

Girls Matter

Our calls for change



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Girls Matter

To all Party Leaders and the next government

We write on behalf of thousands of Girlguiding's members - girls and young women across the UK aged between 7 and 25. Girlguiding gives us a safe environment in which we can thrive and realise our potential. Our voices are listened to. We matter. But in the world beyond Girlguiding - for us and many others - it is a different story.

Girls should not have to grow up afraid to walk down the street alone at night. We should not accept harassment as commonplace. We should not be plagued by insecurities about our bodies because we are told time and again that our looks are the most important thing about us. We should not have to feel embarrassed and undermined by the way women are portrayed in the media. We should not be woefully underrepresented in positions of power. We should not need to feel grateful for getting an education in the UK - all girls and boys across the world should enjoy that right.

In the run-up to the 2015 General Election, we have put together eight calls for change and are looking to you as our democratically elected representatives to listen to girls' voices and commit to act. Promise to support our calls and show that you believe girls and women play a vital role in our society and deserve to be respected as equals.

Young people will be the voters and leaders of tomorrow, so it is crucial to engage us fully in decisions that will have an impact on our lives, now and in the future. We strongly believe that change at a parliamentary level is imperative for any significant cultural shift in the lives of women and girls.

These eight issues are all close to our hearts. And we know, through Girlguiding's consultation with thousands of members and from the results of the annual Girls' Attitudes Survey, that many other girls and young women share our concerns. Girls are facing unparalleled challenges, both here and across the world. The time has come to act. You have the power to let girls know they matter. We hope that you do.

*Yours faithfully,
Girlguiding's Advocate panel**

**Amy, Bijal, Daisy, Ellie, Emma, Haley,
Heather, Isla, Jasmine, Julia, Katie,
Michaela, Morgan, Nikki, Sophie,
Vicky.**

**To learn more about us,
see the back cover.*



Within the next parliamentary term, we ask you to:

1

Listen to girls and young women, take them seriously and make sure their voices count

Promise to regularly consult girls and young women from all backgrounds and ensure their views are considered in policy decisions that affect their lives.

2

Demand that schools take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual bullying and harassment

Promise to introduce guidance that all schools must use to tackle this issue.

3

Call on all schools to teach body confidence and gender equality

Promise to make Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) compulsory and urge schools to include lessons on body confidence and gender equality.

4

Make girls' rights a priority in the UK's approach to international development

Promise that the Department for International Development will focus on equality for girls, including advocating for girls' rights to be central to the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

5

Stop children's exposure to harmful sexualised content in mainstream media

Promise to bring print and online media in line with the principles of the broadcast watershed.

6

Empower girls and young women to speak out and be heard on the impact of media sexism and stereotyping

Promise to establish a girls' and young women's advisory panel to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

7

Modernise Sex and Relationships Education so all young people can make informed decisions and stay safe

Promise to make Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) compulsory in all schools and update the curriculum to include healthy relationships, sexual consent, online safety, violence against women and girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships.

8

Guarantee that women will be equally represented in Parliament

Promise to set a target for an increased number of female MPs in your party by the 2020 General Election and do what it takes to meet it, no excuses.

1 Listen to girls and young women, take them seriously and make sure their voices count

Promise to regularly consult girls and young women from all backgrounds and ensure their views are considered in policy decisions that affect their lives.



Heather, 23,
Totnes, Girlguiding
Advocate

'Girls and young women have so much to say and a fresh view on many of the issues the government is tackling. Many young women are frustrated - they feel that their opinions are not heard or considered when policies are created that will affect their lives. Politicians need to connect with the girls and young women they are representing to fully understand the impact of their decisions.'

'I'd really like girls' voices heard all over the place, since the government doesn't listen to them and lots of people think girls don't matter as much as boys.'

Katie, 8, London

'Involving girls and young women in policy decisions will prove that their voices are valued, in turn encouraging more women to take leadership roles.'

Ellie, 17, Hemel Hempstead,
Girlguiding Advocate

'My ideas don't always get taken seriously by boys and men, and I feel the reason is because I am a girl and they don't think I should have a view on anything they are discussing.'

