Written submission from Girlguiding (WHC0027)

About Girlguiding
1. Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with over 500,000 members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls’ confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (5–7 years), Brownies (7–10 years), Guides (10–14 years) and The Senior Section (14–25 years). Registered Charity No 306016. www.girlguiding.org.uk

About Girlguiding’s evidence
2. Girlguiding’s submission focuses on evidence from the Girls’ Attitudes Surveys - our annual research into the opinions of girls and young women throughout the UK aged 7 to 21 and the personal testimony of young members. We also reference other research where outlined. Our young members would be keen to give oral evidence directly to the committee if invited.

3. The Girls’ Attitudes Survey canvasses the opinions of over 1,500 girls and young women, inside and outside guiding across the UK each year. We commission expert child research agency ChildWise to conduct this survey. For more information and data see www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes

4. Girlguiding’s response is also influenced by the Girls Matter campaign - Girlguiding’s member-led campaign that profiles girls’ and young women's calls for change http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/report

Overview
5. Girlguiding welcomes the Women and Equalities Committee’s inquiry into the potential effect of boundary changes on women in the House of Commons after the 2020 Election. As the committee indicates, women could fall behind even further than they currently are, if the total number of seats reduces to from 650 to 600 in the 2020 Parliament. It is our view that any changes to boundaries should not disproportionality impact on women and that all political parties should be doing more to ensure they have equal representation of women and men MPs.

Female leadership
6. Girlguiding research has found that girls and young women want to see more female MPs. Our 2014 Girls’ Attitudes Survey showed that 67% of girls and young women think there aren’t enough female MPs and that political parties should make sure there are more female MPs.

5. Well over half of girls told us they thought politicians don’t listen to the view of girls and young women (57%). More female MPs would have an important impact on girls’ and young women’s lives - 63% think that girls’ voices would be listened to more if there were more female MPs. Girls also told us they would be more encouraged to engage in politics if they saw more representation of difference - 56% of young women aged 13 to 21 say more diversity (of gender, age, ethnicity and disability and sexual orientation) among politicians, would encourage them to be more interested in politics.
6. It is essential that the gain made to increase the number of female MPs continues. We believe it’s significant that girls in the UK today will grow up with a female Prime Minister - only the second appointed in this country. In 2013, 66% of girls aged 11-21 said there are not enough women in leadership positions and 54% said as a result, they felt they had less chance of succeeding. Clearly having positive female role models can encourage girls’ and young women’s own aspirations and widen what seems possible.

“There are hardly any [female] leaders in business or politics, and girls won't aspire to take on one of these roles if there aren't already any women in these jobs” (Respondent to the 2014 Girls’ Attitudes Survey)

Involving girls and young women
7. 21% of girls aged 11 to 21 surveyed in our 2014 research said they are interested in politics. However, 42% of said they don’t fully understand how politics affects their life and opportunities. Over half (55%) of girls support more political education in schools and mandatory teaching about citizenship, democracy and human rights. Engaging girls in politics at an earlier age will not only ensure they have a greater understanding of how politics affects their lives, but demonstrate to them that politics is a viable option for them to pursue.

Girlguiding recommendations
8. Any decisions around boundary changes should include a full equality impact assessment to ensure potential negative consequences of any changes on women are fully understood and mitigated.

9. Girlguiding supports votes at 16 and for all young people to have access to political education in school.

10. Before the 2015 election Girlguiding launched a pre-election manifesto developed from the views of over 2,400 young members aged 7 to 25. The manifesto included the call for political parties to guarantee that women are equally represented in Parliament and that party leaders set a target to increase the number of female MPs in each party by the 2020 General Election. Parliament has duty to represent society and at the moment half of society’s voice is failing to be heard.

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