



House of Commons
Women and Equalities
Committee

**Women in the House
of Commons after the
2020 election**

Fifth Report of Session 2016–17

*Report, together with formal minutes
relating to the report*

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The Women and Equalities Committee

The Women and Equalities Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office (GEO).

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[Gill Furniss MP](#) (*Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough*) was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry.

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the relevant [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Judith Boyce (Clerk), Sharmini Selvarajah (Second Clerk), Emma Sawyer (Committee Specialist), Tansy Hutchinson (Committee Specialist), Holly Dustin (Committee Specialist), Shai Jacobs (Committee Specialist), Asaad Qadri (Inquiry Manager), Alexandra Hunter-Wainwright (Senior Committee Assistant), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Assistant) and Liz Parratt (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Women and Equalities Committee, House of Commons, Westminster, London, SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6123; the Committee's email address is womeqcom@parliament.uk.

Contents

Summary	3
1 Introduction	5
Representation of women in the House of Commons	5
Our inquiry	6
Who is this report aimed at?	7
2 The role of Parliament in women’s inclusion and representation	9
The benefits of a more representative Parliament	9
Sustainable Development Goal 5	10
Parliament’s institutional responsibility to be representative and inclusive	11
Experiences of women in Parliament	12
3 Promoting women parliamentary candidates	16
Women parliamentary candidates in the 2015 General Election	16
The Boundary Review and selection of parliamentary candidates	17
Statutory measures to increase the number of women parliamentary candidates	19
Publication of parliamentary candidate diversity data	19
4 The role of political parties in improving women’s representation in the House of Commons	21
The responsibility of political parties	21
Representation of women in the House of Commons by political party	21
Conservative Party	23
Labour Party	23
Scottish National Party	24
Liberal Democrats	25
Other political parties	26
Strategies used by political parties to increase the number of women in the House of Commons and elected office and their effectiveness	27
Voluntary approaches	27
Institutional initiatives	28
Are political parties taking their responsibility seriously enough?	31
Women candidates in winnable seats	32

5 Conclusion	34
Conclusions and recommendations	35
Annex: Terms of Reference	39
Formal Minutes	40
Witnesses	41
Published written evidence	42
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	45

Summary

Women make up more than half the population of the United Kingdom and, at a time when more women are in work than ever before, there is no good reason why women should not make up half of the House of Commons. Yet only 30 per cent of MPs are women; this constitutes a serious democratic deficit. The particular challenges faced by women MPs have been in the spotlight in 2016. The murder of Jo Cox has shown that the violence female elected representatives face globally is not absent in the UK. There have been recent high-profile cases of threats and abuse aimed at other women politicians; successful prosecutions are welcome but are not neutral acts for women considering the potential impact of taking up a role in public life.

The UK ranks only 48th globally for representation of women in the lower or single legislative chamber, having fallen from 25th place in 1999. If the Commons is serious about being truly representative of the people that it seeks to represent, it must rise to the challenge of being a world leader on women's parliamentary representation. While political parties must retain responsibility for candidate selection, there is also a role for the Government, which has committed to achieving women's full and equal participation under the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed by 193 UN Member States in 2015.

It has been almost 100 years since the first woman MP was elected, but it is a shocking reality that there have only ever been as many women MPs as there are men sitting in the House of Commons today. The backdrop to our inquiry is the publication of Boundary Commission proposals for implementing equalisation of the size of parliamentary constituencies, which will reduce the number of seats in the Commons to 600. In seeking to right one democratic deficit by equalising constituency sizes, political parties need to ensure they have strategies to tackle gender balance too.

Parliament as an institution should actively encourage women to participate in democracy through its outreach initiatives, and continue to investigate ways of making the working environment of Westminster one that does not present unnecessary actual or perceived barriers to women's participation.

Political parties have the primary responsibility for ensuring that women come forward to represent them and that they are put in positions from which they can win seats. The starting point for each party is different, but all of the main parties fielded significantly less than 50 per cent women parliamentary candidates for the 2015 General Election. The parties at present express confidence in their own internal mechanisms for improving this situation, but we consider that the Government should be prepared to legislate to achieve parity among candidates, including setting out financial penalties for under-performance, if voluntary measures do not bear fruit. Introducing publication of parliamentary candidate diversity data, as provided for in the Equality Act 2010, would be an important step towards transparency in holding parties to account for their performance.

In their evidence to our inquiry, the leaders of political parties agreed that the House would benefit from equality in gender representation, and they have made commitments to improving their parties' performance. A range of initiatives, both voluntary

and institutional, are in place, but we saw little evidence of an analysis of the likely effectiveness of these measures which would justify the confidence of political parties that they will be sufficient. We remain concerned that there is a lack of clear strategies for gender equality and concrete action plans to achieve it, and that party leadership is not yet providing the necessary clear and strong direction in working with local parties to deliver more women candidates. Parties should explicitly identify winnable seats and adopt ambitious targets for women candidates in those seats, with the aim of converting that into a significantly increased proportion of women MPs in all parties in the 2020 Parliament. Above all, parties need to be transparent and accountable in their progress, or the lack of it.

1 Introduction

Representation of women in the House of Commons

1. We held this inquiry to bring the importance of women's parliamentary representation to the forefront of the minds of political parties, Government and Parliament.

2. The 1918 General Election saw the first woman, Constance Markievicz of Sinn Fein, elected to the House of Commons. One year later Nancy Astor became the first woman to take her seat in the House. Since 1918, there have been only 455 women elected to the Commons.¹ Putting these numbers into perspective, the number of men in the Commons today is the same as the total number of women ever elected to the House.

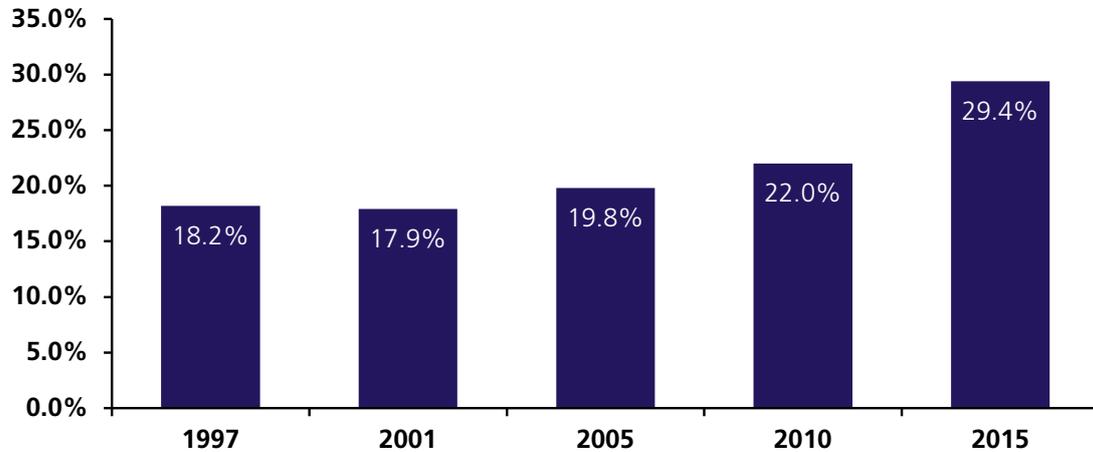
3. Until 1997 women had never represented more than 10 per cent of MPs at any one time, and until the late 1980s the proportion had always been below five per cent. The proportion rose to 18 per cent at the 1997 General Election when 120 women were elected following the introduction of all-women shortlists by the Labour Party.² The highest ever number and proportion of women elected as Members of Parliament was in the 2015 General Election. Out of 650 available seats 191 women were elected; this represented 29 per cent of all MPs. After five by-elections won by women there are now 195 women MPs, which brings the proportion to 30 per cent.

4. We cannot take it for granted that the level of women MPs will carry on increasing; indeed, the number and proportion of women MPs decreased in the 2001 General Election as seen in figure 1. Proposals of the Boundary Commissions for how to achieve equal-sized constituencies and a reduction in their number to 600 were published in Autumn 2016, and are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. There is nothing inherent in that process that will inevitably produce a lower proportion of women MPs in 2020, but regression in this respect may be an unintended consequence unless political parties take steps to prevent it. It is important also to recognise that more than half of women MPs today are in the Labour Party, with women making up 43.7 per cent of Labour's parliamentary party. The overall number of women in the House is at present therefore worryingly dependent on the electoral performance of one party.

1 House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), p.5 (plus the by-elections in Batley and Spen, Richmond Park and Sleaford and North Hykeham)

2 House of Commons Library, [Women in Parliament and Government](#), p.5

Figure 1: Percentage of women MPs elected at general elections, 1997–2015



Source: House of Commons library

5. The UK ranks only 48th globally for representation of women in the lower or single house of legislatures.³ This is behind European countries such as the Netherlands, Spain and Italy and non-European countries including Rwanda, Angola and Mozambique. The ranking of the UK Parliament has gone down by 23 places since 1999 when it was ranked 25th in the world.⁴

6. The United Nations report ‘Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals’, published in June 2016, stated that although women’s participation in parliaments globally is increasing, progress has been slow with a small increase of only six percentage points over the last decade.⁵

7. **We are concerned that Parliament is failing to be a world leader on women’s representation. The under-representation of women MPs does not only represent a serious democratic deficit; it also means that the UK is missing out on the benefits of having gender balance in its highest decision-making body. As the gatekeepers of political office, political parties are in a key position to improve the representation of women in the Commons. Some parties already have policies to help promote women to become MPs, but their current initiatives are evidently unsatisfactory since there have still only ever been the same number of women MPs as there are men in the Commons today.**

Our inquiry

8. Our inquiry was launched in August 2016. During the inquiry we received 85 written submissions and held two oral evidence sessions. In the first session we took evidence from the Conservative peer Lord Hayward OBE and from Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell who are academics specialising in politics and gender. In the

3 IPU [Women in national parliaments ranking](#) as of 1st September 2016

4 IPU [Women in national parliaments ranking](#), June 1999

5 United Nations Economic and Social Council report [Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals](#) p.9, June 2016

second session we took evidence from four political parties represented in the House of Commons: the Leader of the Labour Party, Rt Hon Jeremy Corbyn MP, the Conservative Party Chairman, Rt Hon Sir Patrick McLoughlin MP, the Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Tim Farron MP and the Westminster Group Leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) Rt Hon Angus Robertson MP. We are grateful to all individuals and organisations that took the time to provide evidence to this inquiry.

