring and education are not for men. At both primary and secondary school level, male teachers are far more likely than their female counterparts to occupy 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 schools need to show gender equality in practice as well as teaching their pupils about it.

Education is a devolved matter in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. WE will facilitate collaboration between the governments of all the four countries of the UK to share best practices and ensure all children get a fair start.

WE will:

- ▶ work with campaign groups like Let Toys Be Toys and Let Clothes Be Clothes to challenge unnecessary gender bias from clothing and toy manufacturers and retailers;
- ▶ encourage more girls to take subjects that will lead to careers in STEM and end the “leaky pipeline” that prevents talented women from entering and thriving in STEM industries;
- ▶ encourage more boys into care work and other professions where men are under-represented;
- ▶ explore the feasibility of implementing gender quotas for primary level teacher training and for women as head teachers, and identify ways to recruit more men into childcare and primary teaching;
- ▶ support more women into leadership positions in schools;
- ▶ encourage fathers to engage more closely with their children’s education, including through the Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED) scheme introduced by the Fatherhood Institute in nurseries and primary schools;
- ▶ break destination data down by gender, race and whether pupils are eligible for Free School Meals, to be able to identify problems that are disproportionately affecting some of their pupils;
- ▶ ensure independent careers guidance is available in secondary schools, and provided by external experts who can be audited for gender bias;
- ▶ reintroduce compulsory work-experience in secondary schools, and encourage awards for employers that support girls and boys into non-traditional roles;
- ▶ 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;
- ▶ implement sex and relationships education in all schools so that all children can learn about relationships, respect, consent, sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases and to navigate the complexities of the internet. Ensure it is taught by specialist teachers and providers and followed up by necessary counselling support to combat the damaging impact of sexual violence and bullying in schools on children’s mental health and well-being;
- ▶ require all universities, colleges, schools and 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;
- ▶ work with universities to challenge student societies, events or service providers that encourage sexist or discriminatory behaviour or rhetoric;
- ▶ require all schools to have free sanitary products on offer so that no girl is hindered from accessing education;
- ▶ require all schools to reflect women’s achievements equally to men’s in curriculums across the UK;
- ▶ work towards a curriculum that reflects the diversity of society and education that builds tolerance, creates opportunities and brings an end to discrimination;
- ▶ promote the “whole school approach” on gender equality, which should include staff training, pupils’ and parents’ involvement, a commitment to diversity and equal opportunities, and building up a positive environment for all children;
- ▶ make gender equality a stand-alone criterion for the inspection of schools. 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;
- ▶ include gender equality in the guidelines that set out what under-fives should learn;
- ▶ ensure all schools – including Academies and Free Schools – conduct a gender audit of their curriculum to ensure they are using all opportunities (including wall displays, assemblies, performances and presentation events) to promote role models that challenge gender stereotypes – like Marie Curie for chemistry or Grace Hopper for IT; and
- ▶ address sexism and sexual harassment in schools as a threat to equal access to education and ensure all schools are enabled to take immediate action on such incidents; and require all schools to offer gender-neutral school uniforms.



Ending violence against women and girls

From street harassment to rape and domestic violence, male violence against women and girls is routine and endemic and one of the most conspicuous human rights violations of our times.

By diminishing women's freedom to participate in their societies, violence against women and girls is a pervasive barrier to gender equality.

Rape Crisis England & Wales receives over 3,000 helpline calls every week, and in Scotland at least one in 10 women has been raped. Young women experience harassment on our streets and women are left homeless while their abusive ex-partners remain in the family home. BAME women, disabled women and women with uncertain immigration status can experience different forms of violence, including female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and domestic abuse. The UK is also a destination for sex trafficking, which involves some of the most brutal human rights violations of our times.

These are not individual or isolated phenomena. This is structural violence that limits women's opportunities and restricts their freedom. Violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality. Men and boys – and people of all genders – are also affected by violence and abuse and the protective frameworks suggested in this manifesto should also apply to them.

The criminal justice system sees only the tip of the iceberg: most victims and survivors do not report the violence they experience, prosecution rates are low and convictions rare. Devolution without resources and competitive tendering has left specialist women's services on their knees. They are forced to fight for limited funds in a competitive market, often with "gender neutral" requirements, despite the clear evidence that violence and abuse perpetrated by men against women is a phenomenon quantitatively and qualitatively distinct from violence against men. This process is costly, timely, and deeply inefficient. There is growing demand for, but reduced funding of, services for women fleeing violence and abuse. Rape survivors and adult survivors of child sexual abuse need to wait for months to get counselling to enable them to rebuild their lives.

