



Scottish Labour party leadership and deputy leadership contest: Engender Q&A

We put a short series of questions to the five candidates running for the leadership and deputy leadership of the Scottish Labour Party. Sarah Boyack, Katy Clark, Kezia Dugdale and Neil Findlay responded; their answers are set out here.

1. What issues would you prioritise to advance gender equality in Scotland?

Sarah Boyack

The obvious challenge is ensuring equality across every aspect of public life – my priorities would be affordable childcare, access to college places, particularly part time courses for women returners, an end to discrimination in the workplace in relation to ensuring maternity rights, equal pay and an end to the age discrimination which so often affects older women. The current financial pressures on public services are leading to reductions in services and are pushing back on some of the advances we've made in recent years. I'd also support access to quality care services in order to support older women and ensure that their carers get a fair deal. There are also campaigns that we should support which can help to advance the cause of women in developing countries. The involvement particularly of young women and students in those campaigns can help raise awareness of the need for equality which can sometimes be taken for granted.

Katy Clark

There are a number of issues that I would like to prioritise to advance gender inequality in Scotland. In particular I believe progress must be made in combatting the gender pay gap. I believe it is completely unacceptable that in 2014 that this is on the increase. In the last Parliament I tabled amendments to equality legislation calling for mandatory gender pay audits for all companies with 21 or more employees to reveal any gender pay gap. Sadly at that time I was unsuccessful however I continue to believe such a measure is required and am calling for the next Labour Government to include a Bill establishing mandatory gender pay audits for private companies in its first Queen's Speech after next year's General Election. Another priority must be the rising cost of childcare which has become increasingly prominent in Scotland in recent years. It is essential that existing measures aimed at helping parents are implemented in a way that reflects the reality of their daily lives but I believe we also need to discuss what further measures need to be taken to ensure that childcare is affordable for all.

Kezia Dugdale

As Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Education, there have been two key issues I have already prioritised; supporting women students to study STEM subjects and the rising costs of childcare. At the beginning of the year, I launched the Every Step campaign which was to

engage the public in a conversation about the need for affordable and flexible childcare. From that campaign, Scottish Labour has pledged a cap on childcare costs. As Deputy Leader I would want to see this promise fulfilled. Childcare is not simply a women's issue, but the reality is, women do most of the caring in a household and the soaring cost of childcare is preventing them from making fair choices in life. We need to see this as an economic issue too, we need affordable childcare alongside more and better paid part time work to support women back into employment. I want to see Scottish Labour fight for the needs of women by showing the need for women in our economy and the need for women's rights to be seen as a staple of social justice.

Neil Findlay

I would prioritise fair pay through a Living wage and an end to the gender pay gap through a new law to address it. More free or affordable childcare at the times mums and dads need it. Equal access for training and apprenticeships across all industrial areas addressing gender imbalance in sectors such as engineering, teaching etc. Making domestic violence a top priority of the police in Scotland. Support the campaign for more women on the boards of public bodies.

2. What action would you take to improve female participation and representation within your party?

Sarah Boyack

I have supported the campaign for women's equality in the Labour Party since I was a student at Glasgow University. In those days our campaign was for equality on our committees at local and national level so that the party structures reflected our equality ambitions. As co-author of Labour's Review of our Party in 2011 I argued for returning to the policy of twinning our constituency seats so that we could achieve 50% of our candidates for those seats and to retain zipping on the list. We did this for the 1999 elections and the legacy of that decision then is what has kept our Labour women's representation so strong. For UK elections I've always supported all women shortlists to increase the numbers of women parliamentarians.

In addition to encouraging more women to come forward we also need women's networks to support women through the process of selections. Women's groups and support mechanisms at constituency and regional level and to support women in local councillor networks need to be encouraged.

In terms of where we are now I've supported the policy approach in Edinburgh where we have agreed to stand female candidates for any council by elections until we have achieved gender parity. I'd like to see more radical action to encourage more women to serve on our local authorities as councillors.

I have signed up to support the 50:50 campaign as I believe we need to argue for equality in terms of political appointments and public boards.