Anon, 16, South Lanarkshire

'Surely girls' voices are the most accurate and powerful evidence of what is affecting girls right now?'

Julia, 19, Ashby de la Zouch,
Girlguiding Advocate

57%

Over half of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 feel that politicians do not listen to their views enough.

60%

of young women aged 16 to 21 have felt patronised or been made to feel stupid because of their gender.

87%

of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 think that women are judged more on their appearance than on their ability.

Demand that schools take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual bullying and harassment

Amy, 16,
Glasgow, Girlguiding
Advocate

'Every day, many girls' lives are made a misery by an onslaught of sexist comments, sexual harassment and abuse at school. These girls don't feel safe, which affects their education. By ensuring schools take a no-tolerance approach to this kind of behaviour, the government would be improving the day-to-day lives of these girls, as well as reducing sexual harassment and violence in the future.'

Promise to introduce guidance that all schools must use to tackle this issue.



70%

of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 say they have experienced sexual harassment at school, including sexual taunts and unwanted touching.

41%

aged 11 to 21 know girls their age who have experienced homophobic bullying.

61%

of 11- to 16-year-old girls say teachers/staff sometimes or always dismiss sexual harassment as just a bit of banter (eg 'boys mucking around').

'Sexual harassment is a severe issue for girls, made even worse by social-media-based violence. Violence should not be commonplace for the vulnerable young generation.'

Michaela, 17, Bexley,
Girlguiding Advocate

'The number of teenage girls I know who have been abused, assaulted, or simply made to feel uncomfortable in the presence of a teacher or other authority figure is too high. And what's worse is that they're expected to keep quiet about such "minor" things and not complain.'

Megan, 17, Stourbridge

'I think action should be taken within schools to increase awareness and to be firm with homophobia and bullying before it escalates into a very big problem.'

Sophie, 17, Exeter

'I think it's unfair that girls are groped and get rude comments directed at them, and that women are blamed for rape (eg wearing revealing clothes).'

Anon, 14,
Wokingham

3

Call on all schools to teach body confidence and gender equality

Promise to make Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) compulsory and urge schools to include lessons on body confidence and gender equality.



Nikki, 22,
Southampton,
Girlguiding Advocate

62%

of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 think schools should have to teach gender equality.

47%

Almost half of girls aged 11 to 16 say they are unhappy with their looks.

20%

of 7- to 11-year-old girls say they have been on a diet, and 71% of 11- to 21-year-olds say they would like to lose weight.

'We're just constantly being told "you can't do that - you're a girl" or "that's what you're meant to be". People are restricting what we can and can't do and trying to put us into neat little boxes.'

Rebecca, 13,
Gloucestershire

'Girls are growing up surrounded by things that can make them feel bad about themselves - images of women photoshopped beyond recognition, sexist music videos and song lyrics, lads' mags... The list goes on. I spent most of my teenage years plagued by self-doubt. Had it been a requirement for my school to teach body confidence, then that angst would more than likely have been prevented.'

'I think bullying girls about their looks can change their personalities, because they change to fit in and stop the bullying.'

Anon, 8, Darlington

'Even girls at primary school are worrying about their appearance and weight. PSHE could do more to allow girls to be happy and not spend their childhood worrying about their appearance.'

Bijal, 23, Bolton, Girlguiding Advocate

'I would like the government to come up with some PSHE lessons that would be taught nationally to start to get rid of gender stereotyping.'

Beth, 17, Colchester

Make girls' rights a priority in the UK's approach to international development

4

Promise that the Department for International Development will focus on equality for girls, including advocating for girls' rights to be central to the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.



'Some girls don't have choices and they live in an unfair way. But all girls need an education and we should do something.'

Scarlet, 8, Anglia

Haley, 20,
Carrickfergus,
Girlguiding Advocate

'With female genital mutilation affecting 125 million worldwide and child marriage on the rise, too many girls are not getting the chance of an education or a life equal to men. Girls must not be excluded or forgotten in the post-2015 global development agenda. And the government should show its commitment by also taking a zero-tolerance stance towards the infringement of girls' rights here in the UK.'

