

Women and Equalities

Oral evidence: [Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 Election](#), HC 630

Wednesday 12 October 2016

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Maria Caulfield, Angela Crawley, Mrs Flick Drummond, Gill Furniss, Ben Howlett, Jess Phillips; Mr Gavin Shuker

Questions 23 – 100

Witnesses

I: 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; Rt Hon Angus Robertson MP, Leader, SNP Westminster Group



Witnesses

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Q23 Chair: Thank you very much for joining us this morning. We are being broadcast this morning, I think even live, which is good for our Committee. Can I start by thanking you all for making the time to come to speak to the Women and Equalities Select Committee this morning? The inquiry on women in the House of Commons is something we feel very strongly about. We felt it was appropriate to ask you to all come together. As parliamentary colleagues, we know that this is an issue that you feel strongly about yourselves and that we can discuss this in a very sensible manner with four parties around the table. Thank you again for your time and for your input. We are going to start the questioning with Flick Drummond.

Mrs Drummond: A historical start here: it is nearly 100 years since the first female MP was elected but we have had just 452 women elected in that time, compared to 6,005 men. There are more men in the House of Commons now than there have ever been women. I will just give you a little hint about how many in each party: 260 women from Labour, 123 from Conservative, 25 from SNP, 17 from Lib Dem and 18 from other parties. Why has progress been so slow?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Progress has been slow; there is no question about it. There is much more of a recognition now, I would imagine, between all the parties as to the necessity of having better representation across the whole spectrum of society. A lot has changed in the way the House of Commons operates. It would be interesting to try to find out whether that has had the impact in increasing female MPs that it might have done. Both Jeremy and I have been in the House for a very long time. If you go back to those 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. That is possibly why some of the changes have come about.

The parliamentary year is now a bit better structured so that you can find other time to do constituency business and activity; the year is far more balanced than it used to be. Those have possibly helped make some of the differences.

Jeremy Corbyn: First of all, thank you very much for inviting us. I hope you are also going to be taking evidence from women representing all of the political parties. It seems slightly odd to have four white men sitting in front of you giving evidence about women's representation.

Chair: With respect, that is your fault, not ours.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am obviously very proud to be the leader of the Labour party and to present our views on it. Forty-three per cent. of



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Labour MPs are women. I would want it to be more, and our aspiration is to gain at least 50% of women Labour MPs in Parliament. We have had a process, over 30 or 40 years, of development of women's sections and women's forums in the Labour party, and then a big debate about all-women shortlists, which was eventually won. We now have a process where a number of constituencies have all-women shortlists, which obviously results in a woman being selected as the parliamentary candidate.

I think the issue about women in Parliament goes back somewhat deeper than that, to the aspirations of girls and women and their interest in public life and politics. There is a very interesting dichotomy. I attend local youth parliament elections in my constituency, and it is overwhelmingly young women who want to be elected to the youth parliament, and overwhelmingly young women who are passionately interested in politics, rather than young men. Somewhere along the line, this gets reversed and, in their late 20s or 30s, most political parties are dominated by aspirant young men who end up sometimes in councils and Parliament. That is not wrong of itself, but there has to be an assurance that we get more women selected.

Our party is keen on developing women's interests. We have just set up, with the Labour Women's Network, a foundation that will help to promote, train and mentor young women who want to become active in politics, in memory of the late Jo Cox. We are promoting women in a positive way within the party. It was of course Labour that supported women's suffrage in the first place. One of our early leaders actually resigned from Parliament in order to ensure there was a by-election on that. It goes through the Labour party a long way.

Chair: We are focusing here on why it has been so slow.

Tim Farron: Thanks for inviting us. There are a variety of reasons why progress has been so slow, one of which, over the years, has been the failure of men to take a lead on equality for women and, indeed, access for all under-represented groups. The need for men, as well as women, to take a lead in fighting for equality is absolutely critical. It is evidenced throughout the City, for example, where there is the move towards the 30% minimum target for women on City boards. This has been achieved in no small part by encouraging men as well as women to realise that that was right and to fight for it.

I would also say that, when one looks at leadership, and indeed participation within politics and public life, there is a danger that men tend to have a high confidence-to-ability ratio, and women sometimes have the opposite. That is an observation, and you deal with that culturally in some of the ways that Jeremy was referring to before.

In terms of our failure as an institution and as a body to reach the levels that we are at now sooner, or indeed to reach higher levels and get towards a 50-50 balance in Parliament, if you look at what works around



the world, the empirical evidence shows that two things massively affect the numbers in a country's Parliament. They are whether you have proportional representation; and whether there are restricted shortlists. This country does not have proportional representation for this Parliament, and, up until recently, only one party has had all-women shortlists. If we want to be serious in terms of the organisation so that we really tackle this problem and affect the numbers, we need to address both of those things.

Angus Robertson: Thank you very much. Firstly, I would make the point that the challenge we have had with the under-representation of women is not a challenge that is unique to the UK. I would make the observation that the societal and cultural reasons that have excluded women and other minorities are felt right across the world. If we look at other countries that took this more seriously, and earlier, than the UK did, one can look at our Scandinavian neighbours. They were able to make great strides earlier than we have done. I would just observe that I think all political parties realise that there is a problem. All parties have been trying to find their way to help promote the involvement of women and minority groups within their parties with a view to candidacy and election.

I would mention the creation of the devolved institutions in the UK, which do involve proportional representation. Different Parliaments, when they have been established, have discussed the working practices of the Parliament and whether the working hours, as an example, were conducive to family life. This has led to a higher representation of women in the likes of the Scottish Parliament than has been the case in the UK Parliament. Just as a starter, I would observe that we are dealing with an international phenomenon. We have gone some way to dealing with the shortcomings, but we still have a significant way to go.

Q24 **Mrs Drummond:** What was your party's approach in the last election to getting more women in? I can give you some figures here. 1,033 women stood: 22 for the SNP, 216 for the Green party, which was the highest, 215 for Labour, 169 for the Conservatives and 164 for the Lib Dems—none of whom got in, unfortunately. How do you think it can be improved? You have touched on it, but could you give us a bit more depth on what your parties did to try to get more women in at the last election? We will go on to the other stuff later on, with the other questions.

Jeremy Corbyn: We had all-women shortlists in a number of constituencies, which ensured there was a woman candidate selected. We have done a lot to promote and support women within the party and in women's forums. Indeed, we are taking that further with a policymaking women's conference, which will have a big effect in promoting women within the party and giving them an opportunity to have a say. Those are two specific areas. I mentioned the mentoring programme we are doing through the Labour Women's Network.



Tim Farron: Up until the last election and, indeed, renewed since—if we are going to move on to what we are doing in the future, then I will leave those comments for when we are asked about that shortly—we have had the leadership programme, which began in 2010. That was about making sure that we funnelled additional support, funding, advice and mentoring to all underrepresented groups, but women especially. As a consequence of that, yes, 164 out of 633 seats in Britain is far too few, but it is worth bearing in mind that, in the retiring MPs' seats, the held seats, up until the 2015 election, 55% of the candidates for the Liberal Democrats were women. The reality is that, when you get the hammering we got last May, pretty much any diversity mechanism you put in place is going to be put under immense strain. To be left with eight white blokes is hardly a great result for diversity or, indeed, for the party.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: We have seen a good increase since 2005. If you look at our figures before 2005, they were absolutely appalling. They are a bit better now. We have had organisations like Women2Win, which has been led by Anne Jenkin. It has really pushed and tried to support women candidates throughout England. There is more work being done on that now. The deputy chairman of the party, Amanda Sater, has also been very involved in helping promote women candidates. We have tried to put a number of mechanisms in to ensure that women are getting through shortlists and being selected.

Angus Robertson: In the most recent parliamentary elections for us, which were the Scottish Parliament elections, our female representation went from 27% to 43% in the course of one election. That happened for a very specific reason: because there was intervention. Wherever an incumbent SNP member of the Scottish Parliament stood down, our national executive committee had the power to direct an all-women shortlist in such a seat. As a result, of the 17 new SNP MSPs, 13 of them, which is three quarters, were women.

