

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy (general)

We are here to support all women, offering a platform for lifelong learning, healthy living and firm friendships. A major part of that is making sure we include everyone.

We value and celebrate different experiences and characteristics and we want every woman to have the chance to live their best life, whoever they are and wherever they're from.

Each member in an organisation brings with them a different set of perspectives, thoughts, beliefs and ideas and it is crucial to recognise the benefits of these differences and learn to respect and value each individual in order to build a better membership experience.

Our ambition for diversity and inclusion is to be a place where everyone is welcome, free to be themselves, and has an equal sense of belonging. It's the responsibility of everyone in the SWI – whether a member or member of staff (including contractors and consultants) – to follow this policy and help us achieve this.

Equity is really important to our approach. This means recognising that everyone is different – so giving people the same opportunities will sometimes mean treating them differently. We expect everybody in the SWI to be treated fairly, and to treat others fairly, with this in mind. For example, by providing a resource in large print for a member with a visual impairment, or an audio version of the magazine, we are treating the member differently in order to give them equal and fair access to opportunities.

We will build a welcoming organisation with this culture and values at its core, in which employees and members recognise that their unique characteristics, skills and experiences are respected, valued and celebrated.

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Demonstrate the SWI's active commitment to inclusion, diversity and equity.
- Outline the legally protected characteristics and what members should expect from their membership experience.
- Highlight and celebrate the diverse membership of the SWI, and reach out to all women.
- Outline the roles and responsibilities across all three tiers of the organisation.
- Promote inclusion so that the SWI is a space for all women with no barriers to membership.
- Develop the SWI's on-going conversation about inclusion to increase awareness and share good practice.

Membership of the SWI

Scottish Women's Institutes membership is open to all women. The SWI welcomes and celebrates a diverse cross-section of women, offering a space where they can be themselves surrounded by other supportive women. We do not ask members any personal questions as part of the joining process and are committed to ensuring all members are treated fairly and equally whatever their background or circumstances. We strive to provide equal access to all opportunities on a national and local level.

Being a member of Scottish Women's Institutes means:

- Upholding the core values and ideals of the SWI which are fellowship, truth, tolerance, and justice.
- Utilising educational opportunities to continue learning.
- Welcoming all women and forming friendships.
- Speaking up again inequity and promoting meaningful change in society.

We also have a duty of care to all SWI 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 equity and diversity sit within the core ideals of the SWI. 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.

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 those with no religion or belief)
- Sex (though the SWI lawfully restricts membership to women only)
- Sexual orientation

Protected characteristic 1: Age

Discrimination based on age (also called ageism) occurs when someone is treated unfavourably because of their actual or perceived age. Membership of the SWI is open to women aged 16 and over. We therefore have a broad age range of members thus offering the opportunity to form intergenerational friendships. These friendships enrich the experience of being an SWI member and enable women to meet and learn from women they may not usually meet in their day-to-day lives.

Protected characteristic 2: 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.

Making reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities

The SWI 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 disabled 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.



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.

The SWI 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. Institutes who do not own their meeting venue will need to talk to the venue management/owner about this. It is recommended that the local committee speak to those members who require improved accessibility to fully understand and meet their needs. 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.

Protected characteristic 3: Gender reassignment

We are proud to be a trans inclusive organisation. No member or member of staff should be treated less favourably because they're trans.

The SWI provides women with educational opportunities and the platform to campaign on issues that matter to them and their communities while always celebrating what it means to be a woman. Therefore, including transgender women furthers our objectives and enriches our membership to ensure we are a place for all women to celebrate who they are and influence positive change in their communities.

When talking about transgender people, it is important to understand the difference between sex and gender. Sex is assigned to a person at birth on the basis of their sex characteristics (genitalia) e.g. male or female. Gender is often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity, is largely culturally determined, and is assumed from the sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is a person's sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

Culturally, it is expected that a person's gender identity is aligned with their sex assigned at birth. For example, it is expected that a person who is assigned 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 assigned 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 a transgender woman is a protected characteristic (gender reassignment) under the Equality Act 2010. Gender reassignment includes the permanent decision to live as a woman and there is no legal requirement to have had gender reassignment surgery or other medical intervention.

The SWI does not ask members to prove their sex when they join and it is not necessary or acceptable to request a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) from any member.

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 it is important to think of a gender as 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 assigned female at birth but who identifies as non-binary is able to join the SWI. This is because they fall within our women only exemption as they were assigned female at birth. As mentioned above, The SWI does not ask members to prove their sex when they join.

Protected characteristic 4: Marital or civil partnership status

Staff or members over 16 years old must not be treated differently because they're married or in a civil partnership.

Protected characteristic 5: Pregnancy and maternity

The SWI 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 SWI meetings and providing an environment where members can breastfeed or express milk where possible.

Talking to members about this is the best way to ensure their needs are met. No member or staff member should be treated less favourably because they're pregnant, breastfeeding or have recently given birth, without good reason (such as a health and safety risk). All practical changes must be made to accommodate them.

Protected characteristic 6: Race

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.

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

Refugees and asylum seekers

No one involved with the SWI should be treated less favourably because they are a refugee or asylum seeker.

Protected characteristic 7: Religion or belief

The SWI 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.

Protected characteristic 8: Sexual orientation

We celebrate difference and believe that all members and staff should be proud to be themselves, without fear of discrimination. No one in the SWI should be treated less favourably based on their sexual orientation.

Protected characteristic 9: Sex (except that we are a trans inclusive, woman-only organisation)

We believe we best meet the needs of women by being a women-only charity, led by women. This is part of our constitution. Staff positions are open to all but only women can become members.

In addition

Caring responsibilities

No one should face discrimination because they have caring responsibilities, including caring for a disabled person, older person or children. 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.

Children in care

Members must not face discrimination because they are, or have been, in care of a local authority.

Socio-economic status or class

No one at the SWI should be treated less favourably because of their socio-economic status or social class. We must try and remove barriers to taking part in the SWI based on this.

Inclusive language

The SWI 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'.

It is important to remember that there is not one single approach to using inclusive language; every member will have different experiences and needs. If inappropriate or offensive language is used this should be reported following the procedures set out in the Complaints Policy.

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