



**18 July 2018 - For immediate release**

## **Prime Minister encourages young women to get into politics**

### **Over 500 women attend 'Courage Calls: Ask Her to Stand' event**

Prime Minister Theresa May has met with a number of young women, aged 14-18, as part of a day focused on encouraging women to stand for Parliament. Inviting them into Parliament after weekly Prime Minister's Questions, she discussed their ambitions for a future in politics and public life.

The ***Courage Calls: Ask Her to Stand*** day of events was jointly organised by leading gender equality campaigning charity, the Fawcett Society, and 50:50 Parliament and funded by the government. The day saw over 100 school children from three London schools attend workshops in the afternoon, and a further 400 women attend the oversubscribed evening sessions. The unprecedented interest in this event highlights the appetite among women for a political career at a time when women still make up just a third of MPs in the House of Commons. In 100 years since women won the right to vote only 491 have gained seats in the Commons, versus 4,503 men.

***Courage Calls: Ask Her to Stand*** was focused on supporting women to overcome the many barriers they face when pursuing a career in politics. It also helped attendees to explore the importance of getting more women into politics and provided those interested in a career in Parliament with practical information and networking opportunities. There was also an opportunity to hear from leading women in politics and a cross-party panel session.

#### **Prime Minister Theresa May said:**

"As we mark 100 years since some women achieved the vote in Britain, we should remember the women who got us here and the debt we owe them. The best way we can do that is by ensuring that we encourage more women to come into public life. Women make up half the population of this country, yet only a third of MPs. I want to see more women in politics as greater female representation makes a real difference to everyone's lives.

"The government has put £5 million towards events marking this year's centenary, including helping to fund a statue of Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square. This centenary is an opportunity to remember the women who risked everything for the rights we have today as well as a time to look at what more we must do to create a fairer society that works for everyone."

**Sam Smethers, Fawcett Chief Executive, said:**

“It is essential for young women to see other women at the top of our politics and public life. We want them to leave with the message – ‘this could be you’ because they are the future.

“As we celebrate 100 years of first votes for women the best legacy we could leave behind is to get more women into power. That is what today has been all about.”

**Frances Scott from 50:50 Parliament said:**

"One hundred years after the Suffragettes and Suffragists succeeded in their call for 'Votes for Women' with some women winning the right to vote [50:50 Parliament](#) is calling for "Seats for Women"! At 50:50 we have a clear mission - we want women to have equal seats and equal say, and for men and women to run the country and plan the future together in equal numbers. Seeing so many women excited and engaged in politics at today's events reinforces our belief that this is achievable with the right support.

"It is great to be working with the Fawcett Society and many other organisations for women to have political equality. Now we need everyone to support #AskHerToStand and encourage more women into politics. As the historic saying goes we still need 'Deeds not Words' take action today and join 50:50 Parliament."

- ENDS -

**Notes to editors:**

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**Fawcett’s recently published Sex and Power Index included a section on female political representation. Highlights below.**

**Women make up:**

- 21.7% of cabinet ministers
- 50% of the Shadow Cabinet
- 32% of MPs
- 33% of select committee chairs
- 26% of peers in the House of Lords
- 17% of council leaders and 33% of councillors in England

The full 2018 Sex and Power Index report can be found at

<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/sex-power-2018>

- **About the Fawcett Society** - [www.fawcettsociety.org.uk](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk)

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. Our vision is a society in which women and girls in all their diversity are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential; creating a stronger, happier, better future for us all. The Fawcett Society traces its origins back to 1866 and the first petition for the vote. Millicent Fawcett will be commemorated with a statue in Parliament Square this year.

- **About 50:50 Parliament** - <https://5050parliament.co.uk>

50:50 Parliament was founded in November 2013 by Frances Scott. At that point men outnumbered women 3:1 in Parliament. The institution did not look representative or inclusive; it was lacking women's experience and talent. Frances felt that this needed to be addressed and started the 50:50 petition at [change.org/5050Parliament](http://change.org/5050Parliament). This called upon Parliament and political party leaders to do something to ensure a better gender balance at Westminster.

50:50 Parliament is a non-partisan, cross party organisation taking action to fix this historic democratic deficit. With our [#AskHerToStand](#) programme we want to help women along the path to Parliament. Parliament is meant to be a representative institution and representation shapes policy. Women's life experience and opinions count as much as men's. Over 100 women have signed up to stand via 50:50 this year. Our volunteers support them along the path to Parliament, introducing them to right people in the political parties and helping them navigate the system.