It is time to change direction. Violence against women and girls is a cultural problem and we can end it, if we work together.

WE will:

- ▶ rebuild the funding model so that all women and girls who experience male violence and abuse have access to specialist support and advocacy services in their community that are for and led by women, including BAME and disabled women. Competitive tendering has run its course. WE will move towards a three-year rolling model of grants – following examples already set by the Scottish Government – that allow specialist organisations to build up their services and ensure their sustainability;
- ▶ legislate so that the state has a statutory duty to provide access to services for victims and survivors of violence;
- ▶ ensure women’s specialist services are not forced to offer gender-neutral services to qualify for funding, recognising that male victims have different experiences and needs from female victims and should be offered support that is specific to their needs;
- ▶ monitor the implementation of the National Statement of Expectations and facilitate collaboration between the government, devolved governments and administrations, and local authorities to end the postcode lottery women are currently subject to, where services vary hugely in quality and accessibility;
- ▶ ratify the Istanbul convention before the end of 2017;
- ▶ continue implementing the Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy ensuring that every area of government plays its part in ending and preventing violence and abuse;
- ▶ restore legal aid for all cases involving allegations of domestic violence, as well as for women with uncertain immigration status, and design a system of independent legal representation for all victims of gender-based violence;
- ▶ end the use of and promotion of community or ‘religious’ forms of arbitration/mediation in family matters. Such forums privatise justice and violate the rights of minority women, creating sub-standard parallel legal systems. There should be one law for all based on the principles of human rights and equality;
- ▶ ban perpetrators of domestic abuse from cross-examining their victims in the family courts and ensure victims’ sexual history is never allowed as evidence in sexual abuse or rape cases;
- ▶ extend Respect-accredited perpetrator programmes for those with a history of abuse;
- ▶ ensure all women and children fleeing domestic abuse are offered a stable place to live and that they are never forced out of their homes unless it is necessary for their safety;
- ▶ make sure the nature and impact of violence against women are reflected in curricula for qualification training for front-line staff so that health care workers, police, social services, teachers, youth workers and other professionals are able to identify potential victims of sexual and domestic abuse and intervene appropriately;
- ▶ increase training for police and prosecutors on the nature and impact of violence against women, including online harassment and image-based sexual abuse (including revenge pornography);
- ▶ ensure GPS-enabled electronic tagging is available to enforce restraining orders and non-molestation orders against perpetrators;
- ▶ 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;
- ▶ support the global campaign to end FGM and ensure all victims have access to specialist FGM clinics. Work to raise awareness and so end the practice. All teachers, midwives and doctors should be trained to recognise the risk factors and signs that this abuse may be occurring;
- ▶ separate work on forced marriage and ending FGM from work on prevention against anti-extremism;
- ▶ recognise the specific challenges created by the phenomenon of transnational violence against women and commit to implementing the extraterritorial jurisdiction provisions of the Istanbul Convention to ensure there are no safe spaces for perpetrators of domestic homicide and other forms of violence against women;
- ▶ 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;
- ▶ ensure that specialist services for victims and survivors of male violence, including trafficking survivors, are not dependent on immigration status;
- ▶ invest in public awareness campaigns on the nature of sexual consent.

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- ▶ demand an end to the abuse of women and girls through the sex industry by introducing legislation that fully decriminalises those who sell sex, establishes and funds support and exit services and then moves to criminalise the purchase of sex. While we recognise that this issue divides individuals, organisations and political parties, we believe this is the best way to tackle demand and reduce the exploitation of women and children through the sex trade;
 - ▶ ensure women who have been victims of sex trafficking in the UK are entitled to a legal right to remain in the country and that immigration authorities and border control have sufficient training to identify victims of trafficking;
 - ▶ work with police forces across the UK to record misogyny and gender-based incidents as hate crime, as has been done in Nottinghamshire;
 - ▶ increase scrutiny and accountability of non-specialist organisations that are providing support services to survivors of violence and abuse and those which are working with perpetrators; and
 - ▶ review the current legislation on image-based sexual abuse so that websites that intentionally host and refuse to remove revenge pornography are both civilly and criminally liable and victims can seek damages from perpetrators, with minimum amounts set by statute.



