

What You Told Us

2026 SWI Membership Experience Survey



2,093
members shared
their views



386
Institutes
represented



All 28
Federations
represented

What members value most



Friendship



Meeting like-minded women



Learning new skills



The biggest strength of SWI
is the sense of belonging and community.

Satisfaction across SWI

(rated out of 5)



Institute



Federation



National Body



What this means: Members feel happiest
and most connected at their local Institute.

What members would like to see improve



**Easier access
to events**

Travel distance and
cost make it difficult
for many members.



**Better
communication**

Clearer, earlier and
more direct member
communications



**Better support for
rural and offline
members**

Not everyone can
access digital
information.



**Attract younger
women**

Modernise while
keeping what
makes SWI special.



**Support for
volunteers**

Help with training,
resources and
succession.

National events

76%
didn't attend a
National event
in 2025.



The biggest reasons:

- Travel distance
- Cost
- Timing

Members asked for:

- More events around Scotland
- Lower costs
- Greater variety

Website

Only **38%**
have used the
new website...



...but among those
who have:

90%
feel confident
using it.

Communications



68%
are happy with
SWI communications.

Members prefer receiving
information:

- From Members' News
- Directly
- By email

Membership & the future



54%

would prefer SWI to
remain a women-only
membership.

- 20%** No strong view either way
- 11%** Prefer a more inclusive approach
- 15%** Unsure / Other



The message we heard most

People join SWI for
friendship, support
and belonging.

Members also want:



Greater
transparency



Better
communication



More
accessible
events



Support for
volunteers



A modern image
that respects
our traditions



Looking ahead

The survey shows a strong organisation built on local friendships and community. Members want SWI to continue growing by making it easier for everyone to take part, improving communication, and ensuring the organisation remains welcoming, relevant



Membership Experience Survey 2026

Summary Insight Report

Federation Office Bearers have received a strategic infographic and individual Federation Report

Summary Insight Report

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SWI Data summary

The 2026 Membership Experience Survey received responses from 2,093 members across 386 Institutes and all 28 Federations, an increase of 825 responses compared to the 2024 survey demonstrating strong and growing engagement with the survey process.

The results paint a picture of a membership that is largely satisfied at a local level, with Institutes rated highest at 4.56 out of 5, followed by Federations at 3.71 and the National body at 3.17. This pattern is consistent across multiple sections of the survey and reflects a membership that finds the greatest value in the friendships, community, and skills development that their local Institute provides. The top three things members enjoy about their membership are friendship, meeting like-minded women, and learning new skills a reminder of the enduring strengths at the heart of the SWI.

The survey highlights a number of recurring challenges that may require attention. The most common themes were event accessibility, membership value, support for rural located and non-digital members, and a desire for SWI to modernise its image in order to attract younger women. Members were also clear about the need for the Central Office to be more connected to grassroots level, and more transparent in its decision-making.

Participation in national events remains low relative to overall membership, with 76% not participating due primarily to travel distance and cost, and members calling for a wider geographic spread of National events.

Communication is generally well regarded, 68% of members are satisfied though improvements are needed around digital accessibility for older and rural located members, reducing reliance on Federation as a communication channel, and improving the timeliness of information. The SWI website, while positively received by those who have used it, has only been visited by 38% of members. However 90% of these members feel confident using the website and it was praised for access to event information and booking, ease of use and navigation, and the availability of news and updates.

The Heritage Project has reasonable awareness across the membership, with 71% of members knowing about it before completing the survey. However, engagement remains limited, with only 35% having taken part in any activity related to the project.

The survey also asked members about the future of SWI's membership criteria in light of the UK Supreme Court ruling. 54% of members expressed a preference for retaining women-only membership, with 11% favouring a more inclusive approach and 20% holding no strong view. This topic generated significant open-ended comments, and any future decision will need to be approached with care and transparency.

SWI Strategic insights

The satisfaction gradient is the central organising fact

Institutes sit at 4.56/5, Federations at 3.71, and the National body at 3.17. This isn't noise, it's consistent across almost every section of the survey: members love the people closest to them and feel progressively less connected, less informed, and less convinced of value the further up the structure you go. Money and decision-making flow upward, but the lived experience of value flows downward. Any strategy work should treat this gradient as the core problem to solve rather than three separate satisfaction scores.