9. This report is the latest of many other publications and inquiries that have highlighted the issue of under-representation in the Commons. A Speaker's Conference was convened in 2008 to promote greater representation of under-represented groups, including women, in the House. The final report was titled 'Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation)' and it presented a range of recommendations to help widen the diversity of the House.⁶ The Good Parliament report, written by Professor Sarah Childs and published by the University of Bristol in July 2016, provided in-depth recommendations for making Parliament a more representative and inclusive environment for everyone.⁷

10. Our report specifically focuses on the under-representation of women in the Commons. This first chapter provides background information on women's representation in the House of Commons. The second chapter examines Parliament's responsibility to be a representative institution and the benefits of more equal representation. The third and fourth chapters detail the measures political parties should take to expand the equality of opportunity for women to become parliamentary candidates and the actions Government should take if political parties fail to deliver an increase in women's representation in the 2020 General Election.

11. We believe that genuine diversity in Parliament includes the fair representation of many different groups of people, including ethnic and religious minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, those from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, disabled people and many more. We believe that the proposals in this report will help towards the end goal of improving equality and diversity in Parliament overall.

Who is this report aimed at?

12. There are a variety of players that are involved in improving the under-representation of women in the House of Commons. The three key players that we would like to address in our report are the Government, Parliament and political parties:

- The Government has a role in setting and delivering national targets for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 and for introducing and enforcing statutory measures to help Parliament and the public scrutinise the progress of political parties in selecting diverse parliamentary candidates;
- Parliament holds a unique institutional responsibility to actively reach out to groups that are currently under-represented in the Commons. This is an important part of making Parliament a representative and thriving parliamentary democracy;

6 Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation) [Final Report](#), 11 January 2010

7 [The Good Parliament](#), Professor Sarah Childs, University of Bristol, July 2016

- We recognise that, in practice, it is political parties that have the primary responsibility for delivering greater gender balance in the Commons because they ultimately decide which parliamentary candidates they wish to field for general elections. There is much more that political parties can be doing right now in order to promote a fairer and greater proportion of women parliamentary candidates and to be transparent about their performance, and much that can be done to hold them accountable.

13. Each of these actors has an important role to play in making the Commons more inclusive and representative of the people that it seeks to represent.

2 The role of Parliament in women's inclusion and representation

The benefits of a more representative Parliament

14. Women make up more than half of the population in the UK,⁸ but represent less than a third of the House of Commons.⁹ Why does this matter? The Good Parliament report argues that “there is a link, albeit not a straightforward one, between ‘who’ is present in our political institutions and the quality and legitimacy of our democratic processes and outcomes”.¹⁰

15. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), a body comprising parliaments around the world, has set out five key characteristics that every democratic parliament should have: transparency, accessibility, accountability, effectiveness and representativeness. The IPU has defined ‘representative’ as “socially and politically representative of the diversity of the people, and ensuring equal opportunities and protections for all its members”.¹¹

16. Engender, a feminist membership organisation, argued that Parliament is more effective in its function when a heterogeneity of ideas and experiences are brought to the table, and that improving the representation of women is a key part of achieving this:

Global evidence shows that increased representation for women in politics has a positive impact on both gender equality and social policy more broadly.¹² Gender balance around decision-making tables influences both the focus and outcomes of discussion. The House of Commons provides critical oversight of challenges to gender inequality and discrimination, including development of laws, structures, policies, and programmes. Given that women and men experience life differently as a result of gender inequality and cultural gender roles, women have particular perspectives that must be heard in our representative bodies.¹³

Campaign group 50:50 Parliament stated in its evidence that gender balance in the Commons is a means of utilising the widest pool of talent to build a better informed Parliament.¹⁴

17. Increasing women's visibility in politics is also beneficial for democratic participation. Engender cited evidence that increased numbers of women standing for election is correlated with stronger female participation in politics and higher voter turnout by

8 ONS

9 House of Commons Library [Women in Parliament and Government](#) p.4

10 [The Good Parliament](#), p. 6, July 2016

11 IPU, [Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: a guide to good practice](#), 2006

12 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2005) *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*; UN Division for the Advancement of Women (2005) *Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership*; OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2011) *Gender equality in elected office: A six-step action plan*

13 Engender ([WHC0081](#))

14 50:50 Parliament Campaign ([WHC0067](#))

women.¹⁵ Research conducted by Girlguiding, a charity for girls and young women in the UK, found that having more female MPs would increase political interest among young women:

More female MPs would have an important impact on girls' and young women's lives—63 per cent think that girls' voices would be listened to more if there were more female MPs [...]. 56 per cent of young women aged 13 to 21 say more diversity (of gender, age, ethnicity and disability and sexual orientation) among politicians would encourage them to be more interested in politics.¹⁶

18. The Social Democratic and Labour Party told us that the participation of women in politics as elected representatives is “a matter of not only equality but of improving the performance of government”.¹⁷ It added that this has been demonstrated by research findings which include:

- Women in public office are more likely to promote policies that address the socioeconomic and political challenges facing disadvantaged groups.
- Countries where women are well-represented in public office are proven to have a lower level of corruption which restores faith in government.
- Peace and reconciliation efforts with a higher rate of women involved are proven to be more effective and sustainable.

19. Improving the representation of women in the Commons would allow women to have a proportionate level of participation into the laws and decision-making processes that will ultimately affect their lives and in some cases, the lives of women globally. The evidence shows that diversity helps to improve the effectiveness of decision-making bodies and increasing women's representation is a key part of achieving this.

Sustainable Development Goal 5

20. The UK also has an international commitment to improving women's representation. UN Member States have committed to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets sitting underneath them by 2030. Sustainable Development Goal 5 aims to ‘achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’. Target 5.5 elaborates on this and aims to:

Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.¹⁸

The UN Economic and Social Council has identified the indicator for Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 as the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments.¹⁹ Member States have committed to systematically reviewing

15 Engender ([WHC0081](#))

16 Girlguiding ([WHC0027](#)), para.6

17 The Social Democratic and Labour Party ([WHC0080](#))

18 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/women/decisions> accessed on 3 November 2016

19 UN Economic and Social Council [Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators](#) p.21

the implementation of the goals at a national level.²⁰ They have also agreed that each Government will set its own national targets which are guided by the global level of ambition but also taking into account national circumstances.²¹

21. The Office for National Statistics will be assisting the Government in reporting its progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and will launch a public consultation on the national indicators in 2017. We recognise that, although there is a symbolic value in aiming for 50 per cent women in Parliament, targets for gender balance need as a matter of practicality to allow for fluctuations in numbers and results at the ballot box. ***We recommend that the Government set a domestic target of 45 per cent representation of women in Parliament and local government by 2030 in response to the United Nations indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 5.5. The Government should also set out how it plans to achieve this target, working with political parties.***

Parliament's institutional responsibility to be representative and inclusive

22. The Good Parliament report argued that, historically, the House of Commons has “lacked the institutional will” to address issues of representation and inclusion. It observed that:

Members of Parliament are often regarded as individual office-holders. This can obscure a wider institutional responsibility to act. Hence, parliamentary reform is too often the result of individual MPs expending significant time and political capital. This is no longer a satisfactory state.²²

The report recommended that a coalition of cross-party MPs form a Commons Reference Group on Representation and Inclusion to provide willingness and institutional leadership to help deliver a representative Parliament. This group was established in November 2016, with membership drawn from 11 MPs across different political parties, and is chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons.

23. Professor Sarah Childs told us that Parliament has an institutional responsibility to encourage political participation:

I would go one stage back and ask what Parliament is doing and more Parliament can do to reach the non-party member [...] I think it is about parliamentary outreach [...] Parliament as an institution has a responsibility to make the non-political citizen more interested in politics so they can expand who is already a member of a political party.²³

20 UN Economic and Social Council [Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators](#) p.21

21 UN Economic and Social Council [Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators](#) p.8, para.7

22 The Good Parliament report Executive Summary

23 Q15 [Professor Childs]

24. Evidence from the SNP suggested that the UK the House of Commons could learn lessons from the Scottish Parliament:

[The Scottish Parliament's] Corporate Body has set out a number of inclusive work practices, which include a clear leadership commitment to diversity and inclusion and a focus on creating a diverse workforce which reflects the population of Scotland.²⁴

25. Parliament itself has in the past debated, recommended and in some cases passed laws to call on other institutions to promote gender diversity.²⁵ It is then in the House's best interests to set an example of good practice in being representative and inclusive of all under-represented groups, including women.

26. A representative and inclusive House of Commons is essential for the fully effective functioning of a parliamentary democracy. The laws that are passed in the Commons affect the lives of all those living in the UK; in this respect, the House itself holds a unique responsibility to take steps towards being representative of the population.

27. It has in the past been difficult to identify a vehicle for the House to act on this institutional responsibility. We welcome the introduction of the Commons Reference Group on Parliamentary Representation and Inclusion, and we look forward to the group making the inclusion and representation of women in the House a key priority for Parliament.

28. A key action Parliament could take is to consider using its established resources to encourage women who are interested in democratic participation and, ultimately, standing for election. The work of the UK Parliamentary Outreach and Engagement Service has been an important step in encouraging diversity of participation, and it already offers valuable Career Progression and Development (CPD) training for teachers wishing to learn more about Parliament. A similar model of training could be delivered to prospective women parliamentary candidates of all political parties and of none.

29. The House Service should adopt a core stream of work in its public engagement and educational activities focusing on women's participation in democracy and standing for election. This core work should be set up to function before the 2020 General Election. The House authorities should consider working in conjunction with political parties and organisations that encourage political involvement from under-represented groups to identify prospective women parliamentary candidates who could benefit from parliamentary outreach initiatives.

Experiences of women in Parliament

30. There have been extensive studies into the experiences of women as Members of Parliament. We will not attempt in this report to replicate the well-documented findings of previous studies, but note the importance of Parliament and the Government being aware that more needs to be done to make Parliament a better workplace environment for women.