Equal representation

Power is not shared equally in our society, and this hurts us all.

Whether it is politics, business, finance, arts or culture, women are under-represented in all major decision-making across the UK. If women held equal power, the whole country would benefit. Women's experiences would be better reflected in the decisions Parliament takes and the policies government makes. Our economy would be more vibrant and more resilient. Violence against women and the specific needs of women in our health service would be taken more seriously.

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. Even in arts and culture where women are more likely to be in management roles, there are still more men on boards than women.

Many British businesses have woken up to the fact that companies and organisations with women in senior leadership positions outperform their male-dominated equivalents. But progress is not fast enough and if it continues at this speed, not even our youngest generations will live to see equal representation in politics, business, industry and the arts.

Quotas, especially if backed by other policies to improve diversity, have proven to be the best short-term measure to bring about lasting change, both in politics and business. Quotas do not, as some claim, permit mediocrity: on the contrary, drawing on only half the talent in politics and business diminishes the effectiveness of our whole political system and economy. Data from countries that have improved quotas shows that far from lowering qualification levels in top tiers, the women who break through thanks to quotas are often better qualified than their male counterparts. Efforts also need to be made to increase the diversity of the women and men in decision-making to better represent the racial and ethnic diversity of the UK and to ensure disabled people participate fully in our democracy and society.

WE will:

- ▶ launch a consultation as to the best electoral system for equality of representation in the House of Commons, looking at other democracies with over 40% female representation, and propose moving to a proportional representation system that uses multi-member constituencies;
- ▶ encourage other political parties to use all women-shortlists – or other methods – so that at least 66% of candidates replacing retiring MPs, and 66% of other candidates, are women for the next two Parliamentary terms or until gender parity has been achieved. Similarly 75% of new peerages should be granted to women until women and men are equally represented in the House of Lords. At local level, parties should also follow this approach to choose the appropriate percentage of female candidates for council elections;
- ▶ invest in the support structures women need to take the leap as entrepreneurs;
- ▶ work towards family-friendly working hours, electronic voting and formal parental leave in all parliaments, assemblies and local governments across the UK;
- ▶ implement the recommendations put forward in the Good Parliament Report to move towards an inclusive and diverse Parliament;
- ▶ expect a balanced board in all listed companies by 2025, with businesses making progress every year towards that goal. That means by 2020 at least, 40% of board and Executive Committee positions should be held by women;
- ▶ 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;
- ▶ lead the way from government so that 50% of ministerial posts, including 50% of the Cabinet, are held by women with immediate effect and 65% of public appointments should be of women until balance is achieved;
- ▶ not allow all-male companies, those with all-male boards, or those without a gender diversity policy in place to supply government at any level;
- ▶ add a question to the annual confirmation statement for companies so that it records whether businesses are owned by women (51% or more) or men;
- ▶ hold employers to account on their recruiting policies as well as their promotion policies. This should be subject to corporate governance and made a compulsory part of corporate social responsibility reporting for annual reports to track progress;
- ▶ review the current rules on registering to vote anonymously so that women living in refuges are always able to vote safely;
- ▶ enforce existing UK law which prohibits discrimination against part-time workers; and
- ▶ work towards a culture that assesses people on their skills, capabilities, ability to do the job and commitment to the role, not on the basis of a “chums” or “jobs for the boys” culture.



Equal health

Women and girls across the UK face significant barriers to both good mental and physical health.

The physiological differences between women and men are far too often ignored in medical research leading to medical interventions that are implemented without enough evidence. Women's social status negatively impacts their physical and mental health, e.g. because of poverty, male violence and abuse and women's reproductive and caring roles. Gender neutral health care provision harms women and men alike. Despite 63% of women experiencing some form of mental health problems in their lifetime, services have been found not to meet their needs and even to replicate gender inequalities.

There are many different examples of gender inequalities in health care. Men are less likely to seek medical help and their life expectancy is shorter, which many researchers have attributed to toxic masculinity. Women's symptoms and pain are too often disbelieved and are treated less effectively. Women are more likely than men to be told their symptoms are psychosomatic, to be dismissed without further investigation, and even to be given sedatives rather than adequate pain relief.

The UK has the lowest rate of breastfeeding in the world, and 80% of mothers stop breastfeeding before they want to. The rates of C-sections and medical intervention in birth are high and far too many women report birth trauma and disrespectful care, which affects women's physical and mental health.