There is one conclusion from that: interventions works and it did work. We have found our own way to do it. We are having to think about how we do that for the local government elections next year, and no doubt we will come on to this. What does that mean for future Westminster elections in the context of boundary reviews and suchlike? As my takeaway, the biggest step change in female representation in the SNP is through a mechanism with the intention of dealing with an imbalance. It dealt very effectively with an imbalance.

Q25 **Jess Phillips:** Now we come on to the boundary reviews. Obviously we do not know whether they are going to go through or what they are going to look like, so it is slightly difficult to answer. I recognise this is not for Scotland, but on current forecasting, specifically considering the Labour party and the Conservative party, the Labour Party stands to lose 17 women and the Conservative party stands to lose two. This is more to the Labour party and the Conservative party: I want to know what actions they are going to take to protect the number of women MPs given the



boundary proposal.

Jeremy Corbyn: Obviously it is a hypothetical question because we do not know what the boundaries are going to be. Indeed, I would wish they were not going ahead at all because 2 million voters are left uncoun­ted in the delineation of the proposed boundaries.

Jess Phillips: Let us imagine it is going through.

Jeremy Corbyn: Okay. If it goes ahead as it is, then there will be a number of women who would be in a problem because of the delineation of the new constituency. Our national executive has to consider this. My wish would be to have all-women shortlists where we can, in order to make sure that we maintain at least the current percentage of women.

Q26 **Jess Phillips:** What do you mean by “where we can”?

Jeremy Corbyn: Well, it is a question of how far you can go in proposing things from a national perspective. We have a rule that an MP with 40% of the population and make-up of the new constituency must automatically be shortlisted in the new constituency selection. After that, what we know as a trigger ballot could take place in a constituency, which would decide whether to have an open contest or not. I will be asking our national executive to look at this now to ensure that we do achieve what we are determined to do, which is at least 50% female representation in the next Parliament from the Labour party.

We also have in place, as I indicated, a number of other programmes such as women’s representation at all officer levels of local parties, which is of course an important part of bringing women forward. It is not just about selections. That, in a sense, is an important part of it.

Q27 **Jess Phillips:** Specific to the boundary review, the Labour party is potentially going to go backwards at the next election, not forwards. That is without even taking into account any particular losses in elections, which as Tim Farron has pointed out are damning on diversity because women are more likely to hold marginal seats in the Labour party and across the board. I suppose what we are seeking with regard to the boundary review from all colleagues is what exactly you are going to do about the reduction. The Labour party stands to have the greatest reduction, and therefore stands the chance of going the most backwards.

Jeremy Corbyn: I fully understand the danger of the situation. I have let you know that we are determined to achieve 50% representation and our national executive will be considering this urgently at my request, so that, as we go into the post-boundary review situation where all parties will be going into selections of candidates, we do achieve that. It may well be that we will intervene to ensure that there are all-women shortlists or, in some cases, that women are added to shortlists, to make sure that choice is there.



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Sir Patrick McLoughlin: On Jeremy's point about the makeup, the present boundaries are based on data that was done in 2000. By the time we get to the next general election, it will be 20 years out of date. I am rather surprised he is so opposed to the changes, which Parliament approved in the last Parliament, actually being implemented. It is important that they are implemented. There is far too much disparity among some constituencies at the present time. If we move on from that—

Jess Phillips: We are here to talk about the women.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Of course, but I wanted to respond to what Jeremy said. He made his point; I wanted to make mine as well. We have to do everything we can to ensure we do not see a decrease in the amount of women Conservative members of Parliament. Actually, I want to see an increase in amount of women Conservative members of Parliament.

Jess Phillips: I want to be a size 10.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: As far as I am concerned, one thing that has made the Conservative party better is that we actually have far more diverse representation across all sections of the community. I do not want to see us go back on that. We will take the necessary actions we have to take for that, without trying to override local associations. The boundary commission has only just published its first stab at it. Obviously there are all the representations, which will start. We will get a better feel for where we are going probably this time next year, as far as the actual seats are concerned. I can assure you, particularly with the Prime Minister taking a very direct interest in these matters, that she will not want to see the situation deteriorate.

Q28 **Jess Phillips:** At the moment, you have not identified any specific things you will do to protect the women, for example, who may be reduced.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: The party board has agreed, in conjunction with the 1922 Committee, about proportions of seats, what happens with proportions of seats and how that reselection will go on. There will be some new seats. There will be some seats that are not selected, as far as candidates are concerned, so we need to see about that. As the last Parliament showed, you actually do get some retirements. One of the impacts of fixed-term Parliaments is that they make people think a lot more as to whether they want to do another seven or eight years, when they are making the decision whether to re-stand again.

Q29 **Jess Phillips:** At the moment, as it stands, the Conservative party does not have any particular strategy you could tell us about today with regard to women and the boundary review.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: The strategy overall for women is to get more women into winnable seats.



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Q30 **Jess Phillips:** If you do not mind me interrupting, that is a laudable strategy. I have many laudable strategies in my life that never come to fruition. One has to know the detail of such a strategy, rather than just its overarching mission.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: It is more than a laudable strategy, if I may say so.

Q31 **Jess Phillips:** It is one I have dedicated my life to.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: If it was a laudable strategy, we might not have seen progress. We have seen tremendous progress: in 2005, 17; at the last general election, 68. It is not enough, but a good move forward. I put that as my defence for my laudable strategy, which has been put into operation.

Q32 **Mr Shuker:** Jeremy, I am going to move on to the Labour party. I wondered, because time is limited, if I could ask you a few closed questions that might help us to get short answers as well. Would you agree that all-women shortlists are the most effective mechanism that we have found in UK politics for the selection and reselection of women?

Jeremy Corbyn: Absolutely. I have supported all-women shortlists for all the time I have been in the Labour party. It has made an incredible difference, because it has meant that the men in the party have had to realise that they have a part to play in ending the underrepresentation of women. We initially did it on a regional basis, so we would put all-women shortlists into most if not all selections in a particular region until that region had reached the 50% that we wanted, and after that there would be more open shortlists, where men and women could both contest a selection process. I think it has been a wholly good thing.

I have to say it was extremely controversial when first promoted in the party in the early 1970s. I was accused of being a far-left extremist for promoting ideas like that. Can you imagine such a thing?

Q33 **Mr Shuker:** Surely not. Let me ask you two things related to all-women's shortlists, then. You said in your first answer that you believe there is a drop-off for women's representation coming through in perhaps their 20s and 30s. What do you think is causing that drop-off?

Jeremy Corbyn: It is very hard to know exactly. I do notice that young women of school and college age are often passionately interested in politics, and succeed in representing their classmates, college mates and so on in school and college elections. Later on, there seems to be an overtaking of macho culture, and that reduces their representation. It is a question of perhaps extending the idea of balanced representation in office-holding. In our constituency parties, for example, we require a balance between men and women in all office-holding. That is an important message that you put from the very beginning.

Q34 **Mr Shuker:** In the last 18 Labour selections for mayoral candidates, do



you know how many were women?

Jeremy Corbyn: There is a problem with mayoral selections in that, of the metro mayor selections we have just gone through for Liverpool, Greater Manchester and Birmingham, three men have been selected. Certainly in the case of Manchester, there were no women put forward. In the case of Liverpool Merseyside, there was one put forward. I have again asked that this be reviewed by the national executive to ensure that we give consideration to all-women shortlists for mayoral selections, as we do for parliamentary selections. It is a problem area and you are quite right to identify it.

Q35 **Mr Shuker:** How would you feel if I told you that, of the 18 elected Labour mayors since 2002, just two have been women?

Jeremy Corbyn: Yes.

Q36 **Mr Shuker:** Is there any philosophical reason why all-women shortlists should not be applied at a mayoral level, as opposed to a parliamentary level?