24 SNP Westminster Group ([WHC0079](#))

25 See, for example, Companies Act 2006 (gender reporting requirements) and Equality Act 2010 (Sex discrimination and public sector equality duty)

31. The Improving Parliament report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Women in Parliament looked into the supply, selection and retention of women MPs. Some of its key recommendations aimed to make the House a more family-friendly working environment, especially for MPs that have caring responsibilities, by improving the predictability of the parliamentary calendar and helping MPs balance parliamentary and constituency priorities fairly.²⁶ Professor Rosie Campbell told us that her research in 2012 found that a significant ‘motherhood gap’ exists in the Commons:

We found that 45 per cent of women MPs, compared to 28 per cent of men had no children [...]. The issue of people with caring responsibilities, be that older dependants or children, and access to a political career is a big one, and Parliament should consider how it encourages and supports people.²⁷

32. The Conservative Party Chairman, Rt Hon Sir Patrick McLoughlin MP, told us that late sitting hours in the House were, in the past, deterring women from becoming parliamentarians:

If you go back to the very early days when we would be sitting every night until 10 o’clock, 12 o’clock or quite often 2am, that was certainly something that put a lot of women off wanting to be in Parliament.²⁸

However, he also added that the parliamentary year is now “better structured” and this may have helped make a positive difference for women MPs.²⁹

33. The final report of the Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation touched on the working environment of the House and argued that

The inflexibility of Parliament’s working practices (which are partly institutional and partly the result of the way that political parties work), together with the increasingly heavy workload of constituency demands, combine to create a lifestyle which is detrimental to Members with caring responsibilities, both of children and other dependants.³⁰

34. A study published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in October 2016 noted the global prevalence of sexism, harassment and violence faced by women parliamentarians, and concluded that such factors have “a dissuading effect on women’s political engagement in general”.³¹ The UK is far from immune to this tendency, as shown by the murder of Jo Cox in June 2016. Online harassment and abuse of politicians appears disproportionately to be directed at women. Successful prosecutions for threats and abuse are welcome, but the incidence of such abuse is not a neutral factor for women weighing up whether to pursue a career in public life.

26 <http://www.appgimprovingparliamentreport.co.uk> accessed 22 November 2016

27 Q20 [Professor Campbell]

28 Q23 [Sir Patrick McLoughlin]

29 Q23 [Sir Patrick McLoughlin]

30 Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation, [Final Report](#), para.45, January 2010

31 IPU, [Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians](#), October 2016

35. We asked the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, why it is the case that female MPs are more likely to receive abuse than male MPs. He told us:

The society in which we live is unfortunately still quite sexist, in many cases quite misogynist. Read the style of writing of an awful lot of popular newspapers that I am sure you do not read and you can begin to see where a lot of this stuff comes from. The too-ready acceptance of casual sexism and casual racism in our society is something we all have to challenge.³²

Mr Corbyn also said that in some cases “young women are not treated with the respect they deserve in Labour groups and councils. This probably applies across the board in other parties as well”.³³

36. The House itself, under the auspices of its Administration Committee, conducted an interview study with MPs and their staff to explore women’s perceptions and experiences of working in Parliament in 2015. The survey found a number of common concerns regarding the provision of services for MPs with dependants and families, the unappealing culture of Westminster for women and people from minority backgrounds, and the safety and well-being of MPs and their staff.³⁴ The study found some evidence that perceptions of the culture in Parliament deterred women from standing as parliamentary candidates.³⁵ The Administration Committee report also found that many MPs would like to see greater flexibility from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), specifically on:

Flexibility for Members with caring responsibilities, especially where their constituency was not within easy reach of London. Some felt that IPSA, much like Parliament itself, ran on the model of a male MP with a supportive partner in the constituency [...]. Participants called for clearer and more specific guidance—as well as more flexibility around travel in particular, but also accommodation.³⁶

37. IPSA was created as a result of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, which gave it powers to independently oversee and regulate MPs’ business costs and expenses. Some studies on diversity in Parliament have found that the provision IPSA makes for MPs could be improved to facilitate women’s involvement in Parliament.³⁷ For example, the APPG on Women in Parliament found that ‘reforming IPSA financial support for families’ was the third most popular suggestion in their survey for encouraging more people to become MPs.³⁸

32 Q55 [Jeremy Corbyn]

33 Q48 [Jeremy Corbyn]

34 [Report for the Administration Committee on the findings of the interview study with Members on women’s experience in Parliament](#), p.5–6, August 2015

35 [Report for the Administration Committee on the findings of the interview study with Members on women’s experience in Parliament](#), p.12, August 2015

36 [Report for the Administration Committee on the findings of the interview study with Members on women’s experience in Parliament](#), p.16, August 2015

37 [Report for the Administration Committee on the findings of the interview study with Members on women’s experience in Parliament](#), p.5–6, August 2015, (see conclusions 4, 10 and 12) and p.16-17. Also see APPG on Women in Parliament, [Improving Parliament: Creating a better and more representative House](#), p.41, July 2014

38 APPG on Women in Parliament, [Improving Parliament: Creating a better and more representative House](#), p.41, July 2014

38. IPSA conducts public consultations when reviewing the expenses scheme for MPs. The most recent public consultation into the review of MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses (the Scheme) took place from May to October 2016. We wrote to the Chair of IPSA, who told us that the Authority intends to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment on any new policies introduced as a result.³⁹ Two previous Equality Impact Assessments on the Scheme as it then was were published for 2010–11 and 2011–12, though these exercises have not been repeated in the interim. We note that IPSA's new fundamental principles, which will take effect from April 2017, include a commitment that the Scheme should:

Take account of MPs' diverse working arrangements and should not unduly deter people from any part of society from seeking to become a Member of Parliament.⁴⁰

39. We welcome IPSA's intention to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment subsequent to its most recent consultation on the MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses. We also welcome the introduction of IPSA's new fundamental principle that the expenses scheme should take into account MPs' diverse working arrangements and should not unduly deter people from any part of society from seeking to become a Member of Parliament. We recommend that IPSA explicitly describe in its future Equality Impact Assessments how it is upholding this principle in relation not only to new elements of the Scheme, but to elements carried over from the previous Schemes.

39 [Review of the MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses and IPSA's publication](#) policy—A Consultation, para.148, May 2016

40 [Review of the MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses and IPSA's publication](#) policy—A Consultation, para.20, May 2016

3 Promoting women parliamentary candidates

Women parliamentary candidates in the 2015 General Election

40. In order to become Members of Parliament, women must first, of course, be selected as candidates. The 2015 General Election saw a record number of women candidates—1,033—standing for election to the House of Commons.⁴¹ This represented 26 per cent of all candidates in 2015 and surpassed the previous record of 21 per cent set in 2010.⁴²

41. There are significant variations between political parties in the proportion of parliamentary candidates that they field for general elections that are women, as seen in the table below:

Table 1: The proportion and number of female parliamentary candidates in the 2015 General Election by political party

Party	Proportion of candidates who were women by party in the 2015 General Election	Number of women candidates by party in the 2015 General Election
SNP	38%	22
Green Party	38%	216
Labour	34%	214
Conservative Party	26%	168
Liberal Democrats	26%	164
UKIP	13%	81

Source: House of Commons Library.⁴³

42. The process of selecting candidates for a general election begins for some parties within the first 12 to 18 months of the new Parliament. The Liberal Democrats told us that they have already chosen the majority of their parliamentary candidates in England and Wales in the event of an early general election.⁴⁴ The party's leader, Tim Farron, said that the proportion of women parliamentary candidates that the Liberal Democrats have selected was “in the region of 30 per cent to 33 per cent [...] which is not enough”.⁴⁵

43. We have heard evidence that the key to increasing the number of women in the Commons is for political parties to place women parliamentary candidates in their “winnable seats”. We explore this in chapter four.

41 House of Commons Library [General Election 2015](#) p.57

42 House of Commons Library [General Election 2015](#) p.57

43 House of Commons Library [General Election 2015](#) p.58

44 Q86 [Tim Farron] and Q93 [Tim Farron]

45 Q87 [Tim Farron]

44. Leadership figures in the Conservative Party, Scottish National Party and the Liberal Democrats all told us that Parliament would benefit from having equal representation of men and women.⁴⁶ The Labour Party leader told us that his party would aim for at least 50 per cent representation of its women MPs in the 2020 General Election.⁴⁷

45. We fully respect that the electorate ultimately decides who represents them in the House of Commons. However, it is political parties rather than voters that decide who stands for election, and having more women parliamentary candidates is a necessary precondition to improving the representation of women in Parliament. All of the main political parties fielded significantly less than 50 per cent women parliamentary candidates for the 2015 General Election, which undermined the equality of opportunity for women to be elected. Political parties must take greater ownership of this issue by making gender balance in candidate selection for general elections a key priority. This process needs to start earlier rather than later so that there is a strong supply of excellent prospective women parliamentary candidates from which local associations can select.

46. We recommend that the Government should seek to introduce, in legislation in this Parliament, a statutory minimum proportion of female parliamentary candidates in general elections for each political party. While the goal is equality, we recognise the difficulty inherent in setting this statutory minimum at 50 per cent; such a precise target would be difficult to meet while also ensuring that men did not become under-represented. A minimum of 45 per cent would therefore be acceptable. The measure would need to be subject to a minimum threshold for parties contesting only a small number of constituencies. This measure should be brought into force if the number and proportion of women MPs fails to increase significantly after the 2020 General Election.

47. Parties that fail to comply with this target need to face sanctions for the quota to be effective. The Government should consider a range of possible sanctions, which could include deductions from Policy Development Grants, confiscation of deposits in seats where female candidates have not been fielded, or legislating to extend the remit of the Electoral Commission to introduce fines for non-compliance.