Federations are the weak middle link, and they know it

Almost every Federation report repeats the same three asks: better/more consistent communication from Federation to Institutes, more support and training for office bearers, and more opportunities to actually meet other members across the Federation (connectedness ranges hugely, from 38% in East Lothian to 80% in Stewartry). There's also a striking, consistent appetite for inter-Federation collaboration, roughly 30-50% "yes" and another 40-70% "maybe" in nearly every Federation, yet this isn't being acted on anywhere. That's a low-cost, high-goodwill opportunity sitting largely untapped.

A volunteer and governance pipeline problem underlies a lot of this

Several Federations (Kincardineshire, SC&WP, Dunbartonshire, Lanarkshire) explicitly describe difficulty recruiting office bearers, succession planning failures, and burnout among the small group of women already doing the work, often because the women with time to lead skew older and those with relevant skills are still working. This is a structural risk to the Federation tier specifically, not just a communications fix.

The "heritage vs modernisation" tension shows up everywhere, in similar language

Quotes about SWI being "old fashioned," needing to "shake things up," or struggling to attract younger/working women appear independently across Aberdeenshire, Fife, Perth & Kinross, Renfrewshire, Shetland, and Wigtownshire, among others. Importantly, members aren't asking to abandon tradition, several quotes explicitly say "don't lose sight of who we are." The tension is really about access (timing, format, cost) and image, not core purpose. This maps directly onto the rebrand work already in motion and gives it strong evidential backing.

Digital reliance is creating a real access gap

Only 38% have used the new website, though those who have rate it well (3.83) and 90% feel confident using it. The bigger flag is qualitative: multiple Federations describe older and rural members feeling "left behind" by increasing digital reliance, and there's specific demand (45%) for an FAQ/user guide. Communications overall score reasonably well (68% satisfied), but the same theme, reduce reliance on digital-only and on Federation as a relay channel, recurs as the top improvement ask nationally.

SWI Strategic insights

Trust and transparency toward Central Office is the weakest spot

Beyond the raw 3.17 rating, the qualitative comments are sharper: members describing a "them and us" feel, confusion about what membership fees actually buy, and a specific call for HQ staff to be more visibly connected to grassroots life. The National events findings reinforce this geographically, 76% don't participate, overwhelmingly due to travel and cost, and the central-belt concentration of events is named as exclusionary by Federations as far apart as Caithness, Orkney, Shetland, Argyll, and Wigtownshire.

What's working, and shouldn't get lost in any redesign

Friendship and belonging is by far the dominant theme members raise unprompted, especially as a lifeline through bereavement, relocation, retirement, or rural isolation. This is SWI's strongest asset and the most emotionally resonant material for any rebrand messaging. Worth protecting deliberately as the "non-negotiable core" while everything else flexes.

A pattern worth digging into further

Membership tenure in many Federations is bimodal, lots of 1-5 year members and lots of 20+ year members, with a noticeably thinner 11-20 year band. That could suggest a recent recruitment push working, but a "leaky middle" where mid-tenure members drift away. Worth a targeted look at retention data rather than just recruitment data.

One sensitive item to flag for careful handling

The Supreme Court ruling question produced a clear majority for retaining women-only membership (54%), but with meaningful minorities favouring inclusion (11%) or holding no strong view (20%), and a substantial volume of thoughtful open-ended comment on both sides. Given this is tied to the rebrand and legal work already underway, this is one area where the strategy day conversation probably needs its own dedicated, carefully facilitated space rather than being folded into general "modernisation" discussion.

A few smaller but easy wins surfaced repeatedly

A shared, central database of speakers/demonstrators (asked for independently by multiple Federations), clearer information on what membership fees fund, advance notice for events and competitions, and isolated but real reports of unwelcoming or cliquish behaviour at Federation level (Angus, Berwickshire) that's worth a quiet operational look rather than just a comms fix

SWI Participation Data

Members were asked questions about their length of membership, local Institute, Federation and if they held a committee position, this is used to monitor engagement with the survey.

