

Statement by Nick Clegg on Women in Society for WLD

This leadership election is a great opportunity for the party to reach out and make liberal ideas appeal to the millions of people who share our values but do not yet vote for us.

And that includes, crucially, appealing to the large number of women who make up the majority of floating voters.

We have always sought to address gender inequality, from advocating decent maternity pay and a fair citizen's pension to our absolute commitment to equality of opportunity and equal rights.

But it is time to go further. We must do more to tackle the lack of diversity among our elected representatives. We have made some progress - Ming's Diversity Fund has made a big difference in its short time. And I will build on it – giving grants at all stages of candidate development.

I want to set up a special Academy for party candidates at every level. There are many groups like GBTF and WLD doing great work already, and I want to involve all of them in my new approach. The Academy would give access to better training facilities, and a "virtual" training resource.

This isn't about women-only shortlists, A-lists, or imposing candidates on local parties. It is about nurturing talent. We must invest in ourselves if we are to be the best for the country.

But we mustn't only champion women in our party. There's still far too much inequality in our society too.

I will put at the heart of my leadership of the Liberal Democrats a campaign for families. We should never resort to marriage incentives to chivvy people into living a one-size-fits-all life.

We must celebrate family life – for every family. Our family policy will be for everyone – civil partners, step-parents, lone parents, grandparents, carers, foster families, brothers, sisters as well as husbands and wives.

Everyone should have a right to request flexible working, and tribunals must be strengthened to make it work. When our first child was born my wife, Miriam, went back to work long before I did. It's completely out of step with modern parenting to give women nine months paid leave and fathers two weeks. I'd prefer a longer parental allocation, which parents can divide up between themselves.

If we put women at the heart of our party, and at the centre of our campaigning, we can reach out to people we haven't touched before. And we can win.

