**Why did women win the vote in 1918**

Women responded in different way to the announcement that Britain was at war with Germany. Many decided to join in the war effort and volunteer for a variety of jobs but others decided that all fighting was wrong and would not do any kind of war work (people who believed this were known as pacifists). Many followers of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst decided to stop campaigning for a whole range of work to help fight the war on the ‘home Front’. A government minister asked Emmeline Pankhurst to organise a recruitment march that would encourage women to offer to work. This was very successful.

Women had helped to win the war and some of them were allowed to vote for the first time in 1918 when 6 million women aged over 30 voted in the general election. Women had been campaigning for this day since the 1860s. However, there was not one simple reason why women had won the vote.

So the vote was partly a reward for working in the war. The government had already started to think about giving women the vote in 1915 when the peaceful NUWSS (National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies) wrote thousands of letters to MPs. Their leader, Millicent Fawcett, had decided it would not be right to hold demonstrations during wartime. Many MPs were impressed by their lack of violence and began to support votes for women. Herbert Asquith was the most important of those MPS because he was Prime Minister for the first two years the war.

There was whole range of other reasons why women won the vote:

* David Lloyd George, who replaced Herbert Asquith as Prime Minister in 1916, was a supporter of women voting but not the use of violence.
* The Labour Party, which had always supported women voting, had MPs in the wartime government.
* Men who had organised anti-suffrage groups were away in the war and could not influence what was happening at home.
* *The Times* newspaper supported ‘Votes for Women’ when it could see women working hard in the war.

So why did only women over 30 win the vote in 1918? There were two reasons. Firstly, the government didn’t want there to be more women voting than men. If all women over 21 had been given the vote then 52 per cent of voters would have been women. Secondly, some men still believed that women, especially when they were young, were not capable of understanding serious matters like politics. The government feared that MPs’ would stop women having the vote at the same age as men. Women over 21 were eventually given the vote in 1928.

Finally, some historians believe that the war was a key element in the granting of the franchise to women over the age of 30 years who held property in 1918. However, gratitude for women's war work cannot explain why only women over the age of 30 got the vote while it was the younger women who had done the work. Rather, it is more convincing to argue that the lobbying of the feminist movement and the commitment of the Labour Party to a wider franchise were crucial factors. In addition, it was a case of the suffragists being around at the right time.