Jeremy Corbyn: None whatsoever. I have just given you the answer on that. This was before I became leader, by the way, but I have asked the national executive of our party to look at this as well, because quite obviously it is not acceptable to have the vast majority of our executive mayoral candidates or metro mayoral candidates being men when we want to achieve the same as we want to achieve in parliamentary representation.

Q37 **Mr Shuker:** I want to ask you a couple of questions about the culture of the party that we both belong to and are deeply committed to. We know, because Jess has just pointed it out, there are 23 potential selections where men and women could go head to head in a new boundary seat. Based on what you know of the Labour party, how many of those do you think would likely be won by men?

Jeremy Corbyn: I would hope around half. I would hope we get the 50%. I am concerned about this, as I indicated in my reply to Jess Phillips. That is why I have asked our NEC to look very carefully at this before we go further. I cannot give a definitive answer as to what the rule will be, because it has not yet been formulated, but I hope you will appreciate that I am very determined to achieve 50% representation.

Q38 **Mr Shuker:** Absolutely, and your view on this is really important, and your leadership on it is hugely important.

Jeremy Corbyn: Which is why I have just given you the answer I gave you.

Mr Shuker: Which is why I appreciate the process being gone through with the NEC is important; I would not want to subvert that. But your view in this forum is important for informing that debate as well.

In the Labour party, we have a process whereby a trigger ballot can



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cause a full reselection process in a particular seat. If any Labour MP goes through a trigger ballot process and we reopen nominations, and they are a woman, do you think it would be appropriate for the NEC to put in place an all-women shortlist in that case?

Jeremy Corbyn: It would be perfectly logical to be able to do that. Yes, that could be done.

Q39 **Mr Shuker:** Is it your view that that would be a good idea?

Jeremy Corbyn: If it looks as though we are going to end up with far too few women being selected and therefore having the possibility of being elected, yes, I would want to look at that.

Q40 **Mr Shuker:** Bex Bailey was a young woman member of Labour's NEC until she was removed in the most recent elections by members. She tried for two years to get a sexual harassment policy through the NEC to improve both the structure and the culture. I know you are a member of the NEC and have been for the last year or so. Why do you think that did not go through?

Jeremy Corbyn: I have now put something through the national executive, which was a statement that came out of the concerns about racism. We put forward a policy that prohibits intimidatory behaviour against individuals or communities; and anyone behaving in a way that is sexist, racist or discriminatory in any way could face action within the party, including suspension, and ultimately could be expelled from party membership. I am very serious about this. I put this forward personally as the leader of the party to the national executive. To their credit, it was adopted unanimously. That was after I became leader.

Q41 **Mr Shuker:** Do you believe that is sufficient on the issue of sexual harassment within the Labour party?

Jeremy Corbyn: We have codes of conduct, which apply throughout the whole party, at branch level, constituency level, as well as any other level or part of the party, about behaviour and attitudes towards people. Members who behave in an inappropriate way, troll people or are abusive can be suspended from membership and could be expelled. There has to be a process to examine each case, because obviously there are two sides to an argument. They have to be resolved, but I am determined that they will be resolved very quickly and not be allowed to drag on. I am very serious about this.

Q42 **Mrs Drummond:** You talked about young women and confidence. What I read in the newspaper and what I hear from colleagues is that there is a level of intimidation and trolling within the Labour party that would put even the hardest person off going into politics. What are you doing about that?

Jeremy Corbyn: It is not necessarily coming from within the party. There is a level of trolling and abuse happening on social media that is beyond disgusting. If you trawl through and look at what is there, you



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will see some horrible stuff. If there are people identified as within our own party behaving in an inappropriate way, putting wrong things up on Twitter, Facebook or anywhere else, they can be, and are, suspended from party membership and investigated.

- Q43 **Mrs Drummond:** In the Conservative party, we have this policy for the boundary changes of no person left behind. Do you have that same policy? I know that Jess, for example, has two petitions to deselect her. Are you going down that route as well, so that, if you do lose seats, when people are retiring they are going to be replaced by existing MPs or people who may have been deselected through no fault of their own, as they have been very effective MPs?

Jeremy Corbyn: Our process is one where the local party makes the decision and has the selection process. I do not have the power to impose candidates or tell people who to select. What we do have the power to do is ensure that a process takes place, that there is a fair selection and that we achieve what we are determined to do, which is 50% women representation.

- Q44 **Mrs Drummond:** So you are going to make a big effort to stop the trolling and the intimidation.

Jeremy Corbyn: It is not "going to"; I already am and have, and will continue to do so.

- Q45 **Jess Phillips:** Just to pick up the point about how it is not for you to tell local memberships what to do, that slightly disagrees with the point you have just put across about all-women shortlists. You and I both know, Jeremy, that no local branch ever wants to have an all-women shortlist, but we put that on to them. I just wonder at what level you think you do not have a role in what local memberships do, because we do.

Jeremy Corbyn: I thought I made it extremely clear that the national executive of the party can and does require all-women shortlists. We have done that process now for more than 20 years and it has had a huge effect on increasing the number of women MPs. We will continue with that process. What I am saying is I cannot tell a constituency who to choose. What we can do is set the parameters of the rules. If we have an all-women shortlist, then obviously they are going to choose a woman.

- Q46 **Mr Shuker:** Jeremy, you gave a commitment during the leadership campaign to 50-50 representation. You reiterated it at the Labour Women's Conference in 2016. What are you going to change to bring that about?

Jeremy Corbyn: An examination of where we are at the moment on selections when we know what the new boundaries will be and what the winnability or otherwise of those seats is. Jess made a very valid point earlier, which goes back a very long way, even to the 1920s. Women tend to represent more marginal than safe constituencies. This also applies in other parties. I want to look very carefully at all-women



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shortlists, so they are not just in the totality of constituencies, but in ones that are more likely to be won or not won by us, to ensure that we do achieve the 50%.

Q47 Mr Shuker: So in the bell curve of winnable to less winnable seats, you think that there should be more women selected in safer seats and fewer forced into marginals.

Jeremy Corbyn: I would very much like that to be the case, where there are seats seen as safe. But I do not like using the words “safe” and “unsafe” seats.

Mr Shuker: I said “safer”. Trust me, there are no safe seats.

Jeremy Corbyn: We all know what you are talking about here. I want to make sure we get the 50%.

Q48 Mr Shuker: Okay. Jeremy, just to go back, you mentioned this drop off. I posited that possibly there might be something about the culture of the Labour party, particularly for young women involved in representation perhaps at levels outside of Parliament. Have you come across any examples where you think there is an issue around young women, say in council groups or particular areas?

Jeremy Corbyn: Sometimes there are behaviour issues and 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. It is a process of respect, of education, that is very important in it, which is why I am quite interested in attitudes of young women towards politics and towards activity in public life. I have been looking at the way in which youth parliaments, youth councils and things like that operate, as a way of ensuring that young women continue to be involved and interested in representational politics.

Q49 Mr Shuker: Do you think, where there are situations in which young women come forward with allegations of misogyny, bullying or intimidation within the Labour party, that we handle those well presently?

Jeremy Corbyn: I am trying to ensure they are all examined quickly, sensitively, and that the names of all parties are withheld until there has been at least an initial investigation of it. That was in Shami Chakrabarti’s recommendations to our national executive. I will keep it under review, because we have set in train the processes that are described here. Obviously they are open to review at any time, because you have to check how these things are going on.

It is also a question of the educational culture within all parties, how people behave towards each other and how people behave towards each other in public life. I have to say, Parliament sets a truly appalling example in the behaviour of MPs towards each other in the Chamber and often in committees—not your Committee, Chair; I am sure you would



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not allow such a thing. We have an example to set as well, and we do not.

- Q50 **Mr Shuker:** What would be your message to young women, perhaps in the Labour party, who feel that they are experiencing intimidation or abuse, because of their gender or because of their age?

Jeremy Corbyn: If they feel they are, then make sure that the officers of their local party or branch know about it and it is investigated in a proper way. If they are not satisfied with the answer, then take it to the next stage up. There is an open process to taking reporting forward.