The Boundary Review and selection of parliamentary candidates

48. The Rules for Redistribution set out in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, which seeks to achieve equalisation in electorate size of parliamentary constituencies, require the number of seats in the House of Commons to be reduced from 650 to 600. Proposals for how this should be achieved are the responsibility of the four independent Boundary Commissions for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The four commissions published their initial proposals for the 2018 Boundary Review in autumn 2016 for consultation.⁴⁸ The final set of proposals will be laid before the House in 2018 and must be approved by both Houses in order to take effect in advance of the 2020 General Election.⁴⁹

46 Q99 [Angus Robertson, Sir Patrick McLoughlin and Tim Farron]

47 Q56 [Jeremy Corbyn]

48 Gov.uk, [Independent review to deliver fair and equal parliamentary boundaries](#), 13 September 2016

49 House of Commons Library [Parliamentary boundary reviews: public consultations](#), p.8, November 2016

49. Some political parties have expressed concern that the overall reduction in the number of seats could reduce the representation of women and other under-represented groups in the Commons. The SNP Westminster Group told us that it was “anxious that the review will have a negative effect on female and minority representation in the House”,⁵⁰ the Green Party said it was concerned that “fewer parliamentary seats will mean fewer female candidates and therefore less female MPs”⁵¹ and the Labour Party stated it would “seek ways to mitigate the effects of [the Boundary Review] on the proportion of Labour women MPs.”⁵²

50. The Fawcett Society, a charity that campaigns for gender equality and women’s rights, raised concerns that the reduction in seats could see the Commons “go backwards in terms of women’s representation”.⁵³ Fawcett’s analysis of the boundary proposals found that there are 57 seats that are “at risk”. This is any current constituency whose electorate does not form the largest part of any new proposed seat, and in which, therefore, an incumbent MP that is representing the constituency will not have an obvious successor seat to contest in the next General Election. Fawcett found that 37 per cent of these ‘at risk’ seats are currently held by women MPs. They concluded that:

Without intervention from the major parties, women’s representation is at serious risk of reversing in 2020. The major parties must commit to a transparent and proactive process during selection for the new boundaries to avoid turning the clock back for women.⁵⁴

51. The Fawcett Society provided an analysis of how the Boundary Review will affect women MPs in each of the major political parties.⁵⁵ In summary, its findings for the major parties are that:

- The Labour Party will be most affected by the review because 32 Labour seats are at risk, with 17 of them held by women MPs. The party’s rule book states that MPs with “40 per cent or more registered electors of the previous parliamentary constituency”⁵⁶ may seek selection for a new constituency as a matter of right. However, women’s representation is not explicitly mentioned.
- The Liberal Democrats have no seats at risk under Fawcett’s analysis.
- The Scottish National Party has MPs in five of the six seats at risk in Scotland; two of them are women. The small number of seats that SNP MPs stand for in general elections (in the context of the whole UK) means that they are sensitive to small changes in the number of female MPs.
- The Conservative Party has 17 currently held seats at risk. Only two of these are held by women MPs. It is not yet clear how the internal race for seats will impact the number of female Conservative MPs, especially when the party will be implementing a ‘no-one left behind’ policy for incumbent MPs wishing to stand for election in 2020.

50 SNP Westminster Group ([WHC0079](#))

51 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))

52 The Labour Party ([WHC0078](#))

53 The Fawcett Society ([WHC0075](#)), para.7

54 The Fawcett Society ([WHC0075](#)), para.7

55 Fawcett Society further evidence ([WHC0084](#)) p.6, paras 32–36

56 Labour Party [Rule Book 2016](#), Appendix 3, p.65

52. Lord Hayward argued in oral evidence to us that, while the drawing of new boundaries in itself will not affect women’s representation in the House, it is the “selection and attitudes of political parties” that will determine its ultimate effect.⁵⁷ This was also reflected by Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell, who wrote that:

Given the key role that parties play in the make-up of the House and the importance of parties’ attention to the gender composition of their parliamentary parties, the parties will need to explicitly take into consideration the impact of the reduction in the number of seats when they and their local parties select candidates for re-drawn or new seats.⁵⁸

53. In light of the proposed reduction of seats in the House of Commons to 600, we recommend that political parties should publicly set out the measures they plan to take to increase the proportion and number of women parliamentary candidates in 2020. This is necessary to ensure that the previous positive trends do not stagnate or reverse. While the boundary review itself need not result in a lower proportion of women MPs, without intervention from the parties, regression may be an unintended consequence. There is no room for complacency.

Statutory measures to increase the number of women parliamentary candidates

54. Although immediate responsibility falls on political parties to act, we consider that the Government can play a significant role in bringing forward legislation to drive and embed change, particularly if the outcomes achieved by voluntary measures are unsatisfactory.

Publication of parliamentary candidate diversity data

55. The Government response to the Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation set out plans for an amendment to the Equality Act 2010 to make political parties publish diversity data on parliamentary candidates. The Government stated that the amendment would “enable diversity data to be collected in a systematic way at a national level for the first time”,⁵⁹ and expressed a hope that such a requirement would “help generate more diverse candidate selection and [...] ultimately result in a more representative Parliament.”⁶⁰

56. The requirement for parties to publish candidate diversity data is now in place in Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010, but this provision has not yet been brought into force.⁶¹ The Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat party leaders agreed, when giving evidence to the Speaker’s Conference in 2009, to the “principle of publishing monitoring data in relation to candidate selections”.⁶² However, Professor Childs and Professor Campbell told us that:

57 Q4

58 Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell ([WHC0065](#))

59 [Government response to the Speaker’s Conference Report](#) p.20, March 2010

60 [Government response to the Speaker’s Conference Report](#) p.20, March 2010

61 Equality Act 2010, [section 106](#)

62 Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation, [Final Report](#), para.25, January 2010

These promises have only been periodically and incompletely delivered upon, and frequently only after repeated pressure from senior MPs.⁶³

57. The Good Parliament report recommended that Section 106 of the Equality Act should be brought into force; Professor Sarah Childs argued that this would allow:

The public, you and others within this House to see how the party selections are progressing. Therefore, as we go through the selections, parties can be held to account by their members, by their voters and by civil society actors, to ensure that we see greater diversity.⁶⁴

58. We recommend that the Government immediately bring into force the statutory requirement for political parties to publish their parliamentary candidate diversity data for general elections, as set out in Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010. Publication of this information is vital for public and parliamentary scrutiny of the record of political parties in selecting a diverse slate of parliamentary candidates. We also recommend that the Government bring forward legislative proposals to empower the Electoral Commission to collect and host this data, to ensure consistency and transparency from political parties.

63 Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell ([WHC0065](#))

64 Q19 [Professor Childs]

4 The role of political parties in improving women's representation in the House of Commons

The responsibility of political parties

59. The Government stated in its evidence to our inquiry that:

It is primarily for political parties to ensure more diverse representation (including that of women) in the House of Commons through their selection of candidates.⁶⁵

Engender told us that political parties “serve as gatekeepers to political life”: political parties are in control of the selection process for parliamentary candidates and so are in a position to directly improve the gender balance within the House of Commons.⁶⁶

60. All political parties must accept that they have the primary responsibility for making the Commons more diverse and representative of modern Britain. Action and transparency by political parties are therefore essential in improving the gender balance of parliamentary candidates and increasing women's representation as Members of Parliament.

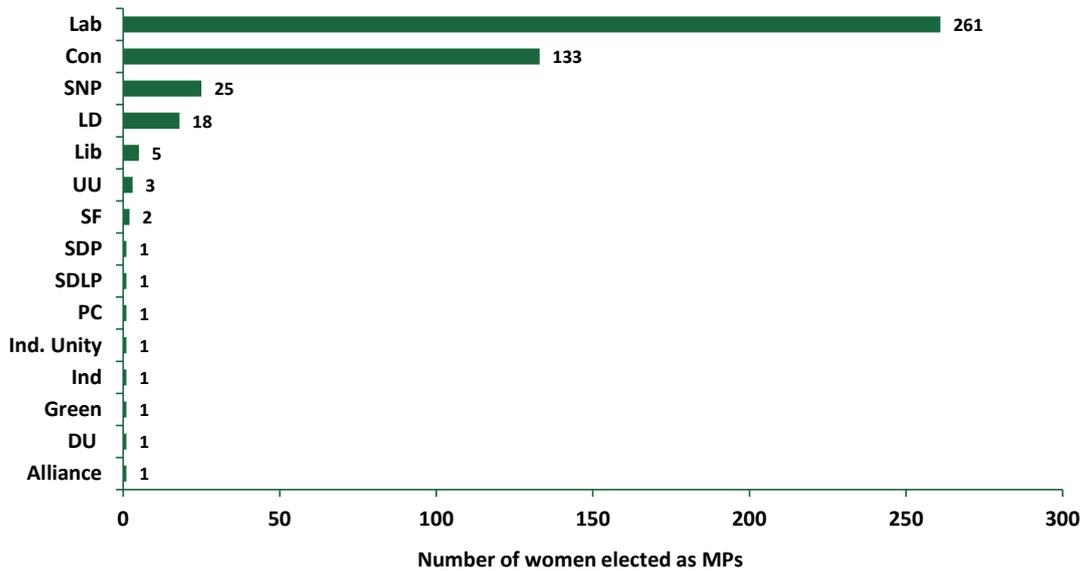
Representation of women in the House of Commons by political party

61. Of the 455 women that have ever been elected to the Commons, 261 (57 per cent) were elected as Labour MPs, 133 (29 per cent) Conservative, 25 (5.5 per cent) SNP, 24 (5 per cent) Liberal Democrat and its predecessor parties (SDP and Liberal), and 18 (4 per cent) were from other parties or elected as independents.

65 HM Government ([WHC0073](#))

66 Engender ([WHC0081](#))

Figure 2: The total number of Women MPs by political party since 1918



Source: House of Commons Library

62. In the 2015 General Election, 191 women were elected to the House of Commons. After five by-elections there are now 195 women MPs. This is broken down by political party as follows:

Table 2: Number of women MPs by political party, December 2016

Party	Women MPs	All MPs	Women as % of MPs
Conservative	69	329	20.9%
Labour	101	231	43.7%
SNP	18	54	33.3%
DUP	0	8	0.0%
Liberal Democrat	1	9	11.0%
Independent	3	4	75.0%
Sinn Fein	0	4	0.0%
Plaid Cymru	1	3	33.3%
SDLP	1	3	33.3%
UUP	0	2	0.0%
Green Party	1	1	100.0%
UKIP	0	1	0.0%
Total	195	649	30.0%

Source: Houses of Commons Library

These figures emphasise how crucial the relatively good performance of the Labour Party has been to improving the overall representation of women in the House. More than

half of women MPs are in the Labour Party, which means that a change in the electoral performance of that party would have a disproportionate effect on the representation of women.

