



**LIBERAL DEMOCRATS** Autumn Conference

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# Real Women

## Clear print version

real lives · real solutions · real women

[www.realwomen.org.uk](http://www.realwomen.org.uk)

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# Introduction

Women face pressure from all directions these days. Hit hard by the recession, trying to juggle family commitments with work and home life, it's easy to feel like you're running just to stand still. The media screams out an endless list of things still to do: get a bikini body in 20 days, plan the perfect children's party, how to look 10 years younger. Despite great strides forward in equality, women still get paid less than men, and generally still end up taking more responsibility for childcare and looking after elderly relatives. This can be hugely rewarding, but combining this with a job can seem almost impossible. There's a lot the Government could do to give a helping hand. Making employers check for pay discrimination would help women get the money they deserve. Providing 20 hours per week free childcare would allow parents to make real choices about returning to work. Enabling everyone to ask for flexible working would help to change the rigid work culture, and make it easier to juggle different commitments. And it would be nice to inject some realism into the media's portrayal of women, instead of the suggestion that nothing less than perfection will do. In this paper we set out what the Liberal Democrats would do differently, to help real women. Our most distinctive new ideas are in this paper, and I hope you like them. You can let me know what you think at [jo@realwomen.org.uk](mailto:jo@realwomen.org.uk)

Take care,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' followed by a smaller 'o'.

# Real Money

## A fair deal at work and beyond

The old arguments about the gender pay gap being a fiction will not do. Official government figures show the full-time gender pay gap has actually been getting worse. Nearly forty years after the Equal Pay Act, it is simply unacceptable for women to be paid less than men, just because they are women. Why is it that women end up in the lowest paid types of work? Why is it that part-time work is so badly paid and that quality part-time roles are few and far between? Recovery from the recession must not mean just going back to business as usual. What we need is real change for the better, change which really helps women.

## Tackling the pay gap

1. Help women find out if they are being paid less than others doing a similar job, by making companies and organisations publish data on their pay scales and conduct pay audits
2. Enable people to work together to tackle pay discrimination, by bringing representative actions on behalf of a group, rather than each individual fighting their case alone.
3. Allow women who have faced 'simultaneous discrimination' due to their ethnicity, sexuality or disability, to bring a case on more than one ground
4. Allow the use of 'hypothetical comparators' in equal pay claims so that things can change in professions dominated by women and characterised by low pay
5. Remove pre-interview sex discrimination with a 'no name' policy for job applications to stop employers making conscious (or subconscious) judgments about whether a woman can 'do the job'

“Increasing women’s participation and reducing gender segregation in the labour market could benefit the economy by up to £23 billion.”<sup>1</sup>

“Equal pay – the UK is number 81 out of 130 countries when it comes to measures of wage equality for similar work which puts it behind Tajikistan, Sri Lanka, Syria and China”<sup>2</sup>

“Regardless of socio-economic background, the top three jobs girls believed they would be working in were: teaching, childcare and beauty. Four times more boys compared to girls, believed they would go into engineering, with similar percentages of boys over girls choosing building, architecture, trade and IT careers.”<sup>3</sup>

## **Help Throughout Life**

6. Good careers advice to give young girls genuine choices and continued access to such advice throughout their working lives
7. Scrap tuition fees for all part-time and full-time degree courses
8. Help women over 25 going back to study by paying the fees for their first Level 3 qualifications
9. Roll out a network of financial advice centres and advertise their services through schools, bounty packs and children’s centres

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Women and Work Commission 2006

<sup>2</sup> Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2008

<sup>3</sup> Source: EHRC Staying On report

10. Cut income tax bills by increasing tax threshold to £10,000 – no income tax is paid on earnings under this amount
11. Ensure all divorcing women get information about benefits and entitlements
12. Immediately scrap compulsory retirement ages so people can choose when to give up work, rather than waste time on lengthy consultations on the issue
13. A Citizen's Pension for all based on residency and set above the poverty line, helping women who took time out from work to raise children. This would rise in line with earnings or inflation, whichever is higher
14. Scrap Council Tax and replace with a fairer system based on ability to pay

# Real Lives

## Juggling priorities and finding a balance

### Support for Families

15. Recruit and train thousands more health visitors and midwives. These professionals will advise new mothers and families on parenting skills including, advice on the health of a baby and support for relationships, which can become particularly strained when a new child arrives. We would set these professionals free from meaningless targets so that they could focus on the well-being of families and children
16. Provide twenty hours of free quality childcare per week, for all children from 18 months to when they start school, available to all parents regardless of working status or income

\* Liberal Democrats want women (and men) to have real choice after the birth of a child – parents should be free to go back to work full-time, part-time, or not at all.