- Q51 **Ben Howlett:** I have a very quick one, because we want to move on to the next set of questions. Jeremy, you are a believer in equality, are you not?

Jeremy Corbyn: Of course.

- Q52 **Ben Howlett:** So why are there not all-black shortlists, all-disabled shortlists or all-LGBT shortlists in the Labour party?

Jeremy Corbyn: There have been suggestions about that. There have been ideas that that should be put forward. I have some sympathy with that, actually. I also have a lot of sympathy with ensuring that there is a place on selection processes for people representing LGBT communities, black communities or those with disability. There is a process to ensure that happens because Parliament, at the end of the day, has to be representative of the totality of our society. It is up to all of us, recognising that we are in a party political system, to make sure that our parties operate in a way such that all those groups do end up with representation. It is a pretty sad thing that it was not until 1987 that there were four black MPs elected to Parliament, the first ones since the 1920s when Saklatvala lost his seat.

- Q53 **Ben Howlett:** How will you deliver that without breaching the Equality Act?

Jeremy Corbyn: You can deliver it without breaching the Equality Act by requiring them to be included in a shortlisting process.

- Q54 **Angela Crawley:** Jeremy, you mentioned earlier that this Parliament has a responsibility, and I think you used the word "leadership". I agree with you that leadership is absolutely crucial to this. You seem quite philosophical in nature about the future, about young people, about aspirations for young women. I am interested to know what assurances you will give to all your members, right now, that your party will do more to end the intimidation and bullying that is currently taking place in your party.

Jeremy Corbyn: You are assuming the party is riddled with intimidation. It is not. There is some intimidation that goes on. I am stamping it out and dealing with it. We have codes of conduct. We have rules. We have processes. It has been dealt with. We are also a very large party. We



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have well over half a million members and are growing very fast. I want to make sure that all those new members understand the rules, understand the code of conduct and understand the behaviour that is expected from them within the party.

Q55 Mr Shuker: I have one last question, Jeremy, which is this: why do you think that a woman doing the job that I do, as a Member of Parliament, is far more likely to receive abuse while doing it than I am?

Jeremy Corbyn: 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. We are in public life to represent the entirety of our community. We have to challenge it.

Q56 Chair: Before we move on to the next set of questions, I know you have to leave a little early Jeremy. Can I ask you the final one that we are going to ask all parties? It probably gives you a heads up. What commitment will your party make to this Committee today to ensure that the number of women MPs in your party increases in the 2020 Parliament?

Jeremy Corbyn: It is our policy to achieve at least 50% representation. We have come a long way towards it, with 43% representation 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.

Q57 Chair: How many more women will you have to get elected at the next election to achieve your objective of 50%?

Jeremy Corbyn: We have 43% at the moment. It clearly depends on how many seats we win at the next election. I will not put a figure on it, but it is going to be more than 50% of whatever we win.

Chair: That is quite a lot. Thank you very much.

Q58 Maria Caulfield: Patrick, I am going to question you on the record of the Conservative party. The former Prime Minister was very keen on, or did talk about, all-women shortlists. The Conservative party is one of the few parties that do not use all-women shortlists to select Parliamentary candidates. That has not happened. What are your thoughts on all-women shortlists, and do you think they are something that the Conservative party will use in the future?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: There is nothing to stop all-women shortlists going before associations. I do not have the exact historical record of what happened in every selection at the last general election. I was not then responsible for those matters, but I think there were some areas where all-women shortlists naturally happened. We do not impose



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all-women shortlists because we try to give local associations as much freedom as possible in the way in which they go about selecting their candidates, particularly for a general election. Different rules apply in a by-election. There were some cases, I think, as my memory goes back, where there were all-women shortlists.

Q59 Maria Caulfield: I was selected from an all-women shortlist that happened naturally, but if you were pushed and the Prime Minister came to you and said, "How are we going to get more Conservative women MPs in Parliament?", would you say to her, "All-women shortlists are the way to go"?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I think imposing that on Conservative associations would risk resentment, which would not help that Member of Parliament or that candidate once they were selected. I would rather take other measures, working with associations, working with women who are on or trying to get on the candidates list. We have various organisations we do that through—Women2Win, for instance. As I said earlier, Amanda Sater is now a deputy chairman of the party and has special responsibility for the candidates and for looking after women candidates as well. I hope we have done those kinds of things in the right way. I am always willing to be persuaded as to other routes that we might want to follow.

Q60 Maria Caulfield: Are you saying that using mentoring, such as the Women2Win programme, and these role models is as effective as all-women shortlists?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: We need to monitor it. We need to see how we are moving along in that line. We have come a long way in the Conservative party in a relatively short time, over the last 10 years. A lot of the work that David Cameron and, in fairness, Theresa May did, when David was Leader of the Opposition, to try to redress the balance a bit has moved in the right direction. That also sent a very good message out to constituency associations as to who they are looking for. I was reflecting on this: of all the general elections I have fought in my time of standing for Parliament, I have never had a woman candidate against me from any of the parties, which is quite staggering really.

Q61 Maria Caulfield: A lot of the discussion this morning has been around the parliamentary party and trying to get more female parliamentary candidates in place and then elected. But, if you look at the Conservative party as a whole, it is very male-dominated. If you look at the professional party, only two out of the 10 directors of the party are women. If you look at the voluntary party in my area, the south-east, eight of the nine area chairmen are men. Even on the 1922 executive, there is only one woman out of 12. Does the Conservative party have a problem around women outside of the parliamentary selection process?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: If we are starting awarding points as to the make-up of parties, I hope we get a bonus for the Prime Minister. You are right in some ways. It is sometimes partly that people do not want to put



themselves forward for various bodies. You cannot force them to do that. I take your point on the 1922 elections. I do not think I get a vote on that, but you do.

- Q62 **Maria Caulfield:** Yes. In terms of when candidates are selected or are being selected, I know you talked about the boundary changes. You said that one of the areas you would be looking at to help increase the number of women MPs and to help those female MPs who might potentially lose their seats was around retirement seats. Historically, the Conservative party has been very poor in selecting female candidates for either retirement seats or target seats. At the last election, only 28% of female candidates were in target seats, compared to, say, 54% in Labour. Why is it so difficult for female candidates in the Conservative party to be selected for either retirement seats or target seats when they are much more likely to be selected for non-winnable seats?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: As I say, we have made a lot of progress. Are you telling me more work needs to be done? Yes, more work does need to get done. Actually, we have started to address that and will continue to address that, by giving extra help to women candidates through organisations like Women2Win and other programmes of engagement we have to get women forward in selections.

- Q63 **Maria Caulfield:** In your written submission for this Committee, you said that a third of Conservative candidates selected for the 2015 general election were female, but the House of Commons library says it is less than that, at around 26%. What is the true figure?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I think the figure that I have given is true. I have not caught up with the discrepancy between that and the House of Commons library. Members of Parliament seem to take the House of Commons library as a bible that is not to be questioned. I will check that out. The figure I was given I thought was the correct figure.

- Q64 **Maria Caulfield:** You have ruled out all-women shortlists and we have highlighted there are a lack of role models within the Conservative party itself. Are there any specific things, apart from mentoring, that you can do to try and increase the number of female candidates in retirement seats, so that they are more likely to win?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Maria, there are a number of things going on. First and foremost, we will have a better idea by this time next year what we expect those seats to be, those people who are affected or not affected by changes and how we work with them. There is more work to be done. I go back to the point: 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 a lot more work to be done? Yes, there is, and that is being done through the candidates department, not just through Women2Win, but



that is very important. They have been very successful in helping us do that. We had a special video made at the conference about getting women selected into winnable seats. That was shown at conference. I hope we have made progress along those lines, and there is more that we will do.