Conservative Party

63. The Conservative Party has made progress on increasing the proportion of its MPs who are women, notably at the 2010 election, but today only one-fifth of its MPs are women. In evidence to the Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation in 2009 the then leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron, confessed that the under-representation of women and ethnic minorities was "a real problem for Parliament and it's been an even greater problem for my party".⁶⁷ He continued:

I think it is bad in all sorts of ways, it is clearly bad for women and for ethnic minorities, it is bad for equality; it is also bad for the quality of our politics. I have a very simple view, which is that we need to make sure that the conversation we have within the Conservative Party, and the conversation we have within Parliament, is like the conversation that is going on in the rest of the country.⁶⁸

64. In oral evidence to us, the Conservative Party Chairman, Rt Hon Sir Patrick McLoughlin MP, accepted that whilst progress had been made in the party there was still more work to be done:

In 2005, we were 17 women on the Conservative benches; today, we are 68. Is the party aware of the problem? Yes. Is the party trying to address the problem? Yes. Have we been as successful as we would like? We have made good progress in a number of directions. Is there more work to be done? Yes, there is.⁶⁹

65. The Conservative Party told us that its ambition is "to have more female Conservative MPs in both relative and absolute terms, after the next general election".⁷⁰

Labour Party

66. The Labour Party has the strongest record among all parties of women MPs. More than 57 per cent of all the women that have ever sat in the Commons have been from the Labour Party.⁷¹ This relative success was attributed to a particular mechanism by the then Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, at the Speaker's Conference in 2009; he said that "the under-representation of women historically, we have found can only be addressed by all-women shortlists" and that he would "urge other parties" to consider all-women shortlists in selecting parliamentary candidates.⁷²

67 [Q447](#) [Mr David Cameron MP] Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 20 October 2009

68 [Q447](#) [Mr David Cameron MP] Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation, 20 October 2009

69 Q64

70 The Conservative Party ([WHC0074](#))

71 See figure 2

72 Speaker's Conference on Parliamentary Representation [Q443](#) [Gordon Brown]

67. The Labour Party elected 232 MPs in the 2015 General Election, 99 of whom were women. At the time of writing the party had 101 women MPs after winning three by-elections. This is the highest number of women MPs out of all major political parties in the Commons.

68. Despite the progress made by the Labour Party on women's representation, it has never delivered 50 per cent or more women parliamentary candidates or MPs. Jeremy Corbyn told us that the party's ambition is to have 50 per cent representation of women both amongst its MPs in the 2020 Parliament and in local government:

It is our policy to achieve 50 per cent representation. We have come a long way towards it, with 43 per cent representation [of Labour women MPs] at the moment. It is also important to the cultural development within our party, and I hope within other parties, that we achieve that representation at local government level, because that is often a route into Parliament.⁷³

Scottish National Party

69. The Scottish National Party has historically had low numbers in the House of Commons and similarly low numbers of women MPs. However, the 2015 General Election resulted in a dramatic increase of SNP MPs in the Commons to 56, of which 20 were women. In the run-up to the 2015 General Election, the SNP Business Convener Derek Mackay commented on the step-change he felt that the party had taken on women's representation:

Traditionally what was seen as a problem for the SNP was not having more women elected members. Even if we had high-profile women in our ranks, there was a deeper issue around women joining the party and that is now largely resolved. The proportion of the membership who are female is now 44 per cent.⁷⁴

70. In March 2015 the SNP voted to introduce institutional mechanisms to increase the proportion of women parliamentary candidates for election to the Scottish Parliament. The party's National Executive Committee may now direct a local constituency branch or local association to use an all-women shortlist when an "incumbent SNP constituency MSP announces their intention to stand down" and will also have the power to introduce candidates to shortlists to enhance gender balance.⁷⁵ The SNP states that as a result of this mechanism, 43 per cent of SNP parliamentary candidates that were elected to the Scottish Parliament in May 2016 were women.⁷⁶

71. Angus Robertson MP, the party's Westminster group leader, acknowledged that the introduction of such mechanisms had met some resistance within the party.⁷⁷ However, he told us that interventions and mechanisms within parties were the "only way that you can right the imbalance"⁷⁸ of under-representation, and added that the SNP has:

73 Q56

74 Holyrood Magazine, [Interview with SNP Business Convener Derek Mackay](#) accessed 18 November 2016

75 Scottish National Party Westminster Group ([WHC0079](#))

76 Scottish National Party Westminster Group ([WHC0079](#))

77 Q74 [Angus Robertson]

78 Q76 [Angus Robertson]

gone on a journey that has seen us implement mechanisms, which have led to the significant change [in women’s parliamentary representation].⁷⁹

He also told us that the party will be introducing the use of all-women shortlists for local government elections in Scotland next year.⁸⁰

Liberal Democrats

72. The Liberal Democrats have historically had extremely low levels of women’s representation in the Commons. The party’s record high of 14.5 per cent, in the 2005 General Election, represented only 10 women out of 62 total MPs. The then Liberal Democrat Leader, Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP, told the Speaker’s Conference in 2009 that the party was “woefully unrepresentative of modern Britain” but that he was “hopeful it will change and change dramatically”.⁸¹ Unfortunately, after the 2010 General Election only seven of the party’s 57 MPs were women.⁸²

73. In the 2015 General Election the Liberal Democrats lost all but eight of their seats. In December 2016 the party won a by-election in which their candidate was a woman. However, all eight of the MPs returned at the General Election were men, despite the party having placed women in “35 per cent of their target seats” in the election, according to Professor Rosie Campbell and Professor Sarah Childs. They observed that:

Historically the Liberal Democrats have tended to place men in safer seats than women and this is probably the best explanation for why the residual Liberal Democrat MPs are all men.⁸³

74. A tendency for the party to have male candidates in safer seats was also noticeable in the analysis by the House of Commons Library of the 2015 General Election. The Library identified that in the 2015 General Election, “none of the 11 safest Liberal Democrat seats (those with a marginality of 20 per cent or greater) had female Liberal Democrat candidates”.⁸⁴ In other words, the Liberal Democrat candidates in 2015 for the 11 seats where the party’s margin of victory had been over 20 per cent in 2010 were all men. The Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Tim Farron MP, told us that in his experience there are “no safe seats for the Liberal Democrats”, but he did make a commitment to us that all-women shortlists would be used in the party’s “most winnable seats”.⁸⁵

75. Mr Farron also told us that he believed proportional representation and all-women shortlists were the two “defining factors” for achieving gender equality in Parliament.⁸⁶ Angus Robertson responded that “we have proportional representation in Scotland and we still had a problem”.⁸⁷

79 Q74 [Angus Robertson]

80 Q74 [Angus Robertson]

81 [Q460](#) and [Q462](#) [Mr Clegg] Speaker’s Conference on Parliamentary Representation 20 October 2009

82 Q77 [Tim Farron]

83 Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell ([WHC0065](#))

84 House of Commons Library [Women in Parliament and Government](#) p.11

85 Q77 and Q100 [Tim Farron]

86 Q81 [Tim Farron]

87 Q91 [Tim Farron] and Q92 [Angus Robertson]

Other political parties

76. We invited written submissions to this inquiry from all 11 of the political parties currently represented in the Commons and received responses from the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and the Green Party in addition to the four parties from which we took oral evidence. We also received a submission from the Women's Equality Party. We did not receive evidence from the UK Independence Party, which had 13 per cent women candidates in the 2015 General Election, Plaid Cymru, which had 25 per cent women candidates, or the Democratic Unionist Party, which did not run any women in the 18 constituencies it contested.⁸⁸

77. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) currently has one woman out of its three MPs. The party told us that it uses women's groups to provide "bespoke and targeted training for our female members in all manners of party activity including running for office".⁸⁹ The SDLP also works with external organisations to develop its female members and "ensure a more representative slate of candidates". The party also told us that it is analysing the approach taken by the Irish parliament in the Oireachtas Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2010.⁹⁰ This legislation obliged parties to run at least 30 per cent women candidates in the next general election or face a penalty of losing half of the state funding they receive annually; the threshold was set to rise to 40 per cent seven years thereafter.⁹¹

78. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) is represented by two male MPs in the Commons. The UUP told us that it uses two main means of increasing women's representation within its own party: holding outreach activities to encourage women to become members, and having support such as training and mentoring for its female members and potential candidates.⁹² In 2009 the party founded the Dame Dehra Parker Programme which provides "seminars for female members of the party to build knowledge, develop skills and support women in the party".⁹³ The UUP also plans to launch a mentoring scheme in 2017 to help and support its young women in achieving their political goals.

79. The Green Party's only MP is a woman. The party told us that it aims to have 50 per cent women candidates in general elections, and described the measures it has taken to help achieve this, described below.⁹⁴ The Green Party attributed to these measures its success in having the highest number and proportion of women parliamentary candidates out of all political parties in the 2015 General Election.⁹⁵ In addition, the party told us that several of its local branches run training schemes which help both men and women with "the skills they will need to be excellent local councillors".⁹⁶

80. We also received evidence from the Women's Equality Party which describes itself as a "non-partisan political party" which has a core goal of "equal representation in politics,

88 House of Commons Library [General Election 2015](#) p.58

89 Social Democrat and Labour Party ([WHC0074](#))

90 Social Democrat and Labour Party ([WHC0074](#))

91 Fiona Buckley, '[How to make gender quotas work](#)', August 2013

92 Ulster Unionist Party ([WHC0082](#))

93 Ulster Unionist Party ([WHC0082](#))

94 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))

95 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))

96 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))

business, industry and throughout working life”.⁹⁷ Evidence from the party expressed support for the implementation of legislative quotas as a temporary measure to increase the number of women parliamentary candidates.⁹⁸

Strategies used by political parties to increase the number of women in the House of Commons and elected office and their effectiveness

81. Political parties use two main methods to improve the under-representation of women in their party as Members of Parliament. Firstly there are voluntary approaches, such as mentoring and training their most talented women members to develop them in becoming parliamentary candidates. Secondly, parties have used institutional measures, such as empowering local associations to use all-women shortlists in nominating the best candidate from a list of women to stand as the parliamentary candidate for their constituency.

Voluntary approaches

82. The Conservatives, Labour, the SNP and the Liberal Democrats all use voluntary measures to improve the under-representation of women MPs.

