

# NFWI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

## 1. Introduction

The WI was founded on democratic ideals over 100 years ago and this commitment to equality is still central to our ethos today. The WI – the UK’s largest women’s membership organisation – is an inclusive, welcoming, supportive and progressive organisation for women. Although our membership is only open to women registered female at birth (biological women), we offer different ways to engage with our movement so that we can offer support and fellowship to a wider group, including transgender women and others. Our inclusion of transgender women in activities outside of membership is based on our belief that being a woman is about biology and lived experience.

We are committed to inclusion, both as a membership organisation, a charity, and as an employer. This includes protecting individuals in accordance with the law and ensuring that everyone who engages with the WI is treated fairly and has equal access to all opportunities, no matter what their background, characteristics or circumstances.

This policy focuses on members, including visitors, and the NFWI has separate Equality and Diversity Policy specifically for NFWI staff which focuses on inclusion within employment. If you would like more information about this, please contact the NFWI HR Team by emailing [hr@nfwl.org.uk](mailto:hr@nfwl.org.uk) or calling 0207 371 9300.

## 2. Scope

This policy stipulates the NFWI’s organisational and legal position on equality, diversity and inclusion. Contravention of this policy would affect the ability of WIs and federations to operate as part of the NFWI. This policy therefore applies to all WIs and federations.

At appendix A, there is a list of actions for WIs and federations to take to promote inclusion.

The NFWI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms is available to download on My WI, or on request from the Membership and Engagement Team.

## 3. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Demonstrate the WI’s active commitment to inclusion, diversity and equality.
- Outline the legally protected characteristics and what members should expect from their membership experience.

- Highlight and celebrate the diverse membership of the WI, and ensure that our wider movement offers support and fellowship to all women, including transgender women, and others.
- Outline the roles and responsibilities across all three tiers of the organisation.
- Develop the WI's on-going conversation about inclusion to increase awareness and share good practice.

#### **4. Membership of the WI**

WI membership is open to women registered female at birth (biological women).

Other activities offered by the WI nationally and locally are open to a wider group of members and non-members.

The WI welcomes and celebrates a diverse cross-section of women, offering a space where they can be themselves surrounded by other supportive women. We strive to provide equal access to all membership opportunities on a national and local level. Being a WI member means:

- Upholding the core values and ideals of the WI which are fellowship, truth, tolerance, and justice.
- Utilising educational opportunities to continue learning.
- Being welcoming and inclusive, and forming friendships.
- Speaking up against inequity and promoting meaningful change in society.

We also have a duty of care to all WI members, who have the right to feel safe and protected within our organisational structure. In addition to our legal obligation to protect members from discrimination, we recognise our wider responsibility to ensure that the principles of equality and diversity sit within the core ideals of the WI. We acknowledge that treating members equally does not necessarily equate to treating everyone the same, but rather ensuring that all individual needs are met and accommodated for.

Aside from WI membership, we offer other ways to engage with the WI movement, locally, regionally and nationally, including being a WI Supporter and belonging to one of our Sisterhood groups. We expect all those who engage in the WI movement to uphold the same values.

#### **5. Campaigns**

The WI has been campaigning for over 100 years on issues that matter to our members. In particular, WI campaigns have spoken out against discrimination and taken positive actions to promote equality, inclusion and diversity. For example: Make a Match, Stop Modern Slavery, Equal Pay for Equal Work, Make Time for Mental Health, Link Together to Alleviate Loneliness, Carers Welcome and Care Not Custody.

Much of our campaigning activity is open to all, not just those who are members of the WI. At a local level our WI groups work to engage their wider communities in our campaigning activity and many hold campaign events that are open to non-members. For more information about campaigns, please see [www.thewi.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.thewi.org.uk/campaigns) or contact the Public Affairs Department at [publicaffairs@nfwl.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@nfwl.org.uk).

