

1. About Pregnant Then Screwed

[Pregnant Then Screwed](#) is a charity that seeks to protect, support and promote the rights of pregnant women and mothers. We carry out extensive research into the effects of systemic cultural and institutional discrimination during pregnancy and motherhood, as it relates specifically to employment. Our support services include a free employment rights helpline, a free legal advice service, and an employment tribunal mentoring service, as well as in-person and online events, among these events was [Pregnant Then Elected](#), a project to encourage more mothers into politics.

2. Introduction

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on women has been well documented; school and childcare closures, a spike in pregnancy and maternity discrimination, high numbers of redundancies among mothers with school-age children, unsafe workplaces for pregnant women, indirect sex discrimination in the SEISS payment calculation and a spike in domestic violence. As an organisation that represents working mothers and pregnant women, we are in no doubt that the experience of the women we serve has been exacerbated by the gender-blind policy-making of the current government throughout the pandemic. Despite calls from across the House and the recommendations of this committee in its report *Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact*, the government has repeatedly failed to act or to carry out robust equalities assessments during its Covid response.

While representation in Parliament is at an all-time high with 34% of seats held by women, just 23% of cabinet ministers are women; **essentially, only 5 women - less than a quarter of the cabinet - are involved in making critical policy decisions which affect 50% of the population.** Additionally, the Prime Minister's so-called 'Covid war cabinet' consisted entirely of men.

We believe that the lack of women in Parliament, particularly in cabinet positions, has created adverse outcomes for working mothers and pregnant women during the pandemic. Representation matters, but so too does inclusivity. Once female MPs are elected, we must make it viable for them to actively participate and engage. Our evidence suggests ways in which Parliament can do just that.

3. Recommendations

We recommend that this committee urge Her Majesty's Government to act on the following points:

Written evidence submitted by Pregnant Then Screwed [GSP0025]

- 1. The provision made available to ministers in the Maternity Allowances Bill should be extended to all MPs and their staff.** While we appreciate that this bill was essentially rushed through Parliament to facilitate the maternity leave of the Attorney General, it is potentially discriminatory to other MPs and their staff to have previously been denied the same opportunities. Indeed, the continued withholding of maternity allowances for other members of parliament sets a poor example for employers across the country.
- 2. The proposed IPSA fund to cover parental leave¹, if implemented, should be recorded as a separate budget and not as part of the MPs general expenses.** MPs expenses are closely scrutinised and for good reason. However, including the use of the parental leave fund in their overall expenses may lead to temporarily inflated expenses and leave an MP open to criticism. This could deter them from accessing the fund and taking parental leave.
- 3. Make flexible working patterns available along with job sharing.** We welcome the Minister for Women and Equalities (and International Trade) statement that flexible working should be normalised. Parliament should lead by example and offer the same working conditions, to include job shares and the continued use of virtual sessions. There is some evidence to suggest that female MPs were more likely to use virtual representation and proxy voting more than male MPs.²
- 4. Implement gender quotas for election candidate short lists across all parties.** Evidence has shown that when introduced in other countries, in line with their electoral system, quotas are successful in improving gender representation.³
- 5. The Women and Equalities brief should be the only portfolio of the appointed minister.** Assigning this portfolio to the Minister for International Trade during a seismic event like Brexit, sends a clear message that neither Women or Equality is taken seriously by this government. In fact, the insinuation is that it is a part-time role with a part-time focus and that it does not deserve prioritising. A very clear and decisive step towards a gender-sensitive parliament would be to assign a dedicated minister to this portfolio and treat both women and the topic of equality with the importance they deserve.

Other recommendations

- 6. Normalise parental leave by encouraging male MPs to take leave to care for their children.**
- 7. Repeat the Gender Sensitive Parliament Audit that was last carried out in 2018.**

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https://assets.ctfassets.net/nc7h1cs4q6ic/4kk2orwQKxIKmXY4c6SjhH/f1122d775728cf30b78c3657b6197aa8/Consultation_document_-_MP_parental_leave_cover_and_staff_reservist_leave.pdf

² <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn01250/#:~:text=UK%20Parliament%20and%20Government,is%20an%20all%2Dtime%20high.&text=Since%201918%2C%20552%20women%20have,of%20the%20House%20of%20Lords.>

³ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOL-FEMM_NT\(2013\)493011_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOL-FEMM_NT(2013)493011_EN.pdf)

4. Conclusion

Aside from moving towards a more representative Parliament, it is vital that policies and conditions exist which encourage women to participate and do not alienate them from politics. Equally, Parliament must recognise the role it plays in setting an example of gender equality in the workplace. Indeed, it is the most famous workplace in the country. Very few people go to work everyday and have millions of people watch them do their job and scrutinise their performance. The country pays attention to what is happening in Westminster, it is now time for Westminster to pay attention to women.

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