Katy Clark

I am proud the steps which Scottish Labour have taken to improve female representation, such as all women shortlists and constituency pairing arrangements which ensure that at

least half of Labour's target seats for the next Scottish Parliament election have a female candidate fighting them. I am encouraged that we are now in a position where just under half of our MSPs are women. Clearly much more work needs to be done, in particular I believe we need to introduce measures, similar to those in place for Westminster and Holyrood selections for our local authorities where women are still significantly under-represented in certain areas of the country. We also need to put in place measures, such as quotas and mentoring programmes, to encourage women to take on more leadership roles internally within the party so that new female members joining the party are able to feel that they are in an environment where women are playing the leading role in Scottish Labour's success.

Kezia Dugdale

In September, I co-launched the cross party campaign, Women 5050. The campaign is fighting for the legislation of 50% quotas for women in the Scottish Parliament, councils and public boards. In Scotland, the representation of women has decreased since the creation of the Scottish Parliament - that just isn't good enough, it shows that waiting for equality to happen is not an adequate response. I have been campaigning for, and if elected as deputy leader, will continue this campaign for quotas, making it a core Scottish Labour policy.

Neil Findlay

I would invest in a programme of political education and training, continue to support the twinning of constituencies and positive discrimination to promote female, BME, young and working class candidates.

3. How would you ensure that everyone in Scotland stands to benefit equally from further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament, regardless of what those specific powers may be?

Sarah Boyack

A key issue is making sure the Scottish Government has a robust equalities framework for decision making whether on a policy or financial level. This needs to happen at the local government level too where we've seen major setbacks in terms of women's lives. The loss of 70,000 jobs since 2007, the impact of cuts on women both as service users and service providers has been well documented.

Katy Clark

I very much hope that when further powers are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, every Cabinet Secretary will be obligated to put place a strategy on how they will use their new powers to deliver greater equality. If the current Scottish Government fails to deliver on this I will campaign for Scottish Labour to commit to this in their 2016 manifesto.

Kezia Dugdale

Scottish Labour is the party of social justice and that has to be the lens with which we see further devolution. As deputy leader I would work to ensure that further devolved powers are used to create a fairer and more equal Scotland. Already, Scottish Labour have outlined the need to devolve and protect housing benefit and employment tribunals. As deputy

leader, I would work to ensure that Scottish Labour considers how the delivery, not simply the devolution, of these policies takes place. Once the negotiations have been conducted and a decision of further devolution is made, I will push for Scottish Labour to conduct an assessment of how these powers can be used specifically to advance equalities for all and ensure that this is a key component of the 2016 manifesto. Through Women5050 I have made a submission to the Smith Commission for the power to legislate for gender quotas and I work daily to progress that agenda in the context of more powers for the Parliament.

Neil Findlay

It is not about having powers it is having the will to use the powers to benefit the country. I want Scotland to be a fairer more equal country and to achieve that we need an all-out attack on the health and wealth inequality that blights our country. We need to use the powers we have and will get to provide jobs, training and educational opportunities for all with the goal of full employment. And when in work people need security and fair pay – that is why the commitment to end the zero hours low pay culture is so important especially as women are often on very low rates of pay.

4. A Key barrier to faster progress on gender equality issues is lack of political will within the policy hierarchy. As party leader can we expect you to prioritise women’s equality?

Sarah Boyack

Absolutely, as a strong supporter of women’s equality it would be a personal priority and that I would continue to support the policy initiatives I have campaigned for throughout my adult life.

Katy Clark

I believe my track record demonstrates that improving equality is at the heart of my political beliefs and I am very happy to commit to prioritising women’s equality if elected Scottish Labour Deputy Leader.

Kezia Dugdale

Part of the reason for this lack of political will, is the lack of women making the political decisions. That's why the Women 5050 campaign is so important, with a 50% parliament of women more of the decision taken would prioritise the tackling of inequality. Fighting for women's equality has been part of my campaigning life before becoming an MSP, has continued throughout it, and will be a priority as deputy leader. If elected, I would ensure that a strategic effort is made for policy development to be inclusive. No more policy making by a small, elite group. Policy making will engage all levels of Scottish Labour representation, members and sector agencies responsible for, and experts in, policy areas.

Neil Findlay

Yes of course – the Labour party has throughout its history challenged injustice and discrimination and we need to ensure we do that again. If the political will was there from the SNP government we could have used the public procurement bill and the post 16 education bill to legislate for greater gender equality – that was a missed chance. Under my leadership I will tackle these issues head on.