## **6. The Protected Characteristics**

Members must not be treated less favourably, or be denied access to any opportunities, on the grounds of the protected characteristics, which are as follows:

- Age
- Disability (including mental health and hidden disabilities)
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and belief (including the absence of religion or belief)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Any such treatment may be discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. For more information about the types of discrimination, including examples, please see the NFWI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms.

## **7. Age**

Discrimination based on age (also called ageism) occurs when someone is treated unfavourably because of their actual or perceived age. Membership of the WI is open to women who have reached the Age of Majority (the age at which you can vote). We therefore have a broad age range of members thus offering the opportunity to form intergenerational friendships. These friendships enrich the experience of being a WI member and enable women to meet and learn from women they may not usually meet in their day-to-day lives.

## **8. Disability**

Under section 6 of the Equality Act 2010, a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Some impairments are automatically treated as a disability such as cancer, HIV and multiple sclerosis. 'Impairment' also covers difficulties associated with long-term medical conditions such as diabetes, and with fluctuating or progressive conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis.

'Long-term' means the impairment lasts, or is likely to last, for 12 months or more. 'Normal day-to-day activity' is defined as something you do regularly in a normal day.

If you are receiving treatment or taking medication for the impairment, you can ignore the effect of this when deciding whether the impairment has a substantial, adverse effect on your day-to-day activities. This means the law considers how your condition affects you without your treatment or medication.

### **Non-Visible Disabilities:**

A non-visible disability is a disability or health condition that is not immediately obvious. This can make it difficult for people with non-visible disabilities to access what they need. The impact of living with a non-visible disability can be small or have a large effect on someone's day to day life.

A person with a non-visible disability is to be treated the same as a person with a visible disability. If the individual with a non-visible disability does not want to explain or inform anyone of their disability this is their choice and must be respected. The individual can choose to share this information or instead wear a lanyard or carry a badge that indicates they have a non-visible disability.

Non-visible disabilities include a wide range of disabilities, which may include, but are not limited to:

- Mental health conditions; anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, personality disorders & obsessive-compulsive disorders, including many more.
- Autism and Asperger's syndrome
- Visual impairments or restricted vision.
- Hearing loss
- Sensory and processing difficulties
- Cognitive impairment, including dementia, traumatic brain injury, or learning disabilities.
- Non-visible health conditions, including diabetes, chronic pain or fatigue and respiratory conditions.

## **9. Making reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities**

The WI aims to ensure members with disabilities can, as far as possible, receive the same services as those who do not have disabilities. Reasonable adjustments may need to be made to minimise or remove the disadvantages experienced by those with disabilities. Examples of reasonable adjustments include:

- Providing a sign language translator at physical or virtual meetings and events.
- Ensuring there are accessible toilets.
- Allowing members who may feel anxious to arrive early and get settled before a meeting or event begins.

- Taking steps to ensure that members with dementia are able to arrive at and leave the meeting or event venue safely.
- Making adjustments at a venue for a guide or medical assistance dog to attend meetings with the member who requires their assistance to access day to day life.

What is reasonable depends on the circumstances of each individual case including:

- The type of disability.
- How practicable the adjustments are.
- How the adjustments would overcome the disadvantages experienced.
- The size of the organisation, the resources available and the cost of the adjustments.

WIs may therefore have to change the way things are done, change a physical feature of its property and/or provide extra aids or services where it is reasonable to do so. WIs who do not own their meeting venue will need to talk to the venue management/owner about this. It is recommended that the WI Committee speak to those members who require improved accessibility to fully understand and meet their needs.

Under the Equality Act 2010 medical assistance dogs and guide dog owners have important rights which protects their service dogs. If a member is reliant or requires assistance from their service dog to access their local WI group, then reasonable adjustments must be made in order to avoid discriminating against disabled members.

It is unlawful to refuse access to a disabled person accompanied by an assistance dog except in the most exceptional circumstances for example, in certain hospital wards.

Failing to make reasonable adjustments, where it is reasonable to make those adjustments, may be considered discrimination. Discussions and decisions on reasonable adjustments must be documented, detailing the reasoning for making or not making reasonable adjustments.