83. The Conservative Party has two main mentoring organisations for women members: the Conservative Women’s Organisation and Women 2 Win. The party told us that their candidates team works alongside these organisations which “invest a lot of time with women candidates [...] in training, supporting and mentoring”.⁹⁹ The outcomes of these programmes in the last Parliament were that:

123 women attended workshops. 31 per cent of this group were advised to enter the candidate selection process, 44 per cent of whom went on to become parliamentary candidates, and most then became MPs.¹⁰⁰

The Conservative Women’s Organisation highlighted that, of the 20 new Conservative women MPs elected in 2015, 56 per cent came through the organisation’s “development pipeline”.¹⁰¹

84. The Labour Party told us that it runs a wide range of training programmes both regionally and nationally which have an objective of “increasing the diversity of role holders within the party, from branch level to national leadership positions”.¹⁰² The Labour Women’s Network (LWN) is a voluntary organisation affiliated to the party which exists to “secure the election of more Labour women to public office at every level”.¹⁰³ The LWN will be delivering the recently-established Jo Cox Women in Leadership Programme which plans to train over 600 women to be “future leaders in the Labour Party, in elected office, and in public life”.¹⁰⁴

97 The Women’s Equality Party ([WHC0032](#))

98 The Women’s Equality Party ([WHC0032](#))

99 The Conservative Party ([WHC0074](#))

100 The Conservative Party ([WHC0074](#))

101 Conservative Women’s Organisation ([WHC0035](#))

102 The Labour Party ([WHC0078](#)), p.3

103 The Labour Party ([WHC0078](#)), p.3

104 The Labour Party ([WHC0078](#)), p.3

85. The SNP holds party conferences specifically to promote under-represented groups. Angus Robertson told us that:

We have had a women’s academy. We have had a women’s conference. We have this coming weekend the first equalities conference, which brings together the different minority strands, including disabled members. We also have a disabled conference.¹⁰⁵

A “National Women’s and Equalities Convener” within the party is responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of equality strategies. The Convener also works to support women’s officers and chairs in the SNP Women’s Academy on equality issues such as vetting and selection.¹⁰⁶

86. We are in no doubt that work on a voluntary basis to help women members of political parties is extremely valuable in getting women interested in politics and in supporting women to hold public office. We would like all political parties to adopt, fund and promote training and development programmes for their women members. This should include high-quality programmes specifically aimed at helping women become parliamentary candidates for general elections.

Institutional initiatives

87. In addition to voluntary measures political parties use institutional initiatives such as all-women shortlists and fielding women in winnable seats to help increase the number of women parliamentary candidates and MPs.

88. The Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 allows political parties to use all-women shortlists to select candidates for UK parliamentary elections, elections to the European Parliament, elections to the Scottish Parliament, elections to the National Assembly for Wales and most local government elections.¹⁰⁷ The Equality Act 2010 extended the period in which all-women shortlists may be used until 2030.¹⁰⁸

89. The use of all-women shortlists has been controversial within political parties. There has been strongest resistance within the Conservative Party but the Liberal Democrats, SNP and Labour have also on occasion been divided over the issue.¹⁰⁹ All-women shortlists were adopted by the Labour Party in the run-up to the 1997 General Election. The SNP and the Liberal Democrats have recently voted to empower their local and national decision-making bodies to use all-women shortlists for the selection of parliamentary candidates.¹¹⁰

90. Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell drew attention to the Labour Party’s use of all-women shortlists in securing an increase in the number of women elected at the 2015 General Election:

105 Q76 [Angus Robertson]

106 Scottish National Party Westminster Group ([WHC0079](#))

107 House of Commons Library [All-women shortlists](#) p.4

108 House of Commons Library [All-women shortlists](#) p.4

109 House of Commons Library [All-women shortlists](#) p.15

110 Q74 [Angus Robertson] and Q77 [Tim Farron]

The overall increase was largely driven by the Labour Party and the SNP who increased the percentage of women among their MPs from 35 per cent to 43 per cent and 17 per cent to 36 per cent respectively. The Labour Party delivered this increase through their continued use of all-women shortlists.¹¹¹

91. When asked why the Conservative Party does not use all-women shortlists, the Party Chairman Sir Patrick McLoughlin told us:

The progress we have made over the last 10 years has been through measures we have taken that have been acceptable within the Conservative party. If we were not making that sort of progress, obviously we would have to look at other means available to us.¹¹²

92. The Green Party informed us that it does not use all-women shortlists because it would “be difficult to implement when local parties have sovereignty”.¹¹³ However, the party does have other institutional mechanisms in place to increase the number of women candidates; for example, in 2012 the party introduced a rule that it would “aim for at least 50 per cent women candidates in general elections”.¹¹⁴ In 2013 the party also passed a rule stating:

If no woman comes forward during the selection process for a constituency, the nominations have to be re-opened for a further two weeks to allow a woman to come forward. This time is used to try and encourage more women to stand.¹¹⁵

The Green Party told us that these measures, among others, led to the party “achiev[ing] 38 per cent women candidates in the 2015 General Election”, putting them ahead of all other political parties in terms of the number and proportion of women candidates.¹¹⁶

93. Engender argued that, whilst gender quotas are not a panacea, they are an “evidence-based tool to fast-track change and compensate for the persistent barriers that women face when seeking public office”.¹¹⁷ Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell put forward the view that quotas for women in politics are the “most effective means” by which to increase the numbers of women MPs:

There is a 10 percentage point difference in the number of women MPs between countries that do and do not employ sex quotas. Of those countries with more than 30 percent women Members of Parliament, over 80 percent use some kind of quota.¹¹⁸

However, they also told us that whilst quotas can very quickly deliver, they “never think that [quotas] are the solution in and of themselves”, and that “quota plus strategies” which supplement quotas with other mechanisms are preferable.¹¹⁹

111 House of Commons Library [All-women shortlists](#) p.6

112 Q73 [Sir Patrick McLoughlin]

113 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))

114 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))

115 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))

116 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))

117 Engender ([WHC0081](#))

118 Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell ([WHC0065](#))

119 Q13 [Professor Childs]

94. Chwarae Teg, a charity working for the development of women, told us that quotas must work in conjunction with supply-chain initiatives to be effective:

Quotas in isolation will not deliver lasting change but as part of a range of measures, which include improving the supply chain of female MPs, addressing the structural barriers presented by our political institutions and persistent gender stereotypes, sustainable change can be achieved.¹²⁰

95. A further factor that must be considered is the financial risk of standing for office. Professor Rosie Campbell told us:

Obviously there are some people who get support, say from trade unions, but the upper end of the range that people said they had spent on selection expenses was £80,000. That can include things like renting places or childcare, potentially—a wide range of factors. That goes alongside risk: if you are standing in a marginal constituency you may get it and then step outside of a career or the job market for five years.¹²¹

96. Political parties need to have stronger and more visible outreach initiatives to attract and engage women. As part of this, parties should give in-depth consideration of how they can further support their women’s organisations in attracting and developing prospective parliamentary candidates.

97. We are additionally concerned that political parties should provide support for young women and women entering politics for the first time, often at local government level. There should be robust procedures in place to prevent intimidation, bullying or sexual harassment, along with actions that help ensure that their first experience of elected office is a positive one.

98. We believe that there is no one mechanism which is the solution to ensure that women are represented equally in the House of Commons; a mixture of voluntary and institutional initiatives are required. Supply-side interventions such as training and mentoring are important for encouraging women’s participation in politics. However, the critical step of having more women elected into the House of Commons requires additional institutional initiatives and drive from political parties to select more women as parliamentary candidates.

99. The evidence demonstrates that the use of all-women shortlists has been very effective in increasing the number of women MPs. We support the continued use of all-women shortlists by political parties, and welcome the decision taken by the SNP and the Liberal Democrats to join the Labour Party in using them as part of their processes for selecting parliamentary candidates for the 2020 General Election. We believe that forcing parties to use all-women shortlists is not desirable, but that allowing parties to continue using or to adopt this tool is important. *We recommend that the Government extend the time for which the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 is in force, in order to allow political parties to use all-women shortlists beyond 2030.*

120 Chwarae Teg ([WHC0029](#))

121 Q7 [Professor Campbell]

Are political parties taking their responsibility seriously enough?

100. Despite the wide range of voluntary and institutional initiatives detailed by political parties in their evidence, the fact remains that progress towards a gender-balanced House of Commons has been slow. We were grateful to representatives of the Conservatives, Labour, SNP and the Liberal Democrats for coming to give oral evidence to us, which gave us the opportunity to probe how seriously those in leadership positions in the parties were taking their responsibility to initiate and lead change.

101. Overall, we were disappointed in the lack of substance given in the responses to our questions. All witnesses acknowledged that more must be done to improve the under-representation of women as parliamentary candidates and MPs in their own parties, but they failed to give much detail on how they aimed to achieve this. For example, when asked about what the Conservative Party would be doing to support women in marginal seats, the party Chairman responded by saying “Quite a bit, but I am not necessarily prepared to say it to an all-party committee”.¹²²

102. The Conservative Party, Scottish National Party and the Liberal Democrats all told us that Parliament would benefit from having 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women.¹²³ The Labour Party leader told us that his party would aim for at least 50 per cent representation of its women MPs in the 2020 General Election.¹²⁴ However, the witnesses failed to demonstrate leadership and responsibility for meeting this target. For example, both Sir Patrick and Jeremy Corbyn distanced themselves from the possibility of intervening in the selection processes for in local branches to further encourage the consideration of women candidates.¹²⁵

103. Representation of women is important not only as parliamentary candidates, but in other arenas in political parties. This is because the involvement of women throughout the political process is crucial in ensuring a pipeline of potential candidates, but also because it can be considered a barometer for how seriously the parties are taking the issue of gender equality. We put it to the Conservative Party Chairman that only two of the 10 directors of the party were women and that there was only one woman among the 12 members of the executive of the 1922 Committee.¹²⁶ Sir Patrick responded that we were “right in some ways” to describe the party as a whole as “very male-dominated” but he argued that sometimes “people do not want to put themselves forward for various bodies. You cannot force them to do that”.¹²⁷ The Labour Party has addressed a historic gender imbalance by instituting mechanisms for equal representation on party boards and management committees, including voluntary and unpaid roles.