17. Recognise the important role of fathers by replacing maternity leave with paid parental leave, extended to 19 months. This would be shared by both parents (no more than 12 months per parent, unless a single parent), and lost if not taken up
18. Encourage all divorcing couples to attend at least one mediation session when starting divorce proceedings, to minimise the number of hostile separations which have a negative impact on parents and children

“Businesses which try flexible working often find it works well, leading to a more motivated and productive workforce. An

information campaign about the practicalities and benefits of flexible working would help more businesses to reap the rewards of being flexible with their staff.”

### **Caitlin’s Story**

“Most of my working life has focused on international development and so involved lots of long trips abroad. This was a source of excitement when I had no children, a logistical and an emotional challenge when I had one, and a near impossibility with two. My main problem, now that my children are a little bit older, is the dearth of interesting part-time jobs. We have such a competitive work environment, that people only seem to be regarded as being of use if they are willing to do their jobs 24-7. Most workplaces have a macho work culture which doesn’t understand or take seriously the business of looking after children.”

### **Flexible working**

Many different studies suggest that although we live in a country which is relatively economically advanced, we are certainly not amongst the happiest nations. We work some of the longest hours in Europe and people are often forced to make stark choices between work and caring for children, older relatives or just pursuing outside interests.

Work needs to become more flexible. Real change will only come if there is a change in the UK’s working culture; many businesses do not currently understand the financial benefits of working flexibly. Liberal Democrats believe that everyone should be able to have a good work-life balance and that flexible working needs to become a norm across the country so that women are not penalised when they request it.

19. Extend the right to request flexible working to all employees, not just parents. This has already been done in Holland and would help to tackle the stigma some people attach to flexible working, and move away from a culture where productivity is measured by number of hours worked
20. Require all public sector employers to have a transparent policy for identifying and creating senior part-time and/or job share roles, working where appropriate with job brokerage services. Following successful piloting in the public sector, we would apply a similar requirement to private sector companies that are hoping to win big government contracts

# Real Women

Healthy, Happy and Confident

## A Campaign for 'Real Women'

Standards of female beauty have become progressively more unrealistic. In 1917, the physically perfect woman was about 5ft 4in tall and weighed nearly 10 stone. This is a dramatically different picture from the current media ideal which is achievable by less than 5% of the female population.<sup>4</sup> We are constantly presented with images of models who are young, tall, extremely thin and that have been made to look flawless with the use of airbrushing and retouching technology.

21. Protect children from body image pressure by preventing the use of altered and enhanced images in advertising aimed at under 16s, through changes to Advertising Standards Authority rules. We would work with industry regulators and professionals to find ways to ensure that children have access to more realistic portrayals of women (and men) in advertising
22. Help women make informed choices by requiring adverts to clearly indicate the extent to which digital retouching technology has been used to create overly perfected and unrealistic images of women
23. Encourage the British Fashion Council and design schools to ensure students are taught and judged on their ability to cut to a range of sizes and body types
24. The fashion industry should implement all the recommendations in the Model Health Inquiry, including introducing model health certificates for London Fashion Week

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<sup>4</sup> Source: Social Issues Research Centre

25. Require cosmetic surgery advertising and literature to give surgery success rates by collecting and publishing Patient Reported Outcome Measures. This would assess whether the surgery had the desired effects
26. Ensure age-appropriate modules on body image, health and wellbeing, and media literacy are taught in schools

\* 34,178 cosmetic surgery procedures were carried out in 2008, 91% for women. The most common procedures were breast enlargements, eyelid surgery, face lifts and tummy tucks.<sup>5</sup>

It is ridiculous that in a commercial market where the average body size is a sixteen, that trainee designers spend most of their time cutting to sizes six, eight and ten.

## **Promoting Health and Fitness**

Media images of women are often unrealistic and unattainable with little room for a range of body sizes and shapes – the problem of representation is worst of all for older women and disabled women.

A Grazia survey of 5000 women found that a third worry about the way their body looks “every waking minute”, and just one in 50 is happy with her body. This pressure has a negative effect on women’s wellbeing, and research increasingly shows that it creates body image issues and can contribute to eating disorders. Perhaps most worryingly of all, there has been a 25% increase in the number of girls under nine who are being treated for eating disorders.

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<sup>5</sup> Source: British Association of Aesthetic and Plastic Surgeons

27. Tackle the problem of teenage girls dropping out of exercising by encouraging schools to include greater choice in physical activity (e.g. by including options such as dance, yoga and aerobics)
28. Give discounted sports club memberships for children, so girls have a greater variety of options, including options for disabled girls
29. Invest more money in improving school and community sports facilities to make them cleaner, safer and more female- and family-friendly (e.g. better changing facilities; crèche facilities and more family changing facilities)
30. Require OFCOM and the ASA to add a specific gender equality strand to their roles as media regulators. Currently any concerns about the increasing sexualisation of women can only be addressed on grounds of obscenity and decency but this does not address the effects that increasing sexualisation has on the development of young girls (and boys) and the concern voiced by the End Violence Against Women campaign that this increasing sexualisation creates a 'conducive context for violence against women'