## **10. Carers**

As part of ensuring meetings and events are accessible for disabled members where possible, carers of disabled members should be allowed to attend meetings and events. For more information, please see the policy *NFWI Access of Carers to Members with Disabilities to Meetings and Events*.

## **11. Transgender inclusion**

The WI is an inclusive, supportive, and progressive organisation that offers different ways to engage in our movement for members and non-members. The WI provides educational opportunities and the platform to campaign on important issues, whilst

celebrating the WI's long history of trans inclusion, and embracing the sisterhood and solidarity of our movement.

Transgender women are welcomed to a range of local and national activities that are open to non-members, as well as our national Supporter scheme. Based on the WI's history of trans inclusion, we believe that including transgender women in these activities enriches our organisation to ensure we are a place for both biological women and transgender women to celebrate who they are and influence positive change in their communities.

WI membership is open to transgender men. This is because they were registered female at birth.

When talking about transgender people, it is important to understand the difference between sex and gender. Sex is registered at birth on the basis of sex characteristics (genitalia) e.g. male or female. Gender is often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity, and is assumed from the sex registered at birth.

Gender identity is a person's sense of their own gender which may or may not correspond to the sex registered at birth. Culturally, it is expected that a person's gender identity is aligned with their sex registered at birth.

For example, it is expected that a person who is registered female at birth because of their sex will consider themselves a girl and then a woman. However, this isn't the case for everyone. Sex does not always determine gender identity. People who feel that the sex and gender, registered to them at birth does not match or sit comfortably with their own sense of gender may describe themselves as transgender, or use a similar term.

Being transgender is a protected characteristic (gender reassignment) under the Equality Act 2010. Being transgender includes the permanent decision to live in their gender identity, and there is no legal requirement to have had gender reassignment surgery or other medical intervention.

## **12. Non-binary members**

Non-binary is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn't sit comfortably within the binary categories of "female" or "male". Gender is often expressed in terms of masculinity or femininity but for some gender is a spectrum. Gender identity is a person's sense of their own gender, and there are many different gender identities on this spectrum.

Non-binary people may feel both male and female, something in between, or not either. They may have a gender identity that changes over time or they may not relate to gender at all. Non-binary people often use gender neutral pronouns such as

they/theirs and it is therefore important to find out how a non-binary member wishes to be addressed.

A person who was registered female at birth but who identifies as non-binary is able to join the WI as a WI member. This is because they were registered female at birth.

### **13. Pregnancy and maternity**

The WI is focused on supporting women through every stage of their lives. Therefore, our members will include women who are pregnant, breastfeeding, or who have recently given birth, and it is important these women are supported. For example, this may mean ensuring women feel able to bring their baby to WI meetings and providing a quiet space where members can breastfeed or express milk where possible. Talking to members about this is the best way to ensure their needs are met.

### **14. Race**

Race includes a person's skin colour, their nationality, ethnic origin and national origin. For example, a White British citizen whose parents are of Polish origin has British nationality but Polish national origins.

We recognise that unfortunately racism exists in our society, including in the charity sector. We are committed to ensuring members understand what racism is and, if encountered, how to report it. Racism can take many forms such as racist behaviour/language or the creation of rules that result in harmful treatment of people based on their race. As an educational organisation, we are committed to using education to effect long-term meaningful change.

Unfavourable treatment based on race is discrimination and racism can be a hate crime. Race discrimination does not need to be deliberate; it is possible for someone to discriminate against someone else without realising it or meaning to do so. For more information please see section 20 on unconscious bias and the *NFWI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms*.

There is no place for racism or prejudice within the WI, and we work continuously to ensure that the WI is a place for women of all races and where members are empowered to challenge racism in their communities.