'The government and the UN need to make a stand against the abuse of girls' rights, with influential and inspirational people such as Malala Yousafzai helping to raise awareness.'

Keerthi, 15, East Riding
of Yorkshire

'If girls have access to education, can have their voices heard and are safe from violence, many of the other issues they face could be resolved.'

Elspeth, 18, York

'I have such amazing opportunities available to me and I think that it's important that every girl should have the same.'

Emma, 13, Leamington Spa

125 million

girls and women worldwide have undergone female genital mutilation, and 20,000 girls in the UK are at risk every year.

14 million

girls are forced or coerced into marriage every year.

65 million

girls across the globe are not in school.

5

Stop children's exposure to harmful sexualised content in mainstream media

Promise to bring print and online media in line with the principles of the broadcast watershed.



'The government should monitor the media more and have tighter controls on what should be allowed, for example the content of some adverts is degrading to women.'

Kate, 16, Southampton

'Too often the media present women as merely sex objects. Parliament needs to take the lead to show that girls and women are worth so much more than that - they are individual, intelligent and equal human beings. By setting regulations on the portrayal of women in the media, politicians can help to create a society in which young girls and boys are not surrounded by the sexist images of Page 3 and others like it, and know that women are equal and have more to offer than just their bodies.'

Katie, 18,
Doncaster,
Girlguiding Advocate

75%

of girls and young women aged 11 to 21, and 48% of 7- to 10-year-olds, think there are too many images of naked or nearly naked women in the media.

64%

of young women aged 17 to 21 agree with the No More Page 3 campaign that aims to get topless women out of *The Sun*, the UK's most-read family newspaper.

85%

of young women aged 17 to 21 agree that the government has a role to play in making sure the media represent women fairly.

'It's crazy that something that can only be shown after 9pm on TV can be seen by children in all kinds of places like public transport.'

Sophie, 21, Isle of Anglesey, Girlguiding Advocate

'The media influences society hugely, so if the media presents women as being sex objects, there only to satisfy men and be judged on their appearance, ordinary people start to believe that as well.'

Sarah, 18, Birmingham

'We don't want to be objectified. It has a negative impact not only on women but also on men and young boys, and changing this could lead to a decrease in gender-based violence and rape.'

Haley, 20, Carrickfergus,
Girlguiding Advocate

Empower girls and young women to speak out and be heard on the impact of media sexism and stereotyping

Girls Matter

Our call for change

Promise to establish a girls' and young women's advisory panel to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.



'The media need to stop coverage of size 0 models and promote a healthier attitude towards body confidence and self-esteem.'

Laura, 21, Wakefield

'Showing an equal variety of not only men and women but different races will provide a true equality in the media.'

Danielle, 16, Orpington

'Every day we are exposed to thousands of images and ideas from the media. That's why I think their sexualised and stereotypical representation of girls and women is one of the major reasons for the high levels of sexism still present across society. Constantly seeing airbrushed and sexualised images of women has an extremely negative effect on girls' body confidence, and it affects how men and boys think too. Giving girls a voice on how this can be tackled is really important. Things have to change.'

Morgan, 17, Folkestone, Girlguiding Advocate

'I think girls should be on TV more doing sport - the only time you really see this is every four years when they're at the Olympics. You hardly ever see girls playing football or tennis or cricket. You never see them playing golf or anything.'

Kayley, 9, London

'The media should include a diversity of images that portray women, for example in politics, business, academia, engineering, science, technology, mathematics and leading professions. These images must also be taken seriously, not ridiculed or mocked for not conforming to the sexualised stereotype of women.'

Sarah, 21, Morecambe

83%

of young women aged 17 to 21 agree that media organisations should make sure there is more diversity represented among women in the media, including age, ethnicity, body size, sexuality and profession.

61%

of girls and young women aged 7 to 21 say that they feel boys expect them to look like the images of girls and women they see in the media.

