

Further Additional GCSE and A level Subject Content Consultation – The Fawcett Society

1. The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights at work, at home and in public life.
2. Our vision is a society in which the choices you can make and the control you have over your own life are no longer determined by your gender.
3. We publish authoritative research to educate, inform and lead the debate; we bring together politicians, academics, grassroots activists and wider civil society to develop innovative, practical policy solutions and we campaign with women and men to make change happen.
4. The Fawcett Society has long emphasised the importance of education in overcoming gender inequality, both concerning equal educational opportunities for women and awareness of the barriers to sex parity. Article 2.1.3 of our Articles of Association states one of our five objectives is "advancing education in equality and diversity".
5. Education is a priority theme for Fawcett due to the importance schooling has on influencing gender norms and stereotyping for boys and girls. Historically, our namesake Millicent Fawcett, the women's suffragist, was a committed campaigner for improving women's access to higher education before they had the legal right to vote, founding Newnham College Cambridge.
6. As such, Fawcett welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Department for Education's consultation on reforms to A level Politics content. We are concerned that the current proposed syllabus minimizes the role women have played in British politics, international politics, and political philosophy.
7. The Government has committed to tackle gender inequality and has made significant progress with the implementation of Section 78 of the Equality Act, the extension of free childcare provision, and the introduction of shared parental leave. But in order to fully realise equality between women and men it is vital that young people have the opportunity to understand the political thinking and movements that have generated progress to date, and the ongoing barriers to women's equality.
8. Furthermore, feminism is immediately relevant to at least half of the intake of all A level students, and any class on Politics at A level should be able to offer study on a political ideology that has transformed the status and condition of women within living memory. Women's equality is a principle which unites democrats and parties from across the political spectrum, and discussion of the approaches and ideas behind the movement is a uniquely promising opportunity to develop the skills and critical abilities of students.

9. Fawcett recommends:

- Feminism be included as one of the “political ideas” which students will be expected to understand, discuss, and critique
- That more women are included amongst the “key thinkers” of liberalism, conservatism, and socialism that students will study
- That feminism be given a more prominent role than just as a “pressure group” with consideration of the key concepts, debates and thinkers rather than a narrow focus on the disputes between the suffragists and suffragettes

The Current Syllabus

10. The current syllabus covers, in Unit 4 Topic B of the Edexcel Specification for Government and Politics feminism under “other ideologies that emerged either out of or in opposition to liberalism, socialism, and conservatism”¹.
11. Students who undertook this module were expected to know at least the key concepts of “sex and gender, gender equality, patriarchy, public/private divide, and [gender] essentialism”¹.
12. This is in addition to “A knowledge of the core ideas, doctrines and theories of feminist thought, of tensions within feminism and of competing feminist traditions, notably an understanding of the distinctive features of liberal feminism, socialist/Marxist feminism and radical feminism, and also taking into account more recent developments”¹.
13. This section, as well as other non-partisan political ideologies such as nationalism and multi-culturalism, was removed from the proposed draft syllabus’ section on political thought.

Limitations of the Proposed Syllabus

14. Fawcett recognises that the curriculum has limited room and resources available. However, we believe that in a world where women remain highly unequal the subject content as initially drafted lets students down. The inclusion of issues associated with women’s equality is vital to ensure young people have a good understanding of the society we live in, the challenges faced by women globally, and the ongoing need to tackle inequality between women and men. These small additions to the curriculum would have a significant and lasting benefit.

1

https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/Government%20and%20Politics/2013/Specification%20and%20sample%20assessments/UA035236_GCE_Lin_Go vPol_Issue_4.pdf

15. At present of the sixteen thinkers listed by the Department for Education as particularly noteworthy of discussion and teaching only one, Wollstonecraft, is a woman. Whilst Wollstonecraft was an important thinker on women's equality and arguably the first modern feminist, she does not represent the full development of feminist thought within liberalism or women's political thought more widely.
16. That men are 94% of the key thinkers identified in the curriculum concerns Fawcett that women's contribution to political thought will be overlooked. Presenting men as the default political thinker – and the only woman included focused primarily on women's issues – contributes to gendered stereotypes which limit women's participation in politics. Only 29.4% of MPs are women, as are 33% of councillors, 35% of MSPs, 40% of AMs, and 19% of MLAs.
17. Women's activism does receive a mention under "pressure groups", in the form of the dispute between suffragists and suffragettes. Fawcett believes this coverage is too narrow for three reasons.
18. Firstly, feminism is more than simply a type of pressure group. Feminists are not just external actors seeking to reform or pressure the Government into action, but politicians in their own right, as well as philosophers and political thinkers.
19. Secondly, feminism's history in the UK is richer and more contemporary than simply the struggle for women's suffrage. Presenting women's activism solely or primarily within the context of the different efforts to win the vote almost 100 years ago is misleading and fails to cover the changes which women have demanded and experienced within the past fifty years.
20. Finally, feminism is experiencing a surge of interest and activism amongst young people. Students who undertake a Politics A level and are interested in feminism will expect any coverage of it within their studies to be relevant to their own lives and experiences.

