



Scottish Women's Institutes

Changing the future together

Strategic plan update | February 2025





Introduction by Mary Burney, SWI National President

Who we are

Established in 1917, Scottish Women's Institutes is an inclusive and inspirational membership-based organisation, standing out among other women's organisations around the world.

What we do

Our principal aims are set out in our constitution. They are to:

- Build inclusive, diverse communities
- Advance education and skills
- Provide a platform for social activities and networking
- Promote the preservation and development of our cultural heritage
- Campaign and work with like-minded organisations at home and abroad

Since we launched the SWI Strategic Plan in 2022, we have delivered on many key strategic priorities which were endorsed by SWI members through a Scotland-wide membership consultation.

These priorities included reducing organisational costs, growing the membership, preserving our heritage, updating internal systems and processes and enhancing the governance structure of the SWI.

As we guide the SWI through the 21st century, our focus remains on modernisation, investing in the future, and leveraging our heritage to secure a sustainable organisation by 2027.

The core objective of this updated strategy remains unchanged: to honour our past while engaging the present in shaping the future.

2025 is a crucial year for us as we must act quickly to prevent the closure of the SWI. Without urgent action that could happen in as little as four years' time, so we need to be progressive and responsible in order to save the SWI for future generations to enjoy.

We urgently need to generate income without relying on members' fees. After decades of decline – and a shock during the COVID pandemic – our numbers have dropped to 8,600 – a far cry from 55,000 in the 1950s.

This impacts the whole sustainability of the organisation.

Our plan is to harness the strength of our past to drive income and build a vibrant future through a unique partnership. One that showcases our history while continuing to inspire friendships, learning and fun. This is **The Crichton Opportunity**.

Without The Crichton Opportunity and the revenue it will provide, the SWI would cease to exist within four years, and we cannot let that happen. Your support and enthusiasm for the project is much appreciated.

As we update SWI's Strategic Plan, we are delighted to acknowledge the pivotal role members have played in helping us get to this point. →





Together, these are the key milestones we have achieved...

- Despite a constant unaddressed decline in membership since the 1950s, for the past two years we have **maintained stable membership levels** with continuous recruitment within existing Institutes and the launch of new Institutes around Scotland.
- We successfully **hosted national events**, including the Summer School, offering a blend of traditional and modern crafts for members to explore. The four-day event attracted 140 members from across Scotland and **launched a new flexible payment option**, allowing members to pay in affordable instalments. This year's SWI Summer School in Stirling is on track to be just as successful.
- Engaged members with **numerous national skill-sharing workshops, hands-on sessions, and online events**, championing the SWI motto of 'if you know a good thing, pass it on!' and ensuring it's always there for future generations.
- **Strengthened interaction and communication with Federation and Institute Office Bearers** through an Office Bearer's social gathering event, building on Federation peer group meetings to foster engagement and collaboration.

- We achieved **SCIO status**, improving transparency and reducing trustee liability. The updated constitution recognises the SWI Committees structure and offers flexibility in Office Bearer rules at Institute level. SCIO status also unlocks key funding opportunities for the benefit of members.
- We **successfully secured £127,175 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund** to support the SWI Heritage Project, ensuring the protection and conservation of its nationally significant archive and collection for members and future generations to learn from and be inspired by.
- We successfully secured £2,500 from the W Mann and Sylvia Aitken Trust to support the **development of SWI Junior Dippers groups across Scotland**, reinforcing our commitment to intergenerational engagement and nurturing the next generation of crafters and SWI members.
- Through strategic partnership development, we have **helped secure £100,000 from South of Scotland Enterprise** to fund the redesign of The Crichton plans by architects, ensuring it reflects the interests and needs of SWI members.

- We have **expanded our member volunteering base** by providing diverse opportunities at national events and activities, building greater involvement, and strengthening connections within the SWI community.
- We **remain committed to demonstrating value for money** by prioritising inclusivity and accessibility for all members across Scotland. This commitment is evidenced through initiatives such as free online events, e-magazines and e-newsletters, member discounts, and ongoing support and training for both Federations and individual members.

Everything we do has members in mind, and one ultimate goal: to save our beloved SWI for members and Scotland's future women to enjoy.

Please join me in getting behind this goal and saving the SWI which has given so much to so many women in Scotland.

Mary Burney

SWI National President

"The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do."

Steve Jobs



Strategy, planning and performance

Our vision

All women can find opportunities with Scottish Women's Institutes, an internationally recognised and well-respected membership organisation which is ambitious, relevant, and inclusive.

Our mission

Scottish Women's Institutes have a rich history across Scotland's communities, promoting education and connecting women locally and nationally to improve their quality of life through friendship, education, sharing and having fun.

Our values

The values we hold dear describe how we want to work and what is important to us, we want to be **Empowering, Ambitious, Inclusive, Cultural and Educational**.

Executive Summary

There has been significant progress in achieving key organisational goals, however, there are still many goals ahead.

To ensure our future, we propose to:

- 1. Drive organisational growth and development**
- 2. Prioritise members**
- 3. Achieve financial sustainability**
- 4. Develop The Crichton Opportunity**

The key to success

Continuing to secure progress and involve members who have the enthusiasm, skills, experience, and knowledge will enable us to create an exciting sustainable future together.

Reporting on performance

Our strategy is delivered through a set of strategic priorities (overleaf) which form the core of our internal operational plans for 2025-2026. We will review operational outcomes quarterly with the Executive team and Board of Trustees. Each year we will report annual progress and performance through Annual Accounts and Report presented at AGM and an Annual Review.



Our four key priorities for the next two years

1

Drive organisational growth & development

Objectives

- Enhance the membership journey
- Drive membership growth
- Support growth of new Institutes across Scotland
- Promote equality of opportunity, diversity, and inclusion
- Develop intergenerational working across Scotland
- Develop a new website
- Expand partnership working across all sectors
- Continue to streamline outdated processes and ways of working
- Work towards organisational accreditations
- Work with Federations to streamline fee and reporting structures

2

Prioritise members

Objectives

- Engage members in shaping the future collaboratively
- Organise national competitions and events for members across Scotland
- Improve attractiveness and relevance to potential members
- Implement a membership programme focused on recognition and appreciation
- Provide support and guidance to members
- Be proactive in responding to members' concerns – acknowledge and act
- Implement a Federation and Institute twinning programme
- Pilot new member activities and initiatives

3

Achieve financial sustainability

Objectives

- Build and develop income generation streams
- Improve financial transparency
- Develop a fundraising strategy for SWI
- Manage membership fee increments
- Manage financial risk
- Designate funds for future development
- Manage and maximise Investment income
- Revamp the SWI Shop
- Develop income generation from workshops and events

4

Develop The Crichton Opportunity

Objectives

- Deliver the SWI Heritage Project funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Develop a joint fundraising strategy with The Crichton Trust
- Develop a sustainability plan
- Develop an SWI Volunteering Strategy and Communications Strategy on the future of SWI
- Engage in gatherings to share and exhibit SWI's heritage
- Manage expectations, capacity, and resourcing
- Partner with relevant partners to achieve objectives
- Communicate, consult, and involve members

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