

**150 YEARS**  
**Fawcett** ▶▶▶

*Equality. It's about time.*

**1866-2016**



## 150 years of progress on women's rights and gender equality 1866-2016

In 1866 when Millicent Fawcett and other campaigners were handing over their petition for women's suffrage to parliament, women had few legal rights, could not vote in national elections, had no access to higher education, were subject to state-endorsed violence from their husbands and were the property of men, usually their fathers or husbands.

150 years later we have seen our society transformed. Legislative, cultural and societal changes driven by brave women pioneers and campaigners have made the UK a dramatically more equal place for women. Yet this change has not been inevitable.

At every step women and their male allies have fought for change. Behind each of these achievements has been a long list of individuals and organisations like the Fawcett Society campaigning, lobbying and mobilising to challenge and persuade decision makers.

Here we celebrate the achievements of these women and institutions without whom the UK would be a much bleaker place for women today. Yet here we also set out the challenges that remain as there is still a long way to go for women to achieve true equality. In 2016 women make up only 29% of MPs and 23% of FTSE 100 board members, women in Northern Ireland still cannot access safe and legal abortion, 2 women each week die at the hands of a partner or ex-partner and the pay gap stands at 13.9% for full time work. At the current rate of progress it will take 50 years to close the gender pay gap and a child born today will not see equal representation in her lifetime.

As Fawcett celebrates our 150th anniversary throughout 2016, we renew our commitment to speeding up the pace of change. Just like those who have gone before us, we will not wait patiently but will continue to change minds, change laws and create a society where the gender you are does not determine the life chances you have.

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**Reproductive rights and sexual health**

**1866**

Abortion has been outlawed by the Offences against the Person Act 1861.

English common law has set the age of consent to between 10 and 12.<sup>1</sup> Diaphragms and rubber condoms are available but rarely used and not available for unmarried women.<sup>2</sup>

**1877**

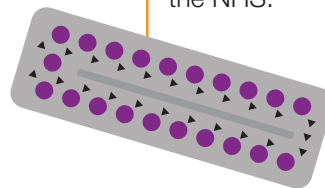
Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh trialled for obscene libel after publishing 'The Fruits of Philosophy' a book about contraception.<sup>3</sup>

**1885**

The age of consent is raised to 16.<sup>4</sup>

**1961**

Contraceptive Pill first becomes available on the NHS.<sup>2</sup>



**1967**

Abortion Act gives women in the UK (excluding Northern Ireland) abortion rights with certain conditions.<sup>5</sup>

**1972**

The National Health Service (Family Planning) Amendment Act allows local health authorities to provide vasectomy services on the same basis as other contraceptive services.<sup>2</sup>

**2016**

Women in England, Scotland and Wales still need the approval of 2 doctors before they can get an abortion. Women in N Ireland can only have an abortion if they are at risk of dying.

Just 53% of young women are taught about their choices should they get pregnant and only 67% are taught about contraception.<sup>6</sup>

The abortion rate for under 18s is going down, for women aged over 30 it's going up.<sup>7</sup>

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## Violence against women



**1891**

The right to use corporal punishment on a wife is removed.

**1866**

At the point of marriage a husband is responsible for his wife and children and can use force to control them although laws do exist to imprison men who beat their wives too severely.

The concept of rape within marriage does not exist.<sup>8</sup>

**1971**

The charity Refuge opens the first safe house in Chiswick, west London, for women and children fleeing domestic abuse.

**1895**

A City of London byelaw makes it illegal to hit your wife between the hours of 10pm and 7am because the noise is keeping people awake.<sup>9</sup>

**1994**

Rape in marriage is made a crime.<sup>8</sup>

**1985**

Prohibition of Female Circumcision Act 1985 makes female genital mutilation a crime.<sup>10</sup> The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 and the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation (Scotland) Act 2005 extend the legislation to cover acts committed by UK nationals outside of the UK's borders.<sup>11</sup>

**2004**

Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act makes common assault an arrestable offence.<sup>12</sup>

**2015**

Coercive control becomes a criminal offence.<sup>14</sup>

**2014**

Clare's law is introduced allowing police to disclose details of an abusive partner's past.<sup>13</sup>

**2016**

On average, two women a week are killed each year by a current or former male partner.<sup>15</sup> Reported incidents of domestic violence have increased by 31% since 2013.<sup>16</sup>