Q1. How long have you been a SWI member?

2064 members responded to this question, 35% have been a member for either 1-5 years, 35% have also been a member for 20+ years, 16% have been members for 6-10 years and 14% have been members for 11-20 years.

Q2. Which Institute(s) do you attend?

2027 members responded to this question, totalling at 386 Institutes represented across the survey.

Q3. Which Federation does your Institute(s) belong to?

2006 members responded to this question, all 28 Federations were represented within the survey, Aberdeenshire had the most respondents at 274 while Arran had the least at 17.

Q4. Do you currently hold a committee role within your Institute or Federation

2061 members responded to this question, 48% did not hold a committee role, 39% held a role at Institute level, 3% held a role at Federation level, 8% held a role at Institute and Federation level. The remaining 2% selected other, the majority of these responses were largely naming roles which would have fit into the answers that were available to be selected.

The data explained

Survey respondents reflected a broad mix of membership experience and organisational involvement. Length of membership was fairly evenly distributed, with large numbers of respondents being either relatively new members or members of 20 years or more, while fewer respondents fell into the intermediate membership categories. Respondents also came from a wide range of Institutes and all Federations were represented, indicating that feedback was gathered from across the organisation rather than from a small number of groups. Regarding committee involvement, approximately half of respondents did not hold a committee position. Among those who did, most served on Institute-level committees, while smaller proportions held Federation-level roles, roles at both Institute and Federation levels.

SWI National body

Members were asked about their membership and the national body, covering the benefits they use, how much value they feel membership offers, their preferred way of paying their National membership fee, what they enjoy most about being a member, and what stops them taking part in SWI activities.

Q5. Which of the following SWI benefits have you experienced since becoming a member?

2067 members responded to this question 93% of members have at least used one member benefit, the top three benefits are:

- Friendship
- Meeting like minded women
- Learning new skills or hobbies

Q6. What, if anything, currently limits your ability to take part in SWI activities?

1959 members responded to this question highlighting what stopped them from attending SWI activities, the top three responses are:

- Travel & Transport distance
- The cost
- Time constraints

Q7. What do you enjoy most about being a SWI member?

1921 members left a comment regarding what they enjoy the most about membership, the top three responses are:

- Friendship
- Meeting like minded women
- Learning new skills or hobbies

Q8. How do you currently pay your National membership fee?

2046 members responded to this question, 94% pay their National membership fee directly to their institute, the remaining 6% paid their fee directly to the central Office via direct debit.

Q9. What would be your preferred way to pay your National membership fee?

2034 members responded to this question, 88% would prefer to pay their National membership fee directly to their institute, the remaining 12% would prefer to pay their fee directly to the central Office via direct debit or stated other.

Q10. How would you rate the value for money of your SWI Membership?



Q11. Overall, how satisfied are you with your SWI membership?

2050 members responded to this question, 72% of members feel satisfied with their SWI membership, 20% are neither satisfied or dissatisfied, while the remaining 8% are not satisfied.

Q12. How likely are you to recommend SWI Membership to others?



Q13. How would you rate your overall experience with the National body?



The data explained

Members most value the friendship, like-minded company, and opportunities to learn new skills or hobbies that SWI membership offers, and these same areas also stand out as the benefits members have most experienced since joining. The vast majority pay their National membership fee directly through their Institute, with only a small number paying a direct debit to the central Office. When it comes to barriers to taking part, travel and transport distance, cost, and time constraints are the factors most commonly limiting members' involvement in SWI activities.

Members were asked questions about their local Institute, focusing on their current experience, their sense of connection with other members, the support they felt was needed, and opportunities to improve the overall Institute experience.

Q14. How would you rate your overall experience at your Institute? (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent)



Q15. Do you feel connected with other members in your Institute?

1864 members responded to this question, 95% of members feel connected with other members at their local Institute where as the remaining 5% answered no or not sure.

Q16. What additional support would you like to see for Institutes?