## **Statistics**

45% of women do more than 30 minutes of continuous sport or active recreation a month, compared with 55% of men.<sup>6</sup>

Eating disorders are nine times more prevalent in women than men. Cases of bulimia and anorexia among girls under 18 admitted for treatment have leapt by 47% from 562 in 2004 to 825 last year.<sup>7</sup>

Only 2% of press articles in the sports pages cover women's sport.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Women's Sport & Fitness Federation

<sup>7</sup> Source: NICE guidelines 2004 and Dept of Health PQ 2009

<sup>8</sup> Source: Women's Sport & Fitness Federation

# Real Confidence

## Feeling Safe

### Creating Safer Communities

31. Providing up to an extra 10,000 police officers who will be out policing the streets and helping make people feel safer
32. Ensure that late night trains have a well-publicised 'Secure Carriage'. This carriage would be where a guard would sit
33. Develop a 'stopping on request' element to night bus services so that women and men can get off the bus in between bus-stops, to minimise the distance they need to walk on their own

### Ruby's Story

"I am in my mid twenties and have a small son. One night while I was out with friends and family, I was attacked by a man. He sexually assaulted me and when I fought back he knocked me to the floor and brutally stamped on my face and body. I needed reconstructive surgery as a result of my injuries. The police didn't treat it as a serious sexual offence so didn't offer me a specialist police officer or a forensic medical examination. The police didn't give me any information about specialist sexual violence services, but fortunately I found Cornwall Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Center (WRASAC) who offered me long-term counselling for trauma, advice and advocacy as well as support in making a complaint to the police. Without them, I simply do not know how I would have coped."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> (Source: from longer case study available at [http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/map\\_of\\_gaps2.pdf](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/data/files/map_of_gaps2.pdf))

## **Action to Tackle Violence Against Women**

34. Providing money for Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) which would mean up to 15 new centres, providing services such as: individual counselling, support groups and advocacy with agencies such as housing and mental health
35. Providing up to 10 new Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), which would provide services such as: forensic medical examinations, immediate medical care and follow-up tests, advocacy, case-tracking and short-term counselling
36. Providing early intervention with education by rolling out classes about rights and fair treatment in relationships, in schools with organisation like Relate
37. Improving systems to report abuse by providing better and more supportive systems in schools and social services (such as health visitors and midwives) for children and adults to report abuse
38. Ensuring that women living in refuges can continue to work so that they can stay economically empowered. Currently some women face the 'choice' of giving up their job and getting a refuge place, or keeping their job and living with the abuse, because of the way refuge places are funded
39. Retaining services specifically targeted at ethnic minority women, so that women from ethnic minorities, who need culturally specific services, feel more confident in asking for help
40. Providing all women with access to violence against women services, regardless of their immigration status and therefore helping those with no recourse to public funds
41. Providing a freephone trafficking hotline for clients to report concerns and for victims to self-report. Advertising of this hotline would be required as part of the licensing agreement for all sex encounter establishments

42. Ending the increasing criminalisation of noncoercive prostitution and increasing efforts to help those wishing to exit the sex industry

Women should be free to live, work and travel in confidence and without fear of harassment or attack. This fear is currently a real problem and although young men are more at risk of being victims of crime than women, women still perceive that they are most at risk.

### **Statistics**

45% of women will be a victim of domestic violence, sexual victimisation or stalking at least once in their lifetime.<sup>10</sup>

Two women are killed every week in the UK by current or ex-partners.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Source: British Crime Survey

<sup>11</sup> Source: Women's Aid

## **Real Women Policy Paper 91**

This paper has been approved for debate by the Federal Conference by the Federal Policy Committee under the terms of Article 5.4 of the Federal Constitution. Within the policy-making procedure of the Liberal Democrats, the Federal Party determines the policy of the Party in those areas which might reasonably be expected to fall within the remit of the federal institutions in the context of a federal United Kingdom. The Party in England, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, the Welsh Liberal Democrats and the Northern Ireland Local Party determine the policy of the Party on all other issues, except that any or all of them may confer this power upon the Federal Party in any specified area or areas. The Party in England has chosen to pass up policy-making to the Federal level. If approved by Conference, this paper will therefore form the policy of the Federal Party on federal issues and the Party in England on English issues. In appropriate policy areas, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland party policy would take precedence. Many of the policy papers published by the Liberal Democrats imply modifications to existing government public expenditure priorities. We recognise that it may not be possible to achieve all these proposals in the lifetime of one Parliament. We intend to publish a costings programme, setting out our priorities across all policy areas, closer to the next general election.

### **Working Group on Women's Policy**

Note: Membership of the Working Group should not be taken to indicate that every member necessarily agrees with every statement or every proposal in this Paper.

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