



# Response to the Scottish Labour consultation on Achieving Women's Equality

The Scottish Youth Parliament

January 2016

## Introduction

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) represents all of Scotland's young people. Our Vision for Scotland is of a nation that listens to and values the participation of children and young people. Our goal is to do our utmost to make this vision a reality. We see this as vital to ensuring Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up.

Our democratically elected members listen to and recognise the issues that are most important to young people, ensuring that their voices are heard by decision-makers. We provide a platform for young people to discuss issues that matter to them, and support them to campaign for the changes they wish to see at community, local and national levels.

SYP's Values are:

Democracy - We are youth-led and accountable to young people aged 14-25.

Rights - We are passionate about ensuring that young people are aware of their rights and ensuring that local and national government deliver policies that ensure those rights are fulfilled.

Inclusion - We are committed to being truly inclusive and work tirelessly to ensure that we represent young people from every community and background.

Political impartiality - We constructively engage with, and challenge, decision-makers from all political parties to ensure the voices of young people are at the heart of policymaking in Scotland.

## Our Approach

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Scottish Labour's consultation on Achieving Women's Equality. As a youth-led organisation, our response is based on existing SYP policy drafted and voted on by members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs); direct consultation with the SYP Equalities Subject Committee via an online survey<sup>1</sup>; and preliminary analysis of responses to our manifesto consultation Lead The Way<sup>2</sup>. Therefore our response is fully grounded in the views of young people. Considering SYP's role in

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<sup>1</sup> The online survey was facilitated through SurveyMonkey, and contained seven questions based on specific issues raised in the consultation paper Achieving Women's Equality. The questions were adapted to ensure they were conducive for consultation with young people.

<sup>2</sup> Lead The Way will inform SYP's policy and advocacy activities for the next five years (2016-2021) and has received over 65,000 responses from young people around Scotland. The preliminary analysis cited in this document is based on 1210 responses received online between June and October 2015. It is therefore important to bear in mind that this preliminary analysis should serve as a snapshot of young people's opinions emerging from the consultation rather than a representation of young people's views as a whole. More detailed analysis of Lead The Way will be launched in March 2016.

representing the voices of young people, we have not responded to all questions in the consultation, rather those issues relating to current SYP policy and of particular relevance to young people.



## General comments

- The Scottish Youth Parliament is generally supportive of the vision laid out in Scottish Labour's consultation paper. Many of the vision statements align with SYP's values and policy. For instance in October 2015 Members passed a motion to support the 50:50 by 2020 pledge, and in March 2015 a motion was passed to support UN Women's '[HeforShe](#)' campaign.
- In our preliminary analysis of Lead The Way online consultation responses, 92% agreed that there should be more after-care, support and protection for survivors of sexual violence and abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, human trafficking and domestic abuse. There is therefore clear support among Scotland's young people for an end to gender inequality and gender-based violence and we are encouraged by the consultation paper's vision to ensure that Women's Aid groups are adequately and securely funded.
- We are supportive of the commitment to make equality and transparency a key element in all public contracts to government as part of an initiative to eliminate the gender pay gap. 92% of Lead The Way online consultation respondents agreed that there should be an end to the gender pay gap and gender discrimination in the workplace. In terms of tackling occupational segregation, we believe that more effort and resources should be dedicated to ensuring an equal gender balance in the promotion and allocation of modern apprenticeship places.
- We are very supportive of Scottish Labour's commitment to tackling online bullying and harassment. All online survey respondents either completely agreed or agreed a little that there should be a parliamentary enquiry made into how to challenge online bullying and harassment. With up to 42% of young people feeling unsafe online<sup>3</sup>, it is essential that young people are involved in developing initiatives to tackle online bullying and harassment.
- While we agree that gender inequality should be tackled through promoting women's and girls' equality, this initiative could be strengthened by an explicit acknowledgment of non-binary and transgender identities. As an online survey respondent stated, 'gender inequality should be tackled with an open mind, especially by acknowledging that there are more than two genders'. A vision of gender equality which takes this conception of gender into account could ensure greater inclusion and equality for all.

More detailed comments on specific themes of the consultation paper can be found below.

## Representation of women and girls in the public sphere

SYP supports the 50:50 by 2020 pledge. We believe that the representation of women in politics can be improved by encouraging participation in public life from a young age, for instance through raising awareness of the 50:50 campaign in schools, universities and colleges. SYP, as an organisation that provides a platform for young people to use their voice for change, also plays a vital role in encouraging the participation of girls and young women in politics and public life. Our current membership (2015-17) is made up of 48% young women, 44% young men and 8% non-binary individuals.