Fawcett's Alternative Proposal

21. Fawcett recommends that to correct these problems feminism be covered as a "key idea" alongside liberalism, conservatism and socialism. Whilst feminism does not currently have a major political party formed primarily to advance that ideology (though the Women's Equality Party was founded within the past year), this is also an argument in favour of including it alongside the other three. Feminism has had a huge influence upon liberalism, conservatism, and socialism and vice versa, and presenting feminism's relationship with these three as a distinct ideology gives students the opportunity to reflect on the development of political thought and how philosophers respond to criticism.

With regards to the specifications laid out for the other political ideas:

22. Feminism has a clear set of core ideas, doctrines, and theories, particularly as they affect feminist views on human nature, the state, society, and the economy.
23. There are differing views and tensions within feminism, in particular between radical feminism, liberal feminism, feminist traditions within conservatism, and Marxist/socialist feminism
24. And there are key thinkers who can be discussed and studied, especially concerning their views on government, law, and the state, including Wollstonecraft, Fawcett, Pankhurst, de Beauvoir, Dworkin, Daly, Butler, Greer, MacKinnon, JS Mill, Nussbaum, and the conservative Hoff Summers, to name just a few.
25. Feminism as a political idea is therefore capable of being studied to the same depth as the other ideas which are already proposed for study, as was the case in the previous syllabus.
26. We also propose that the Government reassess its selection of key thinkers beyond feminism to include more women. Important female political thinkers missed out include Fawcett, Martineau, Arendt, Besant, Webb, and Luxemburg².
27. Education plays an important formative role and a significant part in shaping our understanding of our culture and society. Feminist artists and authors have made a huge contribution to the arts, humanities, and other areas of cultural life. We also call for wider recognition of women's contributions across all subject areas.

Public Support

28. Fawcett also highlights the high level of interest and public demand for women and feminism to receive greater attention in the A level Politics syllabus. This has been expressed both by notable feminists in Britain today and the wider public.
29. A petition started by June Eric-Udonie, a Sixth Form student and writer for the *New Statesman* and *Guardian*, to both correct for the absence of female thinkers and reverse the changes to the A level syllabus on the

²Luxemburg is an example from the far left of a female political thinker who was hostile to contemporary feminism, once saying: "*Women's suffrage is an abomination and a bogey for the capitalist state today because behind it stand the millions of women who will strengthen [our] internal enemy, social democracy.*"

removal of feminism has attracted over 40,000 signatures³. A separate petition on the same issue has achieved 30,000 signatures⁴.

30. Prominent feminists and public figures who have expressed support for these petitions include Yvette Cooper⁵, Caroline Lucas⁶, Tim Farron⁷, Helena Morrissey⁸, Caroline Criado-Perez⁹, and Professor Sarah Childs¹⁰ of Gender and Politics at Bristol University, amongst others.
31. There is therefore a broad coalition of support for inclusion of more female thinkers and the retention of feminism as a key idea worthy of study in schools across feminist activists and the wider public¹¹.

Achieving Future Gender Equality

32. Whether they go on to further undergraduate study of politics or not, A Level students who study feminism will benefit from enhanced political literacy and a clearer understanding of the nature of British democracy and society than they would have otherwise. The Government aspires to close the gender pay gap within a generation. We would argue one of the best ways to do that would be to work on changing the attitudes of the next generation to reduce gender inequality and bias. Including the women's rights movement and the political theory it produced within the A level Politics curriculum would not just do service for students who will take the course, but would also be an important step the Government can take towards gender equality in British society.

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³ <https://www.change.org/p/add-more-female-thinkers-to-the-politics-a-level-syllabus>

⁴ <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/don-t-take-feminism-out-of-politics-a-levels>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/YvetteCooperMP/status/668044238916034560>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/CarolineLucas/status/668730971299176448>

⁷ <https://twitter.com/timfarron/status/667745741398548481>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/MorrisseyHelena/status/672674306330116096>

⁹ <https://twitter.com/CCriadoPerez/status/666744675626258433>

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/profsarahchilds/status/669127204194951168>

¹¹ See also the response of the petitions on twitter:

<https://twitter.com/search?q=a%20level%20politics%20feminism&src=typd>