

# Feminism is back and we want to finish the revolution, say activists

Resurgent movement aims to provide women with skills and contacts to 'translate passion into change'

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Kat Banyard, founder of UK Feminista and author of *The Equality Illusion*. Photograph: Sarah Lee for the Guardian

When Kat Banyard held her first feminist event in 2004, she spent months struggling to attract 90 people. For this year's event, which will take place in Birmingham next weekend, 200 had signed up within 24 hours of it being announced.

"We've got this massive resurgence in feminism and the question is not now 'Does it exist?' but 'What can it achieve?'," said Banyard, founder of campaign group UK Feminista and author of *The Equality Illusion*. "There are vast swathes of the population who aren't happy with the status quo, who aren't content with the fact that feminism is an unfinished revolution. We need to make that discontent visible and bring it to the surface – to a place where it can't be dismissed or ignored."

The aim of the two-day event is to provide would-be activists with the skills and contacts to "translate their passion into real change". Classes on the schedule include "How to influence government and reach MPs" and "How to do non-violent direct action". An aerial photograph is planned of the participants spelling out the words "Feminism is back".

Banyard says when she started, "you could count the number of feminist groups on one hand". Now, the so-called "Suffragette school" this year has places for 400 people and applications from 600: "There is a massive appetite out there now." Fuelled by a diverse array of feminist literature by writers such as Natasha Walter, Cordelia Fine and Caitlin Moran, the resurgence has manifested itself over past 18 months in headline-grabbing events such as the Slutwalk protest marches as well as in the birth of dozens of grassroots groups nationwide. Banyard is launching a London-based activist group later this month.

Potential targets include the 2012 Olympic Games, which some fear could lead to a rise in demand for prostitution. Newspapers and magazines that print images of semi-naked women, the pay gap and women's under-representation in parliament are also targets for action.

Laurie Oliva, the 26-year-old activist co-ordinating the new group, said: "It's 40 years since pay discrimination was outlawed, yet women today are paid at least 16% less than men. It's over 90 years since women got the vote and yet they're still outnumbered in parliament four to one. Waiting for change is boring and it is dangerous. Progress doesn't just happen. It's time to take to the streets."

Key to the future of the movement are grassroots activists who are forming groups and campaigns in their own areas. Feminists in Sheffield managed to stave off the arrival of the US restaurant Hooters, with waitresses in revealing outfits, although their counterparts in Bristol and Cardiff have not been so successful.

Together with the organisation Object, east London activists contributed to Hackney council's decision this year to adopt a "nil policy" on strip clubs, meaning that no new venues will be able to open in the borough. In September, Manchester will host a "DIY Feminist Festival".

Emma Holland, 24, founder of the Berkshire Women's Movement, which is fighting for a sexual assault referral centre, said: "A lot of people question me, but there's still so much more to be done."

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