80%

of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 think there is too much discussion on women's weight in the media.

7

Modernise Sex and Relationships Education so all young people can make informed decisions and stay safe

Promise to make Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) compulsory in all schools and update the curriculum to include healthy relationships, sexual consent, online safety, violence against women and girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships.



Julia, 19,
Ashby de la Zouch,
Girlguiding Advocate

'We need to prepare children and teens for the challenges and joys of respectful relationships by debunking myths and having open and frank discussions about trust, consent, respect and equality, as well as "taboo" issues like pornography, online relationships and domestic violence that aren't currently covered in lessons. The next government could take a positive step by making updated SRE compulsory.'

'Schools could include information on physical relationships that aren't heterosexual. It can be awkward and confusing for young people to search out this information on their own.'

Jenny, 20, Aberdeen

'So many girls in my peer group have been mistreated by boys who think they are in control in sex and relationship situations, and girls feel that they cannot tell anyone or leave.'

Anon, 16, Devon

'Focusing more on the way boys look at and treat girls, rather than the way girls have to act, may have a positive impact.'

Bel, 15, Milton Keynes

'PSHE lessons should include more on behaviour and emotions in relationships, and talk openly about mental, verbal and physical abuse, including female genital mutilation and domestic violence.'

Hannah, 25, London

55%

of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 say SRE does not focus enough on relationships, rising to 64% among 16- to 21-year-olds.

46%

of 11- to 16-year-olds say SRE at school has not prepared them well.

76%

of girls aged 11 to 21 say girls are judged harshly for sexual behaviour seen as acceptable in boys.

Guarantee that women will be equally represented in Parliament

8

Promise to set a target for an increased number of female MPs in your party by the 2020 General Election and do what it takes to meet it, no excuses.



66%

of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 think that there are not enough women in leadership positions in the UK.

67%

think there aren't enough female MPs.

63%

think that girls' voices would be listened to more if there were more female MPs.

'We won't see girls believing that their voices are listened to and taken seriously until we see more women in Parliament.'

Katie, 18, Doncaster,
Girlguiding Advocate

'I think just as many women should run the country as men because we should all be equal.'

Jayden, 8, Llanelli

'Politicians should make sure there are more women in Parliament.'

Samantha, 13, Wrexham

'Many girls and young women feel that women are underrepresented in positions of power. With women making up only 25 per cent of MPs, political parties should do more to ensure that women are visible within Parliament. A greater number of female MPs will prevent the limitation of girls' aspirations, and help to ensure that the voices of girls are being listened to.'

Daisy, 18,
Holmfirth,
Girlguiding Advocate

'There are barely any politicians at the moment who are female. This is discouraging for girls who would like this job. We don't have enough female role models to help inspire girls to do what they want.'

Anna, 11, Farnborough

About Girls Matter

75 per cent of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 say that sexism is so widespread in society that it affects most areas of their lives.

Each year Girlguiding canvasses the views of over 1,200 girls and young women across the UK, within and outside guiding, to find out what really matters to them today. This research has shown that they face a perfect storm of pressures, from everyday sexism, sexual harassment and violence, to intense scrutiny of their appearance, double standards and a role model deficit.

During 2014 we explored these findings in more depth through consultation with over 2,400 of our young members aged 7 to 25. Girls Matter is the result of this process. It's a call for change from girls and young women to the decision-makers of the next government. It proposes solutions that they and Girlguiding believe will help to eliminate the barriers that hold them back and limit their aspirations. All the voices included in this report are taken from this consultation and from members of Advocate, Girlguiding's youth panel.

As the largest charity for girls and young women in the UK, Girlguiding has a responsibility to make girls' voices heard. The General Election in May 2015 is a vital moment for politicians to really listen to what they have to say, take them seriously and prove that things can change.

At the heart of Girls Matter are the members of Girlguiding's Advocate panel, young women from across the UK aged between 14 and 25. Our Advocates come together regularly to discuss the issues they care about and how they can make a difference, and they are central to developing Girlguiding's research and campaigns.