908 members responded to this question and left a comment regarding additional support for Institutes the top suggestions are:

- Financial support for smaller Institutes
- A central database for guest speakers
- Support and materials to help promote the SWI and recruit new members
- Better support for rural, island and remote located Institutes
- Support for committee members and office bearers

Q17. How could your Institute member experience be improved?

914 members responded to this question and left a comment regarding improving their Institute experience, the top suggestions are:

- Membership growth, specifically younger members
- A wider variety of events in their syllabus, including flexible timings for working members
- Reducing the fees paid by members
- Members want Institutes to feel more welcoming and connected
- Reduce committee burnout and increase the number of volunteers

The data explained

Members believe the long-term health of the Institutes depends on attracting younger women, modernising the offer, increasing participation, and reducing the burden on a shrinking pool of volunteers. Alongside this, there is a strong secondary message that members want better value for membership and a richer programme of activities and workshops. Overall, members are highly satisfied while identifying a few practical areas where Federation and National support could help.

SWI Federations

Members were asked questions about their local Federation, focusing on their current experience, their sense of connection with other members, whether they would like Federations to collaborate, the support they felt was needed, and opportunities to improve the overall Institute experience.

Q.18 How would you rate your overall experience with your Federation?



Q.19 Do you feel connected to members across your Federation?

1833 members responded to this question, 88% of members feel connected with other members at their local Institute where as the remaining 12% answered no or not sure.

Q.20 Would you like to see more opportunities for Federations to work together?

1799 members responded to this question, 39% of members would like Federations to work together, 54% would may be interested, where as the remaining 6% answered no.

Q.21 What additional support would you like to see for Federations?

677 members responded to this question and left a comment regarding additional support for Federations the top suggestions are:

- Inter-Federation communication, competitions and activities
- Help to encourage members take up Office Bearer roles
- A better communication system for Federations to deliver information to their Institutes
- More local events, workshops, and activities are needed to improve accessibility and engagement.
- More face-to-face interaction, visits and engagement from the national body.

SWI Federations

Q22. How could your Federation member experience be improved?

693 members responded to this question and left a comment regarding improving their experience with their Federation the top suggestions are:

- Communication from Federations needs to be clearer, more direct, and more consistent to all members.
- Members want more timely sharing of event information and schedules.
- Members would like more opportunities to meet Federation Office Bearers
- Members want more opportunities for social interaction and networking across institutes

The data explained

Members feel well connected locally, but they see Federations as the weak middle link in SWI's structure. The most common request is for more inter-Federation communication, competitions, and shared activities, alongside clearer channels for Federations to pass information down to Institutes. Members also want more support encouraging Office Bearer uptake, more local events and workshops, and more face-to-face engagement from the national body. There is a clear, if not universal, appetite for Federations to work together more closely, with only a small minority opposed to the idea. Overall, the picture is one of strong local connection undermined by a Federation tier that isn't yet delivering the communication, collaboration, and visible support members want.

SWI National Events

Members were asked how they hear about national events and competitions, whether they took part in any national events during 2025, what stopped them from taking part, how they could be improved, and whether they plan to attend the Members' Gathering in September.

Q23. How do you usually hear about National events & competitions?

1849 members responded to this question and let us know how they usually hear about national events & competitions the top three channels are:

- Institute communications
- Members' news
- SWI emails

Q24. Did you attend or participate in any in-person or online National events and competitions in 2025?

1845 members responded to this question, 76% said no where as the remaining 24% said yes or not sure.

Q25. Following on from question 24, if not what were the main reasons you did not take part?

1478 members responded to this question and let us know the main reason they did not take part in national events & competitions the top three reasons are:

- Travel distance
- Timing & dates
- The cost

Q.26 Do you have any suggestions for improving National events or competitions for members?

647 members responded to this question and let us know the main reason they did not take part in national events & competitions the top three suggestions are:

- A spread of events across the country and not just the central belt
- Reduce the cost of National events
- A wider variety of competitions

Q.27 Are you planning to attend the Members' Gathering in September?

1852 members responded to this question, 12% said yes, 22% said they hadn't decided yet and the remaining 66% said no.