104. We observed that only two of the Labour Party’s 18 elected mayors since 2002 have been women.¹²⁸ Jeremy Corbyn acknowledged that this was “a problem area” and that he has asked the Labour Party’s National Executive Committee to review using all-women

122 Q71 [Sir Patrick McLoughlin]

123 Q99 [Angus Robertson, Sir Patrick McLoughlin and Tim Farron]

124 Q56 [Jeremy Corbyn]

125 See, for example, Q58 [Sir Patrick McLoughlin] and Q43 [Jeremy Corbyn]

126 Q61 [Maria Caulfield]

127 Q61 [Sir Patrick McLoughlin]

128 Q34 [Gavin Shuker]

shortlists for mayoral candidate elections.¹²⁹ Legislation currently in place precludes this, as the Sex Discrimination (Electoral Candidates) Act 2002 pre-dates the institution of many elected mayor posts.¹³⁰

105. The position of women in local government is almost as poor as it is in Parliament. In 2013, 32 per cent of local authority councillors in England were women; the breakdown within party groups was 29.1 per cent Conservative, 36.7 per cent Labour, 33.4 per cent Liberal Democrat, 11.4 per cent UKIP and 37.9 per cent Green Party, with 26.4 per cent of independent or residents' association councillors being women. In Scotland, 24 per cent of councillors elected at the 2012 local government elections were women and in Wales that figure was 26 per cent. In Northern Ireland in 2014, 25 per cent of councillors were women.¹³¹

106. Party leaders need to demonstrate a clear sense of direction towards increasing women's representation within their parliamentary parties. Party leadership must work in closer collaboration with their national decision-making bodies and local associations to deliver equality of opportunity for prospective women parliamentary candidates. Each political party needs to recognise the need to pull its weight in achieving gender equality; none of them can afford either to rest on their laurels or assume that better-performing parties will deliver an increase in women MPs by themselves.

107. We saw little evidence of robust work being conducted within parties to analyse the likely effectiveness of different mechanisms for achieving gender balance, or to set out detailed road maps for reaching that destination. Evidence of gender inequality persisting in decision-making bodies within parties is concerning, as is the attribution of such inequality to lack of demand by women to participate. Party strategies for increasing the number of women MPs should recognise the need to achieve better representation in these internal forums, and among candidates for other types of elected office including in local government.

108. We recommend that the Government bring forward legislative proposals to update the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 to allow all-women shortlists for all elected mayor and police and crime commissioner posts.

Women candidates in winnable seats

109. Analysis by the Electoral Reform Society, an independent campaigning organisation, has shown that the selection of seats in which parties field their women candidates is "pivotal to the final result in terms of gender equality".¹³² Professor Rosie Campbell and Professor Sarah Childs explained that the key to increasing the number of women MPs at any individual election is for political parties to:

Ensure that as many women as possible are selected for their vacant held and winnable seats; in other words, those seats that are most likely to successfully return MPs to Westminster.¹³³

129 Q34 [Jeremy Corbyn]

130 The Labour Party ([WHC0078](#))

131 House of Commons Library

132 Electoral Reform Society [Women in Westminster report](#) March 2015

133 Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell ([WHC0065](#)) p.4

110. We have seen no agreed definition of the term “winnable seat”; we understand that to a large extent parties’ understanding of what is “winnable” will be subjective, and it may be considered strategically important to keep this information confidential as well. Nonetheless, the concept was clearly at the forefront of the minds of the party leaders that we heard from.

111. Sir Patrick McLoughlin told us that the Conservative Party’s overall strategy was to “get more women into winnable seats”.¹³⁴ Tim Farron told us that “our job is to make sure that women are in winnable seats”; he also committed to implementing all-women shortlists in the Liberal Democrats’ “most winnable” seats.¹³⁵ Similarly, Jeremy Corbyn told us that women MPs in general tend to represent “more marginal than safe constituencies” and that he wants to:

Look very carefully at all-women shortlists, so they are not just in the totality of constituencies, but in ones that are more likely to be won by us [the Labour Party], to ensure that we do achieve the 50%.¹³⁶

112. Fair Play South West, a women’s equality organisation, advocated all political parties using “positive action” measures in winnable seats.¹³⁷

113. The Electoral Reform Society expressed the view that progress towards women’s representation in the Commons is hindered by the incumbency effect—that “women’s representation generally declines the longer MPs have held their seats as incumbents are overwhelmingly male”.¹³⁸ This means that political parties, such as the Conservative Party, which are adopting a ‘no colleague left behind’ approach to parliamentary candidate selections for the 2020 General Election, after reform of constituency boundaries, must take into consideration the incumbency barrier when selecting candidates; if it is assumed that sitting MPs will continue to contest the seat they hold, there is likely to be an overall bias towards male candidates.

114. A key element of parties taking responsibility for increasing the number of women in the House is ensuring that women are put in positions to win. Within their overall strategies for candidate selection, all political parties should explicitly identify winnable seats and adopt ambitious targets for women candidates in those seats; 50 per cent should be the minimum. Transparency on these points would enable the public to see exactly how seriously parties take the task of increasing women’s parliamentary representation.

134 Q29 [Sir Patrick McLoughlin]

135 Q78 [Tim Farron] and Q100 [Tim Farron]

136 Q46 and Q100 [Jeremy Corbyn]

137 Fair Play South West ([WHC00012](#))

138 Electoral Reform Society [Women in Westminster report](#) March 2015

5 Conclusion

115. We are in no doubt that a representative and diverse House of Commons is beneficial for the effective functioning of a parliamentary democracy. We want to see fair representation of many different groups of people, including women, ethnic and religious minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, people from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, disabled people and more. Our focus on women in this report should not be taken as a lack of interest in diversity more generally; we consider that achieving equality in terms of gender will help to achieve equality for all.

116. Our Parliament should be a world leader in women's representation, but it is clear that there is much to do before we achieve this. We have outlined some of the actions the Government, political parties and the House of Commons itself can take. Our overarching message is that there is no room for complacency; laudable aspirations unattached to practical action will not achieve the scale of change that is needed, nor will trusting in long-term trends without intervention to accelerate their pace. In particular, we are concerned that positive trends could reverse or stagnate in 2020 as an unintended consequence of the planned reduction of seats in the Commons.

117. Political parties bear the lion's share of the responsibility for ensuring that this does not happen: they must recruit and support talented women and put them in positions from which they can win seats. We look to the leaders of those parties to imbue these efforts with the urgency and priority they require. We ask the Government to put in place the means to hold them to account for their performance, and to be prepared to mandate change where the challenge is not met voluntarily.

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

1. We are concerned that Parliament is failing to be a world leader on women's representation. The under-representation of women MPs does not only represent a serious democratic deficit; it also means that the UK is missing out on the benefits of having gender balance in its highest decision-making body. As the gatekeepers of political office, political parties are in a key position to improve the representation of women in the Commons. Some parties already have policies to help promote women to become MPs, but their current initiatives are evidently unsatisfactory since there have still only ever been the same number of women MPs as there are men in the Commons today. (Paragraph 7)

The role of Parliament in women's inclusion and representation

2. Improving the representation of women in the Commons would allow women to have a proportionate level of participation into the laws and decision-making processes that will ultimately affect their lives and in some cases, the lives of women globally. The evidence shows that diversity helps to improve the effectiveness of decision-making bodies and increasing women's representation is a key part of achieving this. (Paragraph 19)
3. *We recommend that the Government set a domestic target of 45 per cent representation of women in Parliament and local government by 2030 in response to the United Nations indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 5.5. The Government should also set out how it plans to achieve this target, working with political parties.* (Paragraph 21)
4. A representative and inclusive House of Commons is essential for the fully effective functioning of a parliamentary democracy. The laws that are passed in the Commons affect the lives of all those living in the UK; in this respect, the House itself holds a unique responsibility to take steps towards being representative of the population. (Paragraph 26)
5. It has in the past been difficult to identify a vehicle for the House to act on this institutional responsibility. We welcome the introduction of the Commons Reference Group on Parliamentary Representation and Inclusion, and we look forward to the group making the inclusion and representation of women in the House a key priority for Parliament. (Paragraph 27)
6. The House Service should adopt a core stream of work in its public engagement and educational activities focusing on women's participation in democracy and standing for election. This core work should be set up to function before the 2020 General Election. The House authorities should consider working in conjunction with political parties and organisations that encourage political involvement from under-represented groups to identify prospective women parliamentary candidates who could benefit from parliamentary outreach initiatives. (Paragraph 29)

7. We welcome IPSA's intention to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment subsequent to its most recent consultation on the MPs' Scheme of Business Costs and Expenses. We also welcome the introduction of IPSA's new fundamental principle that the expenses scheme should take into account MPs' diverse working arrangements and should not unduly deter people from any part of society from seeking to become a Member of Parliament. We recommend that IPSA explicitly describe in its future Equality Impact Assessments how it is upholding this principle in relation not only to new elements of the Scheme, but to elements carried over from the previous Schemes. (Paragraph 39)

Promoting women parliamentary candidates

8. We fully respect that the electorate ultimately decides who represents them in the House of Commons. However, it is political parties rather than voters that decide who stands for election, and having more women parliamentary candidates is a necessary precondition to improving the representation of women in Parliament. All of the main political parties fielded significantly less than 50 per cent women parliamentary candidates for the 2015 General Election, which undermined the equality of opportunity for women to be elected. Political parties must take greater ownership of this issue by making gender balance in candidate selection for general elections a key priority. This process needs to start earlier rather than later so that there is a strong supply of excellent prospective women parliamentary candidates from which local associations can select. (Paragraph 45)
9. *We recommend that the Government should seek to introduce, in legislation in this Parliament, a statutory minimum proportion of female parliamentary candidates in general elections for each political party. While the goal is equality, we recognise the difficulty inherent in setting this statutory minimum at 50 per cent; such a precise target would be difficult to meet while also ensuring that men did not become under-represented. A minimum of 45 per cent would therefore be acceptable. The measure would need to be subject to a minimum threshold for parties contesting only a small number of constituencies. This measure should be brought into force if the number and proportion of women MPs fails to increase significantly after the 2020 General Election.* (Paragraph 46)
10. *Parties that fail to comply with this target need to face sanctions for the quota to be effective. The Government should consider a range of possible sanctions, which could include deductions from Policy Development Grants, confiscation of deposits in seats where female candidates have not been fielded, or legislating to extend the remit of the Electoral Commission to introduce fines for non-compliance.* (Paragraph 47)
11. In light of the proposed reduction of seats in the House of Commons to 600, we recommend that political parties should publicly set out the measures they plan to take to increase the proportion and number of women parliamentary candidates in 2020. This is necessary to ensure that the previous positive trends do not stagnate or reverse. While the boundary review itself need not result in a lower proportion of women MPs, without intervention from the parties, regression may be an unintended consequence. There is no room for complacency. (Paragraph 53)

12. *We recommend that the Government immediately bring into force the statutory requirement for political parties to publish their parliamentary candidate diversity data for general elections, as set out in Section 106 of the Equality Act 2010. Publication of this information is vital for public and parliamentary scrutiny of the record of political parties in selecting a diverse slate of parliamentary candidates. We also recommend that the Government bring forward legislative proposals to empower the Electoral Commission to collect and host this data, to ensure consistency and transparency from political parties.* (Paragraph 58)