- Q65 **Maria Caulfield:** Just reflecting on the boundary changes, the potential impact on female Conservative MPs is not as drastic as it could be on Labour female MPs. But what is the party going to do to ensure that women MPs who may be affected are supported through that? I know there is the “no colleague left behind”, but are there specific measures in place to help female MPs work with the boundary changes?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: There will be once we are clearer on what those changes are. One of the problems with the way in which the legislation was changed, so that we cannot take a decision on these until late 2018, is that it leave a shorter period of time within the fixed-term Parliament to start looking at this. But I think, when we get these seats next year, after the first review is done, we will want to start working with those as the likely seats going forward.

- Q66 **Maria Caulfield:** As a final question, I want to build on what Jess asked all of you previously, but particularly for the Conservative party. If the polls are to be believed, the Conservative party is likely to win the next general election, so the pressure is even harder on you. If we are going to increase female MPs across the board, the Conservative party really has to step up, because it is more likely to produce more of the MPs after 2020. What is the Conservative party doing, and what are you as the chairman doing, to ensure that those MPs who are elected in 2020 are more likely to be women?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: The usual cautionary tale on polls is never to believe them. There is only one that matters, and by the time you know the result of that it is too late. The work that is now being done in drawing up candidates lists, in preparing women candidates, in helping them and giving them extra training courses, is all quite important.

I have just appointed, with the Prime Minister’s agreement, a vice-chairman for training, Anthea McIntyre, who is one of our MEPs in the West Midlands area. It will be one of the things she will want to look at as well, as to how we do training right across the board for the party, not just on candidate selection. Quite a bit of work has been done on that by Women2Win, and I do not want to undermine what has already been quite a successful operation by the women heading up that organisation.

- Q67 **Angela Crawley:** This question is specifically for Patrick. As the party in government in the UK and the party that boasts the second female Prime Minister, will your party live up to its commitment and its aspirations for a gender-balanced cabinet and a 50/50 Parliament by 2020?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I hope we see an improvement in our overall representation as far as women are concerned, yes. I cannot give you



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those actual figures, but I think the Prime Minister has made a very important start in the way in which she formed her first Government. Eight of the cabinet are female. Her commitment to this has gone back for quite some time. It is not something she has newly come to. She has fought against discrimination where she has seen it in the past, and has actually come through it as well.

Q68 **Mr Shuker:** Can I take you back to one of your first answers? What evidence do you have that women who are selected through an all-women shortlist enjoy less legitimacy in Parliament?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: No, what I said was, if you impose it, it can get resentment. I am not saying it is where there is an all-women shortlist. I do not think I said that; I hope I was misquoted. Maria made the point that she was part of an all-women shortlist, and that is where I was drawing the conclusion from.

Q69 **Mr Shuker:** So your belief is that, where an all-women shortlist is imposed, that could prevent a woman from enjoying full legitimacy in the House.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: No. Look, we all know that, once a Member of Parliament is elected to the House of Commons, the majority they got or anything like that does not matter. A Member of Parliament is treated the same as any other Member of Parliament, and so that should be.

Q70 **Mr Shuker:** Do you think that there are women in Parliament right now who feel they have less legitimacy because they were selected on an all-women shortlist, regardless of your view?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: No, because, once they have the mandate of their constituency, then their rights as Members of Parliament are, as far as I am concerned, the same as those of any other Member of Parliament.

Q71 **Mrs Drummond:** We touched before on the fact that, in the Conservative party, more women are in marginal seats. What will you do to make sure they are supported in the next election, so that we can keep up that number?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Quite a bit, but I am not necessarily prepared to say it to an all-party committee.

Q72 **Gill Furniss:** All the evidence points to the fact that, in other countries where there are very good levels of female representation, that has been achieved by quotas, such all-women shortlists, and support mechanisms as well. Some of those support mechanisms can be about breaking down barriers that women often face. I am just wondering why you have rejected out of hand the evidence of good positive discrimination. We can see in this room that some of us are here because we were on all-women shortlists, and that is why we have better representation. I am worried that you are just saying, "Well, we just do not want to do that."



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Sir Patrick McLoughlin: If I may say so, we have made progress. I want to see us make more progress. 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. But we have been making progress and I want to see that continue.

Q73 **Chair:** Sir Patrick, I have to ask the question. The Conservative party has only ever managed to get 123 women elected, and we have thousands of women who are members. I hear very warm words from you, but how are you going to convince this Committee that those warm words will lead to more women at the next election, rather than simply a status quo?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Judge us by our actions. Judge us by what has happened in the last few years. The thing I would say is that we have made lots of progress and we are going to continue to do that. We have done it by taking the party along with us and not having it be an issue, as far as the party is concerned. There was initially some resentment when David Cameron tried an alternate list, although the alternate list was an A-list, which was balanced. There was a lot of criticism about that. A lot of women felt left out because they were not part of that.

We are learning from that and we are working with associations. When it becomes clear that there is a vacancy, when it becomes clear that there is an opportunity, we work with those associations and do a lot more work in the run-up to their selection of their candidates than we have in the past. We have done things like open primaries, which I do not think other parties have done, which have been very successful in certain cases.

Obviously, when you are coming to a situation of bringing down the size of the House of Commons to 600 from 650, then there are other problems that come into being during that reduction.

Q74 **Angela Crawley:** My section is to Angus Robertson, who is the leader of our SNP Westminster group. Now, Angus, I think it is fair to say in the last 10 years the party has been on quite a substantial journey. You, as the former party chairman in the period of 2007 to 2011, were quite instrumental in some of the most successful elections that we have ever witnessed. What improvements did you make, during your time as campaign co-ordinator and business convener within the party, to ensure gender balance and further representation of women?

Angus Robertson: The first observation I would make is for the benefit of colleagues who might not understand the timing and the sense of what that role was. It is quite instructive, because I was effectively the person who was chairing the party, chairing the national executive and chairing our conference, at the same time as being our campaign director. I was doing both the "how do we win elections?" and the "how do we run the



party?" at the same time. It would be fair to say that, at that time, I had inherited a culture of dealing with the issue of women and minority representation from the perspective of: "We really want this to be better"—we have heard a bit of that today—"and we are really going to try, and we are really going to hope that things get better. We are going to exhort and encourage." But we were not going to have mechanisms in place.

By the end of my period in both of those roles, I realised that that was not going to be enough. We could exhort and encourage as much as we liked. We could speak to people who were thinking about becoming candidates and tell them that they would be good candidates, but there would be no mechanisms in place to help make that happen. That might be the position of some other parties that are giving evidence today. We decided that we would look at this and we would change it. Yes, that involved reticence among certain party members who did not like the idea of the party centrally imposing its will on local democracy.

In effect, we have gone on a journey that has seen us implement mechanisms, which have led to the significant change. The SNP is a very democratic political party, so it is not something that happened just because one person willed it. There were people throughout the party, both parliamentarians and members, who have sought to bring about that change. We are still in that process, because what we have introduced, which is all-women shortlists in some circumstances for the Scottish Parliament, is something that we are now doing for the local government elections we have in Scotland next year.

We may come on to the question of what happens at the next Westminster election. I would just now observe that it is a little bit difficult for us to increase our representation, as we won almost every single seat in the country. Perhaps we may get invitations to stand in other parts of the UK—who knows—and then we might have to consider that. We will come on to that later. I am being encouraged to by somebody else on the panel. I digress.

Q75 Angela Crawley: Just to bring it back to the point, we have the first female First Minister that Scotland has ever had, Nicola Sturgeon, who is the leader of our own party. The three main political parties in Scotland each have female leaders: the Conservatives, Labour and the SNP. Do you think that the SNP has a target for a greater proportion of women MPs? How would you like to make that happen and how can this be achieved?

Angus Robertson: It is more than just ensuring that you have better representation in Parliament. When you have the opportunity to make decisions, whether as First Minister or as parliamentary group leader, you also have an obligation to work out what the balance is in your parliamentary team. When the First Minister became First Minister, she ensured that she had a gender-balanced cabinet, one of the few in the world. When I had the good fortune to remain as SNP group leader of a



party that was the third political party in this place, I was in a unique situation. No other party leader at Westminster has been in the situation I found myself in, with a political party going from six to more than 50 members. I sat down and I spent a lot of time ensuring that the roles and responsibilities within our parliamentary group were gender-balanced.

