



# WASPI CAMPAIGN



## Women Against State Pension Injustice

### **Annual General Meeting, 16 September 2021**

#### **Steering Group Report for the period 1 April – 31 August 2021**

1. This report covers the five months during which the current Steering Group has been in place (1 April – 31 August 2021). The Group came into being following the resignation of Francesca Estasy, who had acted as both Chair and Treasurer of the WASPI Campaign 2018 since the departure of Anne Keen in December 2020.
2. After Francesca's resignation, Pamela Judge, Dilys Jouvenat, Jackie Gilderdale, Elizabeth Stanley, Hilary Simpson, Jane Jones, Pat Molyneux and Catherine Williams – all local group coordinators and members of the former Action Group – stepped up to take over the running of the campaign until proper democratic processes could be put in place.
3. Hilary was elected as interim Chair, Pamela as interim Vice Chair, Dilys as interim Vice Chair/Secretary and Catherine as interim Treasurer.
4. Pamela, Dilys, Elizabeth, Hilary and Catherine are standing for election to the new Steering Group while Jackie, Jane and Pat have decided to stand down. All three have worked tirelessly for 1950s women over many years and the campaign owes them a huge debt of gratitude.
5. It was crucial to have an effective campaign team in place, as the report of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman on the communication of changes to women's state pension age – one of the most critical milestones in the campaign's history – was due to appear (in the event it was published on 20 July 2021).
6. The widespread introduction of Zoom as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that this technology could be used for the Group's meetings. Group members have met formally via Zoom every two weeks since April and are in almost daily contact via social media and email.
7. Dilys Jouvenat has continued in her role as Local Group Network Coordinator. Local Coordinators received an average of one email a week from Dilys during the period 1 April – 31 August, with updates on key campaign issues.
8. In addition, three Zoom meetings for local coordinators have been held (one to approve the new constitution, one following the publication of the Ombudsman's report, and a further one to

discuss action in the light of the report). All have been well attended and – crucially – have enabled us to take local Coordinators’ views into account when formulating campaign policy. Personal support to Coordinators has also been provided by Dilys and Elizabeth.

9. Pamela Judge has continued to act as the PR and Communications lead for the campaign. The priority until July was the preparation of material for the Steering Group and Coordinators to ensure that everyone was ready to act as soon as the Ombudsman’s finding of maladministration was published. As soon as the decision was announced Coordinators were sent a briefing pack to support them in communicating with their members, writing to their MPs and securing local media coverage.
10. This approach worked well; a concerted letter-writing exercise has been undertaken, Coordinators have achieved widespread coverage in their local media, and several have also done interviews for local radio. We also had coverage in the national press with features in the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*.
11. Pamela supported this activity by providing template news releases, holding 1-to-1 phone calls and organising four media skills training sessions involving 11 Coordinators (a further one is planned for 11 September 2021). She has been supported by Elizabeth, particularly in providing observation and feedback in the media training sessions.
12. Pat Molyneux and Jane Jones, along with Susan Ward, have been our social media team. Our Facebook page has a “reach” of over 120,000, with over 11,000 regular followers and daily post engagement of almost 20,000. In addition we have over 600 followers on Twitter and more than 1,300 on Instagram, plus 500 monthly visitors to our website.
13. Catherine Williams took over the role of Treasurer and although the campaign has minimal funds, it proved a complex and demanding task to get our financial affairs in order. The rest of the Steering Group are grateful for her persistence. Jane Morwood has continued to handle our merchandising.
14. Jackie Gilderdale has acted as our liaison with Pension Partners for Justice (see paragraph 17 below) as well as with trade unions and related organisations.
15. An important internal priority for the Steering Group has been the development of a constitution to make the campaign properly accountable to its membership and to put democratic processes in place. The constitution was approved at a Zoom meeting of local Coordinators in June, which in turn has enabled this first AGM to take place and the first democratically elected Steering Group to be formed.
16. Following the publication of the Ombudsman’s report with its clear finding of maladministration, our campaigning focus is firmly on Parliament to deliver a fair and fast solution. The All Party

Parliamentary Group on State Pension Inequality for Women was re-formed early in 2021 with Andrew Gwynne MP (Labour) and Peter Aldous MP (Conservative) as its two new co-chairs.

17. Conscious of criticisms from the previous APPG about divisions between the various 1950s women's pension campaigns, a decision was made to join Pension Partners for Justice (PP4J), a networking group for co-ordinated action. Together with representatives from some of the other PP4J groups, Pamela and Hilary met with Andrew Gwynne and Peter Aldous via Zoom in May, and again (with Jackie) on 7 September.
18. The Ombudsman's report was published the day before Parliament rose for the summer recess. To mark the return of MPs to Westminster on 6 September, over 20 local groups persuaded their local councils to light up public buildings in purple to confirm their support and to remind MPs that we have an urgent case for justice and are not going away. A Silent Rally is planned at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester in early October (ably organised by Jane Morwood), to further emphasise the urgent need for swift action by Parliament.

Hilary Simpson  
September 2021