The data explained

Members most commonly hear about National events and competitions through Institute communications, Members' News, and SWI emails. The majority did not attend or participate in any in-person or online National events or competitions in 2025, with travel distance, timing and dates, and cost cited as the main reasons for not taking part. When asked how National events and competitions could be improved, members' top suggestions were spreading events more widely across the country rather than concentrating them in the central belt, reducing the cost of National events, and offering a wider variety of competitions. Looking ahead, only a small minority of members are currently planning to attend the Members' Gathering in September, with a further small amount still undecided and the majority saying they do not plan to attend.

Q.28 Before this survey, how aware were you of the SWI Heritage Project?

1647 members responded to this question, 71% were at least somewhat aware of the Heritage project, where as the remaining 29% were not aware of it.

Q.29 Which aspects of the Heritage Project have you experienced or engaged with?

1599 members responded to this question, the majority 65% had not engaged with the project, the three most popular aspects that have been engaged by the remaining 35% are:

- Read the heritage newsletter
- Visited the heritage section of the website
- Listened or watched the heritage podcasts

The data explained

Most members were at least somewhat aware of the SWI Heritage Project before this survey, though a sizeable minority had not heard of it. When it comes to actual engagement, the majority had not engaged with the project in any way, while those who had most commonly read the heritage newsletter, visited the heritage section of the website, or listened to or watched the heritage podcasts.

SWI Website

Members were asked to rate the new SWI website, including their confidence using it, where it could be improved, and whether a user guide would help. Only members who confirmed using the website (Q30.) are included in this section's data.

Q30. Have you used the new SWI website?

807 members who completed the survey have used the new SWI Website

Q31. How would you rate your overall experience with the new SWI website?



Q32. How confident do you feel navigating the new SWI website?

803 members responded to this question 91% said they feel at least somewhat confident using the new SWI website, the remaining 9% do not feel confident.

Q33. How confident do you feel booking an event through the new SWI website?

788 members responded to this question 84% said they feel at least somewhat confident using the new SWI website, the remaining 16% do not feel confident.

Q34. Which areas of the new SWI website need improvement?

633 members responded to this question and left a comment regarding what areas need improvement the top three results were:

- Nothing needs improvement
- Finding information
- The content available

Q35. Which part of the website do you enjoy the most?

332 members responded to this question and left a comment regarding what part of the new SWI website they enjoy the top three results were:

- Access to event information and booking
- Ease of use, navigation, and speed
- News, updates and information

Q36. What changes would most improve your SWI website experience?

216 members responded to this question, the majority of responses were none or that they had not had enough experience using the website to make a recommendation.

Q37. Would you find a website or user guide helpful?

731 members responded to this question, 45% would find a user guide helpful with a further 38% members feeling unsure if it would be helpful, the remaining 17% would not find a user guide helpful.

The data explained

Among members who have used the new SWI website, overall experience is rated reasonably well. Confidence levels are strong, with most members feeling at least somewhat confident both navigating the site and booking an event through it. When asked what needs improvement, the most common response was that nothing needs improving, followed by difficulty finding information and a desire for more content. On the positive side, members most enjoy the site's event information and booking access, its ease of use and navigation, and its news and updates. A notable proportion of members also said they would benefit from a user guide.

SWI Communications

Members were asked about their experience with SWI Communications, including how satisfied they were, their preferred way to receive them and what could be improved.

Q38. How satisfied are you with your experience of communications from the SWI?

1589 members responded to this question, 68% are satisfied with our communications, only 4% are dissatisfied, and the remaining 28% are neither satisfied or dissatisfied.

Q39. What is your preferred way to receive communications?

1611 members responded to this question and left a comment regarding their preferred way to receive communications from the SWI the top three results are:

- Email
- Directly from their institute
- Members' News.

Q40. What could the SWI do to improve communications?

439 members responded to this question and left a comment regarding the best way to improve communications from the SWI the top three results are:

- Reduce reliance on communications directly from Federations
- Find more ways to support members who are not online
- Give further advance notice for events and competitions

The data explained

Most members are satisfied with their experience of SWI communications, with only a small minority dissatisfied and the remainder sitting neutral. When asked about their preferred way to receive communications, email, direct contact through their Institute, and Members' News came out as the top three channels. In terms of improving communications, members called for less reliance on information passed down through Federations, better support for members who are not online, and more advance notice for events and competitions.