So, yes, it is about making decisions that relate to candidacies and making sure that you have more female and minority participation. You also have an obligation to try to make sure that, when you can make decisions that will ensure you are reflecting society in terms of the responsibilities within the parliamentary party or Government, you do it. That is something that I would observe the Prime Minister at a UK level has not done with her Cabinet; nor has Ruth Davidson within her parliamentary group in the Scottish Parliament.

Q76 Angela Crawley: Notwithstanding the local government elections in 2017 and our conference this weekend, which will decide—you are one of the candidates—who will be the next deputy leader of our party, in the wider sense, representation in 2020 is about more than gender. It is about representation of all minority groups. The equality strategy includes openly gay MPs as well, of which the SNP has eight. I believe that is the highest percentage of openly gay parliamentarians, so the UK is the gayest Parliament in Europe.

The SNP has only one MP of black, Asian or minority ethnicity. What do you think, in that case, can be done to improve on this situation, looking towards future elections within our party?

Angus Robertson: You are reflecting a question that was posed earlier about other minority groups, which is quite interesting because we have, without any mechanisms, gone from being a political party where we had no openly LGBT colleagues in the parliamentary group to, as you have pointed out, having the highest of LGBT parliamentarians in any Parliament in the world. I am very proud to be the leader of the gayest parliamentary party.

I would also observe that, with the first black, Asian or ethnic minority parliamentarian elected from Scotland, it would be fair to observe that the visibly ethnic minority community in Scotland is very small. I would posit that we have a good level of representation both in Westminster and in the Scottish Parliament, where our colleague Hamza Yusuf is a Minister in the Scottish Government. Indeed, we had the first Scots-Asian parliamentarian returned to the Scottish Parliament.

Can we do more? Yes, but there is a structural difference between the rate of female participation as opposed to other minority participation. As you know, we have systems in place. I know other parties have them. 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 have also had a disabled conference. We are working very hard.



To finish on this point, you can encourage and exhort as much as you like, but it is going to take more than that. This is a challenge for the SNP. It is a challenge for all of us. We have to do more than just have structural change. We have to proactively work to encourage and ensure that we have higher percentages of participation across all the minority strands, and particularly among women.

Both of my SNP predecessors as parliamentarians were women and were not great fans of mechanisms to change this. I represent a constituency where the local party was very resistant to the notion of having mechanisms in place. I am now completely convinced it is the only way that you can right the imbalance. It is working for us. There is more that we can do. I would encourage those who are slightly further behind the curve to look at it seriously. It is not without its challenges, but I think, frankly, we all need to do it.

Q77 Gill Furniss: I am your interrogator today, Tim, so let us start, shall we? I have to say the Lib Dems have a lamentable record when you look at female representation. It seems that your high was in 2005, when out of 62 MPs only 10 were women. In 2010, that slipped back; you had 57 MPs and still only 10 of them were women. Of course, at the last election, eight MPs were returned to this Parliament, all men. I want to ask you, in view of the fact that if the polls are correct you could be seeing a resurgence in 2020, what are you actually doing now to make sure that women will be part of that and will have an equal chance at all the seats that are available?

Tim Farron: I should not really say this, but it is more lamentable than you set out. It was nine and seven in 2005 and 2010.

Gill Furniss: I do apologise.

Tim Farron: No, do not apologise. We apologise. "Lamentable" is among the words I have used. There are various things I could say. Our operation of the leadership programme in the last five years did put in a majority of the held seats, where there was a handover, a women candidate, but not one of them was elected. We talked earlier about women being in more marginal seats than men. I have to say that my time in the party since I was 16 has shown me there are no safe seats for the Liberal Democrats. That is one challenge that we face.

Of the places where we have proportional representation, sadly not in Scotland at the moment, but in Wales, London and the European Parliament, we have 100% female representation. That is not to diminish the fact that our record in this place is lamentable. I have been of the view for some time, as party president before I was party leader, that restricted shortlists and all-women shortlists are clearly part of the answer. If you look empirically around the world at the Parliaments with the best records for electing women, places like Rwanda, South Africa and Sweden, the two things they have in common are a proportional



representation voting system and all-women shortlists. I cannot do anything immediately about the former, but I can about the latter.

When I was president, I made an effort, as many others did, to persuade the party that it was right to have all-women shortlists. Three years ago, the party, largely led by young women, resisted, for many of the reasons that Angus was setting out before, the notion of having all-women shortlists. At the conference before last, our spring conference this year in York, we passed a motion, which I led on and spoke on in the body of debate, in favour of all-women shortlists. It was an electing diverse MPs motion.

To give you a quick run-through of what it said, first of all it provided for all-women shortlists in every region of the country. The regions of England, Scotland and Wales have different but equally strong set-ups. We also have all-disabled shortlists. I should say, by the way, that we have just selected for one of our most winnable seats from an all-disabled shortlist. Likewise, although the law does not allow us to have exclusive shortlists for LGBT+ and BAME, it does allow places restricted on shortlists, so we will ensure that as well.

The other thing we have done, and there is evidence that this will make a big difference, is to spend quite a lot of time talking to our sister party in Canada, the Liberal party, who talked us through what they had done. One of the things they did was about affecting culture. It is about affecting the numbers in this place, and I am absolutely sure that all-women shortlists are a critical and essential part of achieving that. It is also right to say that, if you do not shift the culture at the grassroots, you are really only dealing with the symptoms rather than whatever may be the cause of the problem.

What the Canadian Liberals have done, and what we are now doing, is demanding an evidence base, an audit trail of evidence from all constituencies, irrespective of whether or not they are all-women shortlist seats, to demonstrate that efforts have been made to go and talk to underrepresented groups, women and others, to try to bring people into the fold, not just as candidates, but in other ways.

Otherwise, as has been said before, people like the idea of greater gender balance and, indeed, greater representation for currently unrepresented groups. They might like the idea of it; do they will to do anything about it? That is why leadership and, I would say, a more muscular approach is essential.

Q78 Gill Furniss: I would agree with that. If it is the right thing to do, it is the right thing to do, and if people do not like it, they just have to get used to those ideas, because we know it works. I would just like to prod you on the fact that you are saying you are making sure there will be women in safer seats. I know it is difficult in your situation to identify this, but there must be some way that you can say, "Yes, it is an all-women shortlist, but is it in a safe seat or a seat we think we can



win?"

Tim Farron: Of course. Even when we had our post-war high of 63 seats in 2006 after Willie Rennie won the Dunfermline by-election, at that point, as you say, our numbers were relatively low in terms of women. Actually, even at that point, I would not have said any single one of our seats was safe. The notion of safe seats is ugly and dismissive of the electorate, but it is a feature of a first past the post electoral system, just not for all parties, and certainly not for us.

Our job is to make sure that women are in winnable seats. I have to say that, whatever other comment I might make about the boundary changes, we look on the bright side of life. When you are in a situation where you do not have a vast number of sitting MPs, you can impose much more easily. We do not have to worry about people being precious about whether seat X or Y is theirs or not theirs. The fact is that it is there for us to use to achieve gender balance and other balance, if that is going to be part of our aim, which it is.

If I remember rightly, there will be 50-50 in every region of all seats where the party got over 20% of the vote—given that we got 8% nationally, that is the category of our stronger seats—and a compulsory all-women shortlist for any held seat where the sitting MP steps down.

Q79 **Gill Furniss:** You only have the eight MPs at the moment, after the result last year, so presumably they are your safest seats, you would hope, would you not? You do not want to go any lower than that.

Tim Farron: Every election starts nil-nil. That is the right way to look at it.

Q80 **Gill Furniss:** That is somewhere to start with the all-women shortlist, but I do understand the difficulties around that. You have said a bit about the boundary changes and everything, but what I would like you to comment on is why you think women do not come forward. To my mind, you have to identify the barriers first before you can really move much. You can have all-women shortlists, but it might not be the women you particularly need to represent you for all sorts of reasons. Have you identified anything in your party, and have you put in any measures to abolish those barriers, so it is easier for women?