Inadequate inclusion of women in most biomedical research has led to the understanding of many medical conditions based on "male as default" physiology rather than how those conditions affect female physiology. This has serious negative health outcomes. And despite the fact that menopause is a given fact in most women's lives, very little research has been devoted to finding ways to alleviate its symptoms.

Women make up the overwhelming majority of the workforce in health care but are much less likely to be in decision-making positions. For example, women make up 77% of the NHS England workforce but less than half of its executive directors.

At our first Party Conference in 2016 WE adopted equality in health and medical research as our seventh core goal. WE are still undertaking consultation to form this policy area and WE are fully committed to equal health for all. WE wish to remove the range of health inequalities that women face, with recognition of the additional health challenges of disadvantaged and vulnerable populations – people who are BAME, LGBT+, socially and economically disadvantaged, refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers, people who are deaf, disabled or neuro-diverse, and people in the criminal justice system.

WE will:

- ▶ launch a parliamentary inquiry into gender inequalities in health care and medical research to build long-lasting, intersectional solutions;
- ▶ encourage investment into women's health, which improves public health and the health of children and babies, families and communities;
- ▶ assert the importance of health over the course of life – recognising the intergenerational effect of poor health – and of the vital connection between mental and physical health;
- ▶ increase research into historically overlooked areas of health care that have disadvantaged women. This includes research into mental health, invisible disabilities, maternity care, breastfeeding, sexual and reproductive health, miscarriage, menopause, end of life care, UTIs, dementia, and drug development;
- ▶ call for tailored, high quality and relationship-based services to support individuals and communities across the UK, ensuring women's health and the specifics of their experiences are always listened to and taken seriously. Services need to be accessible and account for the needs of vulnerable groups;
- ▶ seek to fully integrate health and social care systems and commissioning to ensure joined up health and social care over the course of individuals' lives;
- ▶ invest in the people, infrastructure and research culture in our health care system, ending the pay restraint, reinstating the bursary for student nurses and midwives and negotiating with the BMA and junior doctors for a fair and equitable contract;
- ▶ review and improve medical complaints procedures;
- ▶ improve mental health care, focusing on prevention and early intervention, investing in thorough and gender-specific research, and shifting stigmas around mental health illness. “Medically unexplained symptoms” or “MUS” should not be regarded as a mental health condition or problem;
- ▶ improve Maternity Care by advocating for continuity of midwifery care for all women and free choice of birthplace, including home birth. The care model should seek to improve perinatal mental health services and neonatal services and reduce the rates of stillbirths;
- ▶ develop a policy to protect, promote and support breastfeeding;
- ▶ ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights by increasing the provision of good-quality sexual and reproductive health services, including access to all forms of contraception and emergency contraception and to abortion, assisted conception services and specialist services for victims of FGM and sexual violence;
- ▶ conduct an inquiry into the cost of over-the-counter emergency contraception;
- ▶ fully decriminalise abortion and protect the rights of women in Northern Ireland by offering them free reproductive health services in England, Scotland or Wales;
- ▶ seek to remove the health inequalities faced by disabled people. This will include ensuring that health services provide accurate and easy-read health information and guidance and prevent the over-medication of people with learning disabilities or autism; and
- ▶ develop a policy to ensure that drug development and research is adapted for female biology and that clear information regarding side-effects is consistently and accurately provided.



Equality in the media

Equality for women requires real cultural change, and the media has to be at the centre of that.

Mainstream media organisations hold a unique position in any society, not only reflecting it but shaping it, essential to democracy yet also failing democracy in too often presenting lopsided, male-centred narratives. It is vital that women's perspectives inform every aspect of this industry, just as it is vital that women are represented at every level of political life. The statistics tell us just how far the media in all its forms has yet to travel to make this a reality. One study of UK newspaper journalism found that 78% of front-page stories were written by men and 84% of those stories were about men. Women make 85% of purchasing decisions yet just 11% of creative directors in the UK advertising industry are female. The UK film industry most often employs men to tell stories from a male viewpoint. Directors UK analysed 2,500 recent films: only 11.5% of films had been directed by women and just 3.3% of big-budget movies had female directors.

Women have the right to be taken seriously as human beings but media representation of women is all too often casually reductive. Young women are sex objects or victims; older women are cougars or victims, or invisible.

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 an end to violence against women and girls.

When children are spoon-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?