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<sup>3</sup> Bullying UK, 'What is Cyberbullying?': <http://www.bullying.co.uk/cyberbullying/what-is-cyberbullying/>



We are supportive of Scottish Labour's commitment to appoint a Cabinet Minister for Equalities to ensure that gender and other equalities are mainstreamed throughout the Scottish Government and Public Sector. In the online survey, respondents were largely supportive of mainstreaming equalities across the government. To be fully effective the person responsible for mainstreaming equalities should take an intersectional approach, that is being aware of how different inequalities overlap and affect one another, and that people can experience multiple inequalities at a time.

We are also supportive of initiatives to ensure that women and girls are fairly represented in the media, particularly in advertising which can perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. 82% of Lead The Way online consultation responses thought that there should be an end to the use of gender stereotypes to advertise goods and services.

### Preventing violence against women

There is evidence to suggest that abuse at the hands of a partner disproportionately affects adolescent and young women<sup>4</sup>; therefore we firmly believe that young people should be closely consulted in order to effectively tackle gender-based violence in Scotland, and are heartened by Scottish Labour's young feminists' roundtable event on achieving gender equality taking place in January 2016. Events like this as well as projects such as [Rape Crisis Scotland's](#) involvement of young people in designing and delivering sexual violence prevention education are essential to tackling gender-based violence. Such initiatives should be more widespread throughout all areas of Scotland.

We agree with Scottish Labour's assertion that education plays a vital role in preventing violence against women and girls and challenging harmful myths.<sup>5</sup> As a rights-based organisation with our mission and values grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), we believe that providing high quality sex and relationship education to young people is a right enshrined under article 29 of the UNCRC, which states that children's and young people's education should develop 'respect for human rights' and prepare young people to live 'in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance [and] **equality of sexes**'<sup>6</sup> (our emphasis).

There was unanimous agreement in the online survey responses for mandatory sex and relationship education. In the interests of transparency, given the small sample number of respondents in this survey we feel it would be useful to conduct a larger-scale survey with young people about their views on mandatory sex and relationship education in order to better inform policy on this area.

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<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government, 2014, *Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy for preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls*: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00454152.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> In 2014 SYP responded to Scottish Government draft guidance on the conduct of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education in Scottish schools. This response can be accessed on our website: [http://www.syp.org.uk/consultation\\_responses](http://www.syp.org.uk/consultation_responses)

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>



Some survey respondents also commented that the quality of sex and relationship education needs to be updated and improved as well as being mandatory. As one respondent stated, sex and relationship education should 'reflect the issues affecting young people today [such as] sexual consent'. This echoes the following Members' Motion passed in October 2015:

'The Scottish Youth Parliament believes young people should be involved in the design of PSHE course content, which must be kept up-to-date and relevant to our rapidly changing world.'

In addition, previous SYP consultation with young people on PSHE education found that some respondents commented that sex education was irrelevant or patronising<sup>7</sup>. We believe that it is therefore essential for young people to be involved in the design of sex and relationship education in order for it to be as relevant, informative and up-to-date as possible.

In regards to the content of sex and relationship education, all online survey respondents either completely agreed or agreed a little that this should include online safety. In addition to including online safety and issues surrounding consent, sex and relationship education could include a focus on gender inequality. In the online survey responses, some respondents asserted that there is still widespread misunderstanding of gender inequality and feminism. As one respondent stated, 'a lot of people have a negative view of "feminism"'. Raising awareness of gender inequality and negative gender stereotypes early in young people's lives could play an important part in promoting a culture that does not tolerate gender-based violence and promotes mutually respectful relationships.

Further, we believe that all professionals who deliver sex and relationship education should receive gender equality training. This would enable better quality, consistent sex and relationship education throughout Scotland.

Finally, we feel there should be more exploration into the delivery of sex and relationship education in higher education as well as schools; a research report published in 2013 by the National Union of Students (NUS) found that 50% of research participants identified a 'culture of harassment' and 'prevailing sexism' at their universities.<sup>8</sup> As with schools, sex and relationship education in higher education could be shaped with the input of students and tailored to the specific context of student life.

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<sup>7</sup> Scottish Youth Parliament, 2014, *Response to Draft Guidance on the Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Scottish schools*: [http://www.syp.org.uk/consultation\\_responses](http://www.syp.org.uk/consultation_responses)

<sup>8</sup> NUS, 2012, *That's what she said: Women students' experience of 'lad culture' in higher education*: <http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/Campaigns/That's%20what%20she%20said%20full%20report%20Final%20web.pdf>