Tim Farron: I do not know the SNP's figures, but I am sure Angus would be able to tell us what they are—but in Britain as a whole, among the UK-wide parties, along with Labour, we have the highest proportion of women councillors, about 33%, which is still a lot lower than it should be, but it demonstrates that, at the grassroots, the problem may not be as hideous as we fear. It also tells you that we are still a long way short of 50-50. You have to ask yourself, again, if we have such a good record of strength in local government why—even in our better years: 2001, 2005, 2010—has that not worked its way through to women getting elected into Parliament.



That tells you an amount, perhaps, about culture on the ground. I identify that as being an issue across society. Yes, you can tackle it in some small part, or in some very significant part, by creating role models and by fixing the numbers at the top, which you can do more easily by restricted shortlists. But it is actually about understanding how people get selected in the first place, what you need to give people the opportunity to thrive and to see a parliamentary career—if we can call it that—as something that is desirable, not just for women but for people from other underrepresented backgrounds.

I say this as someone who still proudly calls himself working-class. It was a more difficult job for me to find myself able to support myself and my family as I became a candidate and an MP over two elections, one where I was not successful and one where I was. That gives me some affinity and understanding of the challenges that are there for underrepresented groups.

We tackle that in various ways. We talk about the leadership programme, which was very effective at getting women into our better seats. They did not win them, but they were in our better seats. 55% of those handover seats had a woman candidate last time round. It is also important for us to focus on not just the people coming forward or not coming forward, but the people who may be a barrier to them coming forward. Something we did in the last five years was to undertake a root-and-branch review of selections and how they are done, selection panels, and, frankly, training in unconscious bias for people.

There are people in every party who are out-and-out dinosaurs, but there are also people who consider themselves to be liberal, progressive, open-minded and tolerant but who, nevertheless, have bias that they did not recognise in themselves. We all need to be trained to understand that. It is also about leadership of local parties—constituency parties as well—to give a sense of women and other underrepresented groups having, if you like, “permission” to be in those visible frontline positions.

Q81 Gill Furniss: Of course, you have never had a non-white woman MP either, over the years, have you? I am sure you would want to do something about that, with the boundary changes.

Tim Farron: Yes, indeed. I cannot give anything away about who is in line to be selected, but I can think of at least one very winnable seat where we will have such a person in it.

Q82 Ben Howlett: One of the first campaigns I ever worked on was a campaign in Kingston where a leaflet went out a couple of years ago saying, “It is a straight choice” just as the gay candidate had lost his husband. It was a Liberal Democrat that was campaigning at that stage. That said to me there is a problem here in terms of the Lib Dems.

Then I was campaigning myself in my own constituency. I said at a hustings that I wanted to have children. The Liberal Democrat candidate



in Bath, who was standing against me, said, on that panel, "How can he have children? He's gay." How can you end up saying to us, and this panel, that you believe in equality when your own candidates are saying such disgraceful things and delivering such disgraceful things?

I also have a particular question. There were a huge number of rumours about what was going on during the gay marriage debate, as well, particularly with yourself, Tim, when it is alleged that you went up to my colleagues—openly gay MPs—and said, "Don't worry; I'll pray for you." How is that right? How can that be the case?

Tim Farron: First of all, that is a downright lie.

Q83 **Ben Howlett:** If it is the case, why are these rumours still going out? Why is it the case that nothing is being done by the Liberal Democrats?

Tim Farron: Because you have just repeated it, Ben.

Chair: Can we focus on the topic of the selection? Thank you.

Tim Farron: This is on the record and on television. You have just repeated an untruth, so that is the reason why it is out there.

Ben Howlett: That is why I said it is alleged

Tim Farron: You did say it was alleged, but it would be good if you could withdraw that.

Q84 **Ben Howlett:** I will say it is alleged. Can I come back on to the counter-point? How can we trust the Liberal Democrats to promote equality of opportunity when, ultimately, I am facing that, when the LGBT community is facing that, and also when your transgender Member of Parliament for Chippenham, who is a woman at the moment, is currently facing deselection because she is "a bit freaky"? How is that right?¹

Tim Farron: On the issues in terms of things that candidates say, and they carry the Party's banner and represent the party in various circumstances, whether it be on the hustings or in a local council election, frankly, the Liberal Democrats, and the Liberal Party before us, have a record of promoting LGBT+ rights that predates pretty much anybody else and is stronger and prouder than anybody else. It does not mean we are immune from people choosing to behave in ways which are outrageous.

I think I am right in saying that, in both the two cases that you have mentioned—it is the first I have heard about them—frankly, there should be a complaint made about individuals like that. If individuals have been found guilty of bringing the party into disrepute—and such actions, if they are as alleged, potentially could do so—then proper action should be taken.

Chair: There is a firm message coming from you on those.

¹ See [WHC0077](#).



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Q85 **Mr Shuker:** Am I right in saying you have put your party on a general election footing, Tim, and that has led to selections?

Tim Farron: It has, yes.

Q86 **Mr Shuker:** How many seats have you selected in?

Tim Farron: We have selected in the overwhelming majority of seats in England and Wales. The Scottish party is doing things differently but will be prepared to have a list of candidates, should be there an election at some point before May 2017.

Q87 **Mr Shuker:** I realise it is a snapshot right now, and it is probably a moving picture, but do you have an idea of the number of women who have been selected?

Tim Farron: Yes, my sense is that we have picked something in the region of 30% to 33% of women for those seats, which is not enough. My quick caveat for that is that those selections have been done under the old rules, not under the rules that we passed at our conference in York. Those selections expire in summer 2017 if there is not an early election. We would also expect that, given many of the candidates who are stepping forward to be short-term candidates for us were former MPs—and we have already talked about how many of them were men—come 2020, should that be the case instead, the end amount will be significantly better.

Q88 **Mr Shuker:** So, under this current system, you have selected about a third of your candidates but you believe that there may be changes later.

Tim Farron: Of the candidates selected, about a third are women.

Q89 **Mr Shuker:** Could I just ask one brief question? Philosophically, is there anything about the ideology of the Liberal Democrats that would prevent, in effect, positive or lenient discrimination to support women being selected in the mechanism we have talked about?

Tim Farron: In a sense, there has been. As I have just indicated, the party has been in favour of equality of all kinds throughout its existence and has led on it. It has often been criticised as a marginal voice calling for equality for LGBT communities, for women and for BAME people; and then that becomes mainstream in years to come. Then you also have this complete conundrum where we are eight straight white blokes in the House of Commons.

There is a connection, and it is not dissimilar to some of the things Angus was reflecting on earlier. In the debate I have been involved in as a young member of the party, as a student, when we looked at all-women shortlists back in the late 80s and early 90s, and in the more recent attempts that have failed, the response is always, "Look, we are a liberal party; we don't go interfering." I understand that, but how can a liberal party seek to represent every part of society and then not look like it?



I am a believer in muscular liberalism and making sure that things are happening. If something is unfair you do not sit there. I am not laissez-faire about economics, because laissez-faire economics does not create a free market situation or create equality. It enshrines privilege and prevents equality. Likewise, we should not be laissez-faire when it comes to equality in Parliament and across society, across men and women and all other groups. It was right for us to fight and it took several attempts to overcome that, and it is an understandable twist on liberalism to say that you should step back and hope things will get better, but that is not the way you make things happen. If you want to make things happen, you have to roll up your sleeves and make them so.

- Q90 **Maria Caulfield:** The impression I get is that the Liberal Democrats are blaming two things as to why they are not more representative of the public they aim to serve. The first is PR. We had a referendum on that during the last Parliament and it seems the Liberal Democrats are not respecting the result of that referendum. We are going to have first past the post, so you will have to live with that and learn to elect more women MPs with that system the British public voted for.