Although many broadcasters and journalists are taking important steps to improve the representation of women, the change is too slow; it needs to happen now. The increasing role of social media has also brought new challenges. Some platforms have permitted an atmosphere to develop where abuse, trolling, revenge porn and threatening behaviour are tolerated or even endemic.

WE will:

- ▶ hold a Parliamentary Inquiry into media representation of women, making recommendations for changes in legislation. The inquiry will include: research and analysis of current content and airtime given to men and women; addressing under-representation, sexual objectification and stereotyping and the different impact on BAME women, disabled women and LGBT+ women; and expert evidence on the impact of inequality in the media;
- ▶ challenge any reporting of sexual violence that minimises its importance or blames victims;
- ▶ work to ensure that violence against women is never encouraged through the media and that adverts that portray sexualised imagery are not permitted next to journalistic material on violence against women;
- ▶ highlight and campaign against any coverage that is gender-biased, such as when women are asked about their clothes, relationship status and family where a man in a similar position would never be asked such questions;
- ▶ require a warning notice to be included on any images of models with a very low unhealthy body weight;
- ▶ 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 images will be permitted;
- ▶ work to promote positive, realistic portrayals of women in the media and celebrate examples of excellence in challenging gender stereotypes;
- ▶ require broadcast media to monitor and publish data on the airtime given to women and men in each programme and type of programming, and across their schedules;
- ▶ 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, gay women and working-class women) as well as greater diversity in the types of roles women are presented as occupying. This will be included in the review of the BBC's charter;
- ▶ 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 five following;
- ▶ implement the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee to improve social media companies' response and prevent hateful content;
- ▶ work with Ofcom and the Independent Press Standards Organisation to 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;
- ▶ legislate so that modelling agencies are banned from asking models to lose weight from the time they first meet;
- ▶ hold a select committee inquiry into the fashion industry and its impact on public health; and
- ▶ encourage the British Fashion Council to conduct an internal inquiry on ways to help designers showing at London Fashion Week to vary their sample sizes.



Balancing the books

Successive governments and all the old political parties have approached the budget as a gender-neutral exercise.

This has led to public finances that significantly increase gender inequalities, rather than reducing them. The bias is deeply rooted. When money is poured into physical infrastructure projects – such as roads and buildings – that create jobs for men, it is referred to as *investment* and accounted for accordingly. Costs associated with the social infrastructure – such as health care services and childcare – where women are more likely to be employed, are referred to as *expenses*. In other words, you can use public money to build a hospital and call that *investment* but the services inside the hospital would be treated as *expenses*.

There is no good rationale behind this.

The Women's Budget Group has shown that investing in the caring economy creates double the number of jobs as the equivalent investment in construction. Meanwhile women are bearing the brunt of the male bias that characterises the fiscal policies presented as good for the whole country. By the end of this decade, 86% of government savings will have come directly from women, with BAME women facing a triple disadvantage. More than £66 billion will be taken from women's pockets in tax changes and cuts to social security. Women are repaying the national debt while being refused services that are vital for them and their families.

Pushing for women's equality is not only the right

thing to do: it also pays. McKinsey estimates that bridging the workplace gender gap would create an extra £150 billion in GDP. Professor Sylvia Walby has demonstrated that ending domestic violence could save up to £4 billion in direct services and a total of almost £16 billion when economic output and human and emotional costs are taken into account. Offering free childcare, so that mothers who want to work can do so, could save £37 billion through higher tax revenues and lower benefit payments.

The policies in this manifesto are costed. In the long run they will all pay for themselves with increased revenues and reduced spending. However, an upfront investment for our prioritised policies is needed. This will be covered as follows:

Childcare

The Women's Budget Group has conducted detailed research into the costing and funding of a free, universal childcare, in which all 3.2 million children across the UK are offered up to 40 hours a week for 48 weeks a year. Their model shows that if childcare workers are paid at current rates the total annual investment will be £33 billion. If childcare workers are paid a salary equivalent to primary school teachers, the annual gross cost would be £55 billion (3% of GDP). These numbers include the necessary investment in training and qualifications for an expanded workforce.

Employment creation in childcare services, and elsewhere in the economy through multiplier effects, would add up to 1.7 million full-time jobs. Increased tax revenue from additional earnings and reduced spending on benefits will recoup between 89% and 95% of the annual investment. For the lower wage scenario, this leaves a funding gap of £1.7 billion and for the higher wage scenario, of £6.1 billion.