UK Supreme Court ruling

Members were asked to choose their preferred membership option in relation to UK Supreme Court Ruling and provide additional context for their answer.

Q41. Which approach to membership do you wish SWI to follow?

1625 members responded to this question, 54% said they would prefer SWI to remain a women-only membership in the future. 20% had no strong view either way, while 11% favoured a more inclusive approach. The remaining 15% were either unsure or selected "other," with these comments generally reflecting a mix of the answers.

Q42. Please share any thoughts, concerns, or reasons behind your answer to question 41

754 members provided more context regarding their decision, the following reasons were provided, these are ranked from most common to least common:

- Members value the SWI's identity, history, and the sense of shared experience it provides.
- A recurring concern was safeguarding and the preservation of a safe space defined by sex rather than gender identity.
- Exclusion is at odds with the SWI values, and that could lead to discrimination challenges
- Do not have a strong enough opinion or information to form a strong view

The data explained

When asked about the future of the SWI's membership criteria, most members favoured remaining women-only, a small minority preferred a more inclusive approach, and others had no strong view either way. The open-ended responses reflect this, with the most common theme centring on SWI's century-long identity as a women's organisation and the value of a space built around shared female experience. Many also described SWI as a safe space where women feel comfortable speaking openly, with concern that change could alter those dynamics.

The question of trans women's inclusion was the most debated aspect, with views ranging from strong support to firm opposition rooted in biological definitions of sex. A smaller group expressed genuine uncertainty, while others argued for broader membership as a way of future-proofing the organisation. Overall, the data points to a half of the membership in favour of remaining women-only, but with a thoughtful range of views that any future decision will need to consider carefully.

SWI General feedback

Q43. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience as a SWI member, or anything we haven't asked about?

546 members chose to leave general feedback regarding their SWI experience below are the top themes ranked from most to least common:

- Friendship and belonging is overwhelmingly the most common theme, with members describing the SWI as a lifeline for connection, particularly for those who are new to an area, recently retired, bereaved, or living in rural isolation.
- Learning and personal growth feature regularly, with members valuing the variety of speakers, new skills, competitions, and the confidence that comes from trying new things in a supportive environment.
- Many members of 40, 50, even 60+ years are still expressing love for the organisation and gratitude for what it has given them over their lives.
- Members raised concerns about the accessibility of events, particularly around online booking requirements, travel distances, and the format of meetings.
- Members questioned whether the cost of membership represents good value, with particular concern that too little of the fee/value is returned to the grassroots level.
- There was concern regarding rural located members feeling overlooked or under appreciated.
- Members felt SWI struggles with an outdated perception and called for a more contemporary image to help attract 'younger women'.
- Members highlighted that increasing reliance on digital tools is leaving a significant portion of the membership behind.

Quotes

"It was a lifesaver for me. When my husband died, people from the Rural came by, brought me flowers and checked I was all right. The SWI is a precious thing when it works well."

"As an incomer to Scotland and our little village, my first significant welcome was at SWI on the night we moved here. Everyone is welcome."

"I am 79 and can't keep up, and like so many at my institute some don't even have a smart phone. I love my institute and partake in as many activities as I can. We need young people."

"I feel the SWI needs to be flexible. Not all members want to do competitions or are interested in crafts. Some want to be social members and come to meetings to be with people."

The National Body

What do members have to say

"I enjoy the friendship and support from fellow members I.e Committee and Institute. Also support from Central Office staff is helpful and I enjoy learning new skills."

"I really enjoy being an SWI member. I have appreciated the changes that have been made at central office and the move to having more information sessions online."

"I run a dippers group and I would like the National Body to positively encourage every Federation to have a dippers group."

"Cut down on the amount of detailed info. It can be too much at times. Perhaps space out releases more so we can take time to absorb the information"

"I think it's a great organisation, but I feel we are losing the reason it was started. There are still lots of elderly woman involved and we must remember that. They don't enjoy social media. Think if all ages."

"Rural Institutes struggle to attract younger members. The National Body could be more supportive in this area. "