Over 137,000 women in England and Wales are already living with the consequences of FGM.<sup>17</sup>

107,104 violence against women crimes are reported a year.<sup>18</sup>

Violence against Muslims is increasing, with Muslim women particularly likely to be targeted.<sup>19</sup>

Recl@im the Internet is established to tackle misogyny and sexism online.<sup>20</sup>

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## Home & family

**1921**

House of Commons tries to make sexual acts between women outlawed in the Criminal Law Amendment Act but is defeated by the House of Lords.<sup>22</sup>

**1945**

Family Allowances Act introduces child benefit of 5 shillings a week per child. Until the 1940s single parents relied on charity or the workhouse.<sup>24</sup>

**1986**

Statutory maternity pay introduced<sup>26</sup>.  
 Bastardy Act repealed by the Family Law Reform Act, finally gives children born outside marriage the same legal status as those born in marriage.<sup>27</sup>

**2003**

Dads become entitled to 2 weeks paid paternity leave.<sup>29</sup>

**2014**

Shared parental leave is introduced giving a mother the right to transfer periods of leave to father.<sup>30</sup>

**2016**

Take up of shared parental leave in the UK predicted to be 8%. In Sweden it's 80%.<sup>31</sup>

Around 54,000 women lose their jobs a year due to pregnancy discrimination.<sup>32</sup>

Men are less likely than women to request flexible working and more likely to have a request turned down.<sup>33</sup>

Almost 60% of women are working in jobs where they can change their hours.<sup>34</sup>

25% of the workforce have requested flexible work with an 80% success rate.<sup>35</sup>

**1866**

Marriage is defined in law as being between a man and a woman (preventing future same-sex marriages). A married woman and all she owns belong to her husband.<sup>21</sup>

**1925**

The Law of Property Act allows both husband and wife to inherit property equally.<sup>23</sup>

**1971**

Dads spend 15 minutes per day caring for children. By 1997 this has risen to 2 hours per day, and 2.7 hours in 2011.<sup>25</sup>

**2002**

Parliament passes measures allowing gay, lesbian and unmarried couples to adopt children, and equal access to the right to request flexible working first introduced for parents of young or disabled children.<sup>28</sup>



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### Education

**1869**

The first women's college, Girton College, Cambridge is founded by Emily Davies.<sup>37</sup>

**1878**

The University of London becomes the first university in the UK to accept women on equal terms with men.<sup>39</sup>

**1880**

Four women graduate from University of London.<sup>40</sup>



**1993**

Equality between women and men in higher education enrolment is reached.<sup>42</sup>

**2009**

Women aged 17-20 outnumber and out-perform men of the same age in higher education with 37% of men in higher education compared to 49% women.<sup>43</sup>

**2016**

45% of academics are female, but are only 22% of professors.<sup>44</sup>

Male graduates continue to earn more (£24 – 27k) than female graduates (£21 – £24k) even when compared to women who did the same subject, went to a similar university and went into the same industry.<sup>45</sup>

**1866**

Education is seen as a way of making girls better wives and mothers. Women have no access to higher education.<sup>36</sup>

**1871**

Newham College, Cambridge co-founded by Millicent Fawcett.<sup>38</sup>

**1944**

Education Act makes secondary education free, raises school leaving age to 15 and outlaws the marriage bar for teachers.<sup>41</sup>

**2012**

Women are just 3% of the 13,280 Engineering apprentices, and 93% of the 25,840 Children's Care apprentices.

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### Work

#### 1914 - 18

During WWI women's employment reaches 46.7%.<sup>48</sup>

#### 1888

Clementina Black, Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, secures the first successful equal pay resolution at Trades Union Congress.<sup>46</sup>

1,400 women at Bryant & May go on strike in protest of the poor wages and dangerous conditions in the matchstick factory led by Annie Besant.<sup>47</sup>

#### 1939 - 1945

During WWII 90% of single women and 80% of married women are working in factories or on the land.<sup>50</sup>



#### 1920

The Sex Discrimination Removal Act allows women access to the legal profession and accountancy.<sup>49</sup>

#### 1973

Women are allowed to join the London Stock Exchange for the first time.<sup>52</sup>

#### 1968

Ford Dagenham sewing machinists' strike, leading to the Equal Pay Act 1970.<sup>51</sup>

#### 1990

Independent taxation for women is introduced and for the first time, married women.<sup>54</sup>