The Women's Budget Group's estimates are based on childcare being available from six months, while the plans presented in this manifesto are for it to be available from nine months. This allows leeway to fund flexible alternatives for parents who work non-traditional hours.

WE will start building up universal childcare at the current childcare salary rates, and will then move towards the higher paid scenario within five years, when the upfront investment has paid off. Public spending on childcare and early education is already around £7.6 billion. WE will close the £25.4 billion investment gap by applying a single rate of pension tax relief at approximately 25%, unfreeze alcohol and fuel duty and postpone further corporation tax cuts. In five years time WE will move towards the better paid scenario, in which the funding gap of £6.1 billion can be covered just by the single pension tax. Other revenues can then be directed into education, social care and health care.

Shared parental leave

WE will establish a parental leave investment fund to implement our shared parental leave policies. The government will provide the fund with £4 billion investment from the infrastructure investment fund. Employers will be required to pay an insurance levy of 0.076% of their total salary costs which will be ring-fenced for the parental leave fund. Self-employed people will only enjoy rights to paid parental leave if they pay the same rate to the fund. The interest generated by this fund will cover its administrative operations and the annual contributions will cover the parental leave uptake. This will ensure a sustainable income for parental leave and employers will not be exposed to any sudden or unexpected costs related to parental leave uptake, which allows for better planning and more sustainability.

An end to violence against women

Scrapping 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 and is payable to the higher earner (normally men) – saves more than £800 million per year. This amount can be used to restore legal aid for all cases involving violence against women, fund further perpetrator programmes and expand refuges and housing services for women and children fleeing domestic abuse.

Competitive tendering – which WE aim to end – is both costly and time consuming. Funds will be better used by moving to a three-year rolling grant model. However, demand for specialist services has increased while funding has decreased. More funding is therefore needed to bridge the gap. Funding is also sorely needed for public campaigns and to improve the criminal justice system so that it avoids putting women seeking justice through additional trauma. WE will work with service providers, the criminal justice system, local authorities, health care professionals and other experts to more carefully assess the need. This will then be covered with tax revenues from effective action on tax evasion, as further explained below.

If this is not sufficient to meet the immediate need we will consider the option of reversing the income tax reductions that have been introduced since June 2010 and the cuts in corporation tax. These cost a total of over £20 billion per year and are mostly beneficial to men. Reversing half of these tax cuts will cover the necessary investment in our policies to end violence against women and help with investment in health and social care.

Health and social care

Better integrated health and social care will save money in the long run. As an example, the issue of patients being fit to leave hospital but not able to be discharged – sometimes called “bed-blocking” – costs the NHS £800 million a year, money which could be easily saved with improved social care.

WE will allocate half of the Chancellor's £23 billion infrastructure investment fund to fund the necessary investment in care and we will double the fund with revenues from action on tax debt, tax avoidance and tax evasion so that we can simultaneously build up our physical and our social infrastructure.

Conservatively estimated, effective action on tax debt, tax avoidance and tax evasion will bring in up to £120 billion a year. This is the same amount as it costs to run NHS England. For this reason WE

do not accept the narrative upheld by successive governments that continuing austerity is inevitable and that the only way to balance the books is to take money from women's pockets. If everyone paid their fair share, there would be ample funds to tide over women born in the 1950s (including the WASPI women) until the start of their deferred state pensions and there would be no reason to reconsider the triple lock on pensions.

Other revenues

WE acknowledge that WE will need to work with other parties on funding for all our policies. WE are open to discussing the proposal to raise national insurance by 1p to bridge the funding gap in social care and health care or to adopt a moderate inheritance tax which is supported by people on both the left and the right. However, we will not accept any proposals that continue to make women pay the price.

Furthermore, WE are open to a minor financial transaction tax so that financial products and services are taxed like all other products and services in our economy. WE will work with the European Union to see this through, rather than blocking such talks as the UK has done to this day. A moderate financial transaction tax would ensure banks pay their fair share – as other businesses need to do – and would help to fund our social and physical infrastructure without increasing taxes on overstretched households across the UK.

WE will introduce and implement gender budgeting for all public expenditure, which will also take account of the effect of multiple forms of discrimination that women face. WE will ensure that the public sector is trained in this approach at all levels of decision-making. Fiscal policies will never again penalise women the way they do now but will rather serve to build up a more equal UK, where everybody flourishes. Because equality is better for everyone.



Because equality is better for everyone

womensequality.org.uk