The role of political parties in improving women's representation in the House of Commons

13. All political parties must accept that they have the primary responsibility for making the Commons more diverse and representative of modern Britain. Action and transparency by political parties are therefore essential in improving the gender balance of parliamentary candidates and increasing women's representation as Members of Parliament. (Paragraph 60)
14. We are in no doubt that work on a voluntary basis to help women members of political parties is extremely valuable in getting women interested in politics and in supporting women to hold public office. We would like all political parties to adopt, fund and promote training and development programmes for their women members. This should include high-quality programmes specifically aimed at helping women become parliamentary candidates for general elections. (Paragraph 86)
15. Political parties need to have stronger and more visible outreach initiatives to attract and engage women. As part of this, parties should give in-depth consideration of how they can further support their women's organisations in attracting and developing prospective parliamentary candidates. (Paragraph 96)
16. We are additionally concerned that political parties should provide support for young women and women entering politics for the first time, often at local government level. There should be robust procedures in place to prevent intimidation, bullying or sexual harassment, along with actions that help ensure that their first experience of elected office is a positive one. (Paragraph 97)
17. We believe that there is no one mechanism which is the solution to ensure that women are represented equally in the House of Commons; a mixture of voluntary and institutional initiatives are required. Supply-side interventions such as training and mentoring are important for encouraging women's participation in politics. However, the critical step of having more women elected into the House of Commons requires additional institutional initiatives and drive from political parties to select more women as parliamentary candidates. (Paragraph 98)
18. *We recommend that the Government extend the time for which the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 is in force, in order to allow political parties to use all-women shortlists beyond 2030.* (Paragraph 99)

19. Party leaders need to demonstrate a clear sense of direction towards increasing women's representation within their parliamentary parties. Party leadership must work in closer collaboration with their national decision-making bodies and local associations to deliver equality of opportunity for prospective women parliamentary candidates. Each political party needs to recognise the need to pull its weight in achieving gender equality; none of them can afford either to rest on their laurels or assume that better-performing parties will deliver an increase in women MPs by themselves. (Paragraph 106)
20. We saw little evidence of robust work being conducted within parties to analyse the likely effectiveness of different mechanisms for achieving gender balance, or to set out detailed road maps for reaching that destination. Evidence of gender inequality persisting in decision-making bodies within parties is concerning, as is the attribution of such inequality to lack of demand by women to participate. Party strategies for increasing the number of women MPs should recognise the need to achieve better representation in these internal forums, and among candidates for other types of elected office including in local government. (Paragraph 107)
21. *We recommend that the Government bring forward legislative proposals to update the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 to allow all-women shortlists for all elected mayor and police and crime commissioner posts.* (Paragraph 108)
22. A key element of parties taking responsibility for increasing the number of women in the House is ensuring that women are put in positions to win. Within their overall strategies for candidate selection, all political parties should explicitly identify winnable seats and adopt ambitious targets for women candidates in those seats; 50 per cent should be the minimum. Transparency on these points would enable the public to see exactly how seriously parties take the task of increasing women's parliamentary representation. (Paragraph 114)

Annex: Terms of Reference

The inquiry was launched on 9 August 2016. The call for evidence stated:

The Committee's inquiry will consider three key areas:

- 1) What should the Government, political parties, the House of Commons and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority be doing now to ensure better female representation in the House of Commons in 2020 and beyond?
- 2) What are the political parties doing to ensure that female representation will increase at the next general election given the impact that the 2018 Boundary Commission Review could have
- 3) What further changes are needed to improve retention of women MPs?

Written evidence should be submitted addressing the themes outlined above, and the following specific issues to the Committee by 12 September 2016.

- What steps are and should be being taken to increase the percentage of women MPs in the House of Commons in 2020 and beyond? Is there a need to reach out to certain groups of women and how can this be done most effectively? What targets and what methods should parties be using for selection? What are the key timings?
- What is the likely expected impact of the 2018 Boundary Commission Review? Have parties made the impact of this on female representation enough of a priority?
- Are parties giving sufficient attention to female representation at other levels of political life, including Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners?
- What additional issues relating to retention of women MPs need to be considered? What are the parties doing in response to the Administration Committee's 2015 and 2016 report on interview studies with women MPs and leaving MPs? How can a consensus be reached on emerging proposals from The Good Parliament report?

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 14 December 2016

Members present:

Mrs Maria Miller, in the Chair

Tracy Brabin

Jess Phillips

Maria Caulfield

Mr Gavin Shuker

Mrs Flick Drummond

Draft Report (*Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 election*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, that the draft report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 117 read and agreed to

Annex and Summary agreed to

Resolved, That the report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the report be made available in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 10 January 2017]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 14 September 2016

Question number

Professor Rosie Campbell, Professor of Politics, Birkbeck, University of London, **Professor Sarah Childs**, Professor of Politics and Gender, University of Bristol, and **Lord Hayward OBE**.

[Q1–22](#)

Wednesday 12 October 2016

Rt Hon Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party, **Tim Farron MP**, Leader of the Liberal Democrats, **Rt Hon Sir Patrick McLoughlin MP**, Chair, Conservative Party, and **Rt Hon Angus Robertson MP**, Leader, SNP Westminster Group.

[Q23–100](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

WHC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 50:50 Parliament Campaign ([WHC0067](#))
- 2 Alison Gibbon ([WHC0018](#))
- 3 Baroness Mary Goudie ([WHC0013](#))
- 4 Beate Shaw ([WHC0017](#))
- 5 Belona Greenwood ([WHC0025](#))
- 6 Benjamin Verran ([WHC0063](#))
- 7 Brenda Ellis ([WHC0007](#))
- 8 Brian Rigby ([WHC0046](#))
- 9 British Academy ([WHC0030](#))
- 10 Bumps and the Boardroom ([WHC0070](#))
- 11 Caroline Halliday ([WHC0011](#))
- 12 Cheryl Andrews ([WHC0020](#))
- 13 Chwarae Teg ([WHC0029](#))
- 14 Conservative Women's Organisation ([WHC0035](#))
- 15 Dr Anne Baldwin ([WHC0047](#))
- 16 Dr Annemarie Bostyn ([WHC0009](#))
- 17 Dr Clive Sneddon ([WHC0028](#))
- 18 Dr Deirdre Marrable ([WHC0043](#))
- 19 Dr John Bancroft ([WHC0005](#))
- 20 Dr John Bancroft ([WHC0016](#))
- 21 Dr Penelope Turton ([WHC0048](#))
- 22 Dr Ute Navidi ([WHC0038](#))
- 23 Dr Venkatarama Subramanian ([WHC0050](#))
- 24 Engender ([WHC0081](#))
- 25 Erika Loch ([WHC0040](#))
- 26 Fair Play South West ([WHC0012](#))
- 27 Gaynor Guthrie ([WHC0024](#))
- 28 Girlguiding ([WHC0027](#))
- 29 Green Party ([WHC0085](#))
- 30 Gwen Marshall ([WHC0008](#))
- 31 Helen Belcher ([WHC0077](#))
- 32 HM Government ([WHC0073](#))
- 33 Inspiration for Success ([WHC0036](#))

- 34 Kashmiri Hawker ([WHC0031](#))
- 35 KREAB ([WHC0054](#))
- 36 Liberal Democrats ([WHC0083](#))
- 37 Linda Mills ([WHC0049](#))
- 38 Martin Wilkinson ([WHC0072](#))
- 39 Mary Golder-Hayes ([WHC0068](#))
- 40 Michael Giles ([WHC0014](#))
- 41 Michael Shaw ([WHC0069](#))
- 42 Miss Christine Webb ([WHC0058](#))
- 43 Miss Kathryn Mooney ([WHC0060](#))
- 44 Miss Lucy Piggott - ([WHC0042](#))
- 45 Miss Mary Hickford ([WHC0055](#))
- 46 Mr Andrew Patrick ([WHC0051](#))
- 47 Mr John West ([WHC0037](#))
- 48 Mr Oliver Bradbury ([WHC0041](#))
- 49 Mr Tiernan MacNamara ([WHC0023](#))
- 50 Mrs Rachel Brown ([WHC0064](#))
- 51 Ms Catherine Charles ([WHC0004](#))
- 52 Ms Deborah Marshall ([WHC0002](#))
- 53 Ms Elspeth Crichton Stuart ([WHC0015](#))
- 54 Ms Jill Smyth ([WHC0039](#))
- 55 Ms Lesley Abdela ([WHC0071](#))
- 56 Ms Mairi Cumming ([WHC0022](#))
- 57 Ms Shannon Whyborne ([WHC0053](#))
- 58 Ms Vivien Gordon ([WHC0045](#))
- 59 Pauline Nowosiad ([WHC0052](#))
- 60 Professor John Bancroft ([WHC0044](#))
- 61 Professor Sarah Childs and Professor Rosie Campbell ([WHC0065](#))
- 62 Professor Susan Banducci ([WHC0034](#))
- 63 Programme for Popular Participation in Parliament ([WHC0056](#))
- 64 Richard Lyons ([WHC0019](#))
- 65 Scottish National Party Westminster Group ([WHC0079](#))
- 66 The Conservative Party ([WHC0074](#))
- 67 The Fawcett Society ([WHC0075](#))
- 68 The Fawcett Society ([WHC0084](#))
- 69 The Labour Party ([WHC0078](#))
- 70 The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) ([WHC0080](#))
- 71 The Women in Public Service Project ([WHC0061](#))

72 The Women's Equality Party ([WHC0032](#))

73 Ulster Unionist Party ([WHC0082](#))

74 Victoria Ash ([WHC0062](#))

75 Wendy Lindsay ([WHC0010](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2015–16

First Report	Transgender Equality	HC 390 (Cm 9301)
Second Report	Gender Pay Gap	HC 584
Third Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission	HC 599

Session 2016–17

First Report	Maternity and Pregnancy discrimination	HC 90
Second Report	Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK	HC 89 (Cm 9371)
Third Report	Sexual Harassment and sexual violence in schools	HC 89 (HC 826)
Fourth Report	Equalities Analysis and the 2015 Spending Review and Autumn Statement	HC 825
First Special Report	Sexual Harassment and sexual violence in schools: Government response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2016–17	HC 826