### **15. Religion and belief**

The WI is non-sectarian meaning that we are not connected or affiliated with any particular religion or religious belief. We therefore welcome both women who belong to an organised religion or have religious beliefs, and women who do not. Religion and beliefs, such as gender critical beliefs, are protected characteristics.

### **16. Sex**

The WI is single-sex, which means we restrict our membership to biological women only. This is based on the provision within the Equality Act to restrict membership based on the shared protected characteristic of sex.

### **17. Sexual orientation**

The WI welcomes all members, regardless of their sexual orientation and no WI member should be treated differently because of their sexual orientation. For more information about sexual orientations please see the *NFWI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms*.

### **18. Inclusive language**

The WI is committed to using inclusive language that reflects the ideals of our organisation, keeping abreast of its evolving nature and ensuring our language does not exclude or offend others. This language should make members feel safe and valued by respecting differences and taking steps to make sure everyone is included.

Examples of inclusive language include:

- 'Person with a disability' rather than 'disabled person'.
- 'Person who uses a wheelchair' rather than 'wheelchair bound'.
- 'Person experiencing poverty' rather than 'poverty-stricken' or 'poor person'.

The WI encourages conversations around inclusive language and is always open to learning. It is important to remember that there is not one single approach to using inclusive language; every member will have different experiences and needs. When describing a person, the person concerned should be asked how they would like to be addressed, and what language/terminology they prefer is used when describing them, for example, in relation to their disability.

If inappropriate or offensive language is used this should be reported, using the NFWI Complaints Policy or applicable policy, with the aim of improving behaviours and mitigating the risk of inappropriate or offensive language being used again. Please see section 22 for further information on complaints.

### **19. NFWI-Wales and the Welsh language**

The NFWI-Wales has adopted the principle in the Welsh Language Act 1993 that the Welsh language and English language should be treated on the basis that they are equal. The Welsh language has always been an integral part of the WI. Many of the early WIs who formed in Wales met through the medium of Welsh and we are proud that a Welsh speaking member has sat on the National Board of Trustees since 1923. NFWI-Wales therefore undertakes to ensure that it is possible, convenient and normal for all its members, partners and the public to choose to use either Welsh or English in their dealings with the organisation.

## **20. Bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation**

As the largest women's voluntary organisation in the country, we are committed to contributing to societal change by promoting equality and eliminating all forms of discrimination and harassment. The WI will therefore not accept bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation of any members for any reason, including for any reason based on the protected characteristics, and will take proactive steps to address any such issue that may prevent WI members from living up to the values we espouse.

## **21. Unconscious bias**

Unconscious bias is where social stereotypes about certain groups of people unconsciously affect decisions, behaviours and thoughts. For example, biases can be about race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender identity, sexual orientation and physical abilities, and these biases can negatively impact the WI membership experience. It is therefore important that all members try to recognise these biases and actively challenge them.

The WI is an organisation centred on education and we believe opening up conversations, discussing concerns and addressing biases will help reduce unconscious bias and educate members about this issue. By reducing unconscious bias, The WI becomes a more open and welcoming environment where all members are included.

## **22. Breaches of this policy**

We take breaches of this policy very seriously and will begin investigations into potential breaches when necessary. If we are made aware of issues we may choose to follow these up as a formal complaint even where this has not been specifically requested and the complainant will be contacted about this. If you believe this policy has been breached, please either follow the NFWI Complaints Policy as detailed below or contact the NFWI.

## **23. Complaints and concerns**

If you have a complaint and/or a concern about anything covered in this policy, you should follow your WI or federation complaints policy in the first instance. WIs and federations are encouraged to adopt the NFWI Complaints Policy in whole or in part.

In addition to following the internal processes for making a complaint or raising a concern, you also have the right to talk to the police about a potential criminal offence.

If you have any questions about making a complaint or raising a concern, please use the contact information below.