#### 1975

The Sex Discrimination Act makes it illegal to discriminate against women in work, education and training and implements the 1970 Equal Pay Act.<sup>53</sup>

#### 1999

The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations, makes it illegal for employers to discriminate against trans people.<sup>55</sup>

#### 2016

The pay gap now stands at 13.9% for full-time work, at the current rate of progress it will take 50 years to close the gender pay gap.<sup>56</sup> A female apprentice earns on average £2000 less than a male apprentice over the year.<sup>57</sup>

Just 22% of women will receive the full amount of the new single tier state pension compared to 50% of men.<sup>58</sup>

Occupational segregation remains common – for example, women are 77% of secretaries and only 13% of QCs and 6% of engineers, much higher earning professions.<sup>59 60</sup>

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**Women at the top**

**1922**

Dr. Ivy Williams is the first woman to be called to the Bar in England (1922)<sup>62</sup> and first woman to be awarded the degree of Doctor of Civil Law in Oxford (1923).



**1943**

Dame Anne Loughlin becomes the first female president of the TUC.<sup>64</sup>

**1973**

Sybil Phoenix is the first black woman to be given an MBE.<sup>66</sup>



**2015**

Libby Lane - First Female Bishop to the Church of England (2015).<sup>68</sup>

Bobbie Cheema-Grubb QC becomes the first Asian woman High Court judge.<sup>69</sup>

Major General Susan Ridge becomes the first ever female senior officer in the British Army.<sup>70</sup>

**2016**

Women make up: 39% of senior civil service roles<sup>71</sup>, 14% of police commissioners<sup>72</sup>, 21% of high court judges<sup>73</sup> and 12.7% of Officers in the armed forces.<sup>74</sup>

Only 26% of FSTE 100 boards members are women.<sup>75</sup>

Women chair only 12% of all Higher Education Institutions and lead only 17% of them as Vice Chancellors.<sup>76</sup>

**1865**

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (sister of Millicent Fawcett) is the first Englishwoman to be openly recognized a surgeon.<sup>61</sup>

**1929**

Margaret Bondfield becomes the first British Female Cabinet Minister (1929).<sup>63</sup>

**1955**

Baroness Sharp becomes the first female Permanent Secretary within the Civil Service.<sup>65</sup>

**1997**

Marjorie Scardino becomes the first female FTSE CEO.<sup>67</sup>



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## Political representation

**1907**

Under the Qualification of Women Act, women can be elected onto borough and county councils and can also be elected mayor.<sup>77</sup>

**1866**

1500 signatures are collected for a petition for women's votes which is presented to the House of Commons by John Stuart Mill.

Only some women (normally those paying household rates such as single women and widows) can vote and only in some local and municipal elections. Women cannot vote in national elections.

**1919**

Nancy Astor is the first woman to take her seat in parliament.<sup>79</sup>

**1918**

Women over 30, with certain property qualifications, are granted the right to vote in Britain. Constance Markievicz becomes the first woman elected to parliament.<sup>78</sup>

**1958**

The Life Peerages Act entitles women to sit in the House of Lords for the first time. Baroness Swanborough, Lady Reading and Baroness Barbara Wooton are the first to take their seats.<sup>80</sup>

**1928**

Women are given universal suffrage on the same terms as men.<sup>79</sup>

**1997**

All women short lists used for the first time, despite being struck down by an employment tribunal in 1996. They are subsequently legalised in 2002.<sup>82</sup>

**1979**

Margaret Thatcher becomes Britain's first female prime minister.<sup>81</sup>

**2016**

29% of MPs are women. The UK ranks 39th in the world for representation of women in parliament.<sup>84</sup>

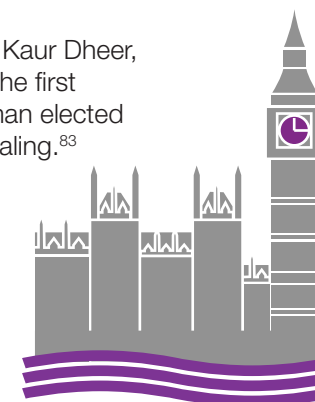
32% of the cabinet are women.<sup>85</sup>

33% of local councillors women.<sup>86</sup>

15% of council leaders.<sup>87</sup>

**2015**

Harbhajan Kaur Dheer, becomes the first Asian woman elected Mayor in Ealing.<sup>83</sup>



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### Endnotes

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