The second issue is the excuse that you are only a small party and that is why there are white men in Parliament, but in 2010 you only had one more MP than the SNP currently have, and yet they have managed to elect MPs that are representative of the populations that they serve. Is it something about the liberal party itself, at the moment, that there are problems there and you are using those two excuses to say, "Well, this is why we are all white men"?

Tim Farron: First of all, if you lose an election—

- Q91 **Maria Caulfield:** But even in 2010, you were not representative.

Tim Farron: You are talking about the referendum. The alternative vote referendum was lost, and it was not proportional representation, but, in any event, I merely reflect that all the empirical evidence shows that the two defining factors in every Parliament in the world where there is gender equality that we would aspire to are proportional representation and all-women shortlists.

- Q92 **Maria Caulfield:** That is not going to happen.

Tim Farron: I am just saying, if we want to fix it, those are the two common features. All right, what can I do? I have to affect what I can affect. It is really about all of us seeking to get our own houses in order and keep them in order. When it comes to all-women shortlists, as I said, it is a very rare thing, even in our party, for the party leader to get on to the conference floor, in the middle of a debate that they could jolly well lose—and the previous time it was put forward they jolly well did lose two to one—and to argue in favour of all-women shortlists and a diversity programme that, on paper at least, will be the strongest of any party in this country. We did, because I can affect what I can affect, and I must do so.



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For example, in what I will boldly refer to as my shadow cabinet, which includes peers, MSPs and assembly members, we have a 50:50 cabinet because I chose to make it so. You can affect those things that you can. In terms of us having a problem, if you look at our Westminster parliamentary party—we will ignore the scale of it for a second—when you see the diversity, or the lack of any diversity, of it, it is blindingly obvious there is a problem. That is why I pushed through a set of packages, which, on paper at least—I now have to make sure they work—are the most radical of any party.

Angus Robertson: Forgive me, convenor. I am not wanting to be argumentative, and I am wanting to be helpful because I am a supporter of proportional representation, but we have proportional representation in Scotland and we still had a problem. That is why we had to introduce mechanisms, because PR on its own was not enough. Having a family-friendly Parliament was not, alone, enough to change things, to tilt things, to make them better. To come back to my previous point—you are looking at this very closely—I would encourage everybody to look very closely at the difference that mechanisms can make. I have no reason to question the motives of my colleagues here; I am sure we all want to get to a situation where things are much more representative, but we are going to be here for a long, long time, and coming back and giving more evidence, unless we have mechanisms in place to sort this out.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I am interested in one of the things that Tim said. If he is telling us he has done all of these things and he has selected candidates for an election that I do not think is going to happen in 2017, how many of them were done by all-women shortlists?

Chair: You cannot ask questions. We do that.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I was not asking a question. I was observing to try to find out some information.

Tim Farron: I am happy to come on to that. All of the immediate selections were done under the previous rules so there were no all-women shortlists, at least none imposed, but there will be next time round.

Q93 **Maria Caulfield:** Just on something you said, do candidates you have selected for 2020 now—

Tim Farron: No, not for 2020. They are in the event of a snap election.

Q94 **Jess Phillips:** The candidate who has been selected where I live on that footing is somebody who nominated himself to be “love rat of the year” in the *News of the World* because of the many, many women that he claims to have “bedded”. What message do you think it sends about the Liberal Democrats’ respect for women and respect for Parliament, that that man on that sitting might knock me out?



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Tim Farron: I remember those comments from some years ago and it is incumbent upon all of us, me especially as leader, to distance ourselves from those kinds of comments.

Q95 **Jess Phillips:** But the Liberal Democrat party has selected somebody who openly says those sexist things about women. I made the same claim to Jeremy Corbyn: what are you going to do about sexism in your party? I ask the same of you.

Tim Farron: It is a top-down approach, is it not? From the leadership, throughout the party, you have to ensure that the language that is used is not offensive to women, or indeed to anybody else, and does not bring the party into disrepute. We have a set of disciplinary procedures that are—following other incidents that we went through in our party—probably the most robust of any in the country. Those procedures exist and they are there to deal with the kind of things you may refer to.

Q96 **Angela Crawley:** Your party, probably more than any other minority party in this Parliament, has benefited from successive coalition governments. Now, in the present day, you have one MP in Scotland, you have no female MSPs in the Scottish Parliament, so I am interested to know: if there is a general election, would you surrender your seat to a female and what is the future of the Liberal Democrats in the UK?

Tim Farron: There are two questions. Will I surrender my seat to a female, and, secondly, what is the future of the Liberal Democrats in the UK? It is a very open question.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: You haven't got time.

Tim Farron: We have not got time. There you go. In the first instance, the honest answer is that I am not going to step down for anybody and I apologise for that. There is a job to do, because not only do I want to follow Justin Trudeau in having a more gender-balanced party; I want to follow him in making sure of the vast growth in our liberal party as there was in Canada. That is the future of the Liberal Democrats across the UK.

Q97 **Chair:** Before we move on to our final section, I just want to ask a couple of questions using the Chair's prerogative. Sir Patrick, the Committee has heard evidence today that although mentoring schemes like Women2Win are very helpful, as Angus Robertson pointed out a few moments ago, these largely voluntary measures are not necessarily sufficiently institutionalised to get the results that, as the largest party in Parliament, you should be trying to achieve. Should you be thinking about that a little bit more?

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I will obviously think about what has been said this morning and what people have said. I do draw back, though, to what we have done and it has been successful. All the questioning this morning, to a degree, and I can understand why, has been done about the 2020 outcome. We have got a stage to get to before we get to 2020,



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and this is something you keep under constant monitoring in the run-up to 2020.

Q98 **Chair:** You can give an undertaking to the Committee today you will be keeping this under constant review so that you achieve a better outcome at the next election.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Yes, of course, absolutely. That is self-evident: if you are trying to get these changes, you have to keep under review the progress you are making in the run-up to 2020. There will be candidates being chosen, I would imagine, because if one looks at what happened in the last Parliament to a degree, a number of people did not decide until quite late on that they were not going to seek re-election. Quite a number of seats came up for reselection quite late on in the programme.

Q99 **Chair:** I want to ask you all a yes-no question, and I really do mean yes or no. Do you think Parliament would benefit from having 50% men and 50% women?

Angus Robertson: Yes.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: Yes, I think so.

Tim Farron: Yes.

Chair: I think there is a lady in the audience who might be pleased with that answer.

Q100 **Ben Howlett:** I have always found in these Select Committee inquiries, if you ask the same question 20 times, you get 20 different answers. Nonetheless, I will ask the same question that has been asked a number of times. What commitment will you give this Committee, here and now, to ensure that the numbers of women MPs will increase by 2020?

Angus Robertson: By supporting the measures that have succeeded in us raising the proportion of female representation for the SNP, both in the Scottish Parliament and hopefully in local government, and then at Westminster at the next election. There is a caveat, which is no backsliding on the wish to raise the percentage, that we represent almost every single constituency in the country where we run for office in this place. It is not without its challenges but, where we can, we now have mechanisms in place and, hopefully, that will ensure that we continue to have an ever growing proportion of our parliamentarians who are women.

Ben Howlett: Don't you go contesting Bath, all right, Patrick.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin: I think that the figures we have seen have seen a dramatic increase on the Tory benches of women representation from 2005 to today. Also, in the Scottish elections, which were the most recent, 40% of our membership now of the Scottish Parliament is women.

Tim Farron: At my instigation, at our conference in York, we have just enacted the most radical set of proposals for how you tackle complete



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failure, I would say, in many respects, when it comes to diversity at the top of our party: all-women shortlists in our most winnable seats; making sure that we have protected places for people with protected characteristics in other seats; making sure we change, from the grassroots up, the way in which the whole nature of selection is done; and, from the leadership down, making sure that I continue to guarantee that my top team, my shadow team, will be 50% female at least, going forward.

Ben Howlett: I would love to have asked Jeremy but sadly he is not here. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you all very much for your time today. I hope you found it useful to hear from other members of the panel the approaches that they are taking. I also hope you will be able to read our report when we publish it, which we hope will be before Christmas. Thank you very much.