## 24. Contact us

We encourage open discussion on inclusion and are here to support you with any questions or comments you may have. Therefore, if you would like to contact us about this policy, please email [inclusion@nfwl.org.uk](mailto:inclusion@nfwl.org.uk). If you would like to contact us about complaints, please email [complaints@nfwl.org.uk](mailto:complaints@nfwl.org.uk). You can also call 0207 371 9300 or write to us at NFWI, Membership and Engagement Team, 104 New Kings Road, London, SW6 4LY.

## 25. Resources

NFWI policies/guidance:

- The NFWI Charter
- The NFWI Code of Conduct
- NFWI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Glossary of Terms
- NFWI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action List
- NFWI Equality and Diversity Policy (for NFWI staff)
- My WI (inclusion, equality and diversity section)
- Social Media Guidelines

The below resources and organisations can offer further information on inclusion:

*[List to be developed]*

## 26. Updating this policy

This policy is under continuous review and will be updated annually or as required. Any updates will be communicated to federations, who should cascade this information on to WIs.

Version	Date created	Last review date	Next review date	Document author
1	March 2021	N/A	March 2022	Membership and Engagement Team
2		March 2022	June 2023	
3		June 2023	June 2025	
4		June 2025	March 2025	
5		March 2025	March 2027	

## Appendix A: Promoting inclusion within the WI

To promote inclusion and support this policy, the NFWI:

1. Ensures the commitment to inclusion and diversity of views and beliefs is understood by all NFWI staff and trustees, and is considered in all NFWI activity.
2. Has a comprehensive Complaints Policy which covers breaches of this policy and provides avenues of redress.
3. Provides WIs and federations with guidance on inclusion.
4. Includes this policy in all NFWI delivered training such as that for WI Advisers, trustees and staff.
5. Ensures all NFWI events, such as the Annual Meeting, are accessible and guest speakers reflect and support this policy.
6. Ensures NFWI communications are accessible e.g. braille, large print, etc. where appropriate.
7. Ensures all publicity and imagery represents and celebrates the diversity of our membership and staff.
8. Actively challenges perceptions and ensures membership is open to all women who would benefit from the WI.
9. Considers how we can modernise and adapt to meet the needs of our current and future members.
10. Frequently reviews policies, procedures and language to ensure these reflect the needs and expectations of our members and staff.
11. Educates members and staff on inclusion so that they can facilitate change where needed and leading important conversations.

**WIs and federations will support and implement this policy in the following ways:**

1. Ensure all members are welcome by using inclusive language and appointing a WI Welcoming Team.
2. Ensure inclusion and diversity of views and beliefs is always on the Committee/Board agenda and that Trustees are open to discussions about the ways in which the WI can ensure it removes any hidden barriers to women joining or participating in its activities.
3. WI Presidents and Federation Chairs should at all times demonstrate welcoming, friendly and inclusive behaviour and language to all members, role-modelling the standard for how members should interact with one another.
4. Ensure it is understood that the WI is non-sectarian meaning that we are not connected or affiliated with any particular religion or political group.
5. Ensure where possible all meeting and event venues are accessible for members as necessary (disabled access, online meetings, signage, transport, hearing loops, lighting etc.)
6. Ensure where possible all activities, events and outings are suitable and open for all members, and any specific requirements are taken into consideration

where possible (including catering). WIs will need to ask members about their abilities, accessibility and requirements for this.

7. Ensure demonstrators, speakers and guests at meetings and events reflect and support this policy.
8. Ensure all sub-groups and sub-committees are open and accessible to all members.
9. Follow up any complaints or any breaches of this policy in accordance with the applicable policy/procedure.
10. Foster a culture where members can ask for changes and see those changes being considered and made where possible.
11. Challenge perceptions of the WI as an organisation, and try to reach women who would benefit from the WI.
12. Avoid making assumptions about members' abilities or backgrounds.
13. Ensure all publicity and imagery represents the diversity of membership.
14. Ensure social media posts and website content reflect this policy.
15. Actively celebrate diversity and inclusion.
16. Demonstrate a willingness to challenge and address discrimination.

These actions are also available in an action list format that can be downloaded from My WI.