



30 May 2023

Dear Melissa,

We are writing to you regarding the article in the [Guardian](#) dated 19 April 2023. As with all our letters this will be published on our website wdwi.co.uk.

We have specific questions and points that we would like to put to you regarding this. Please note that we are using the term trans-identified male, this to avoid any ambiguity that people are able to change to sex, and because we believe that using the term “trans woman” makes women a subset of their own biological sex class.

1. How are you seeking to foster sensible discourse on this “toxic and divisive row”? It is our experience that any debate is being shut down. Ann Jones has already apologised to one of the signatories for her actions in stifling debate on this matter.
2. How is a woman's “lived experience”, often rooted in biology such as periods, pregnancy, childbirth, the menopause and sexism due to our biology and maintained by gendered expectations such as unpaid caring roles, pertinent to a trans-identified male?
3. Please explain how “transgender women are women”? We refer to Annex A, paragraph 1 from the letter dated [7 February 2023](#) for our definition of female, and following from that woman.
4. Do you acknowledge that “share[ing] and celebrate[ing] their [trans-identified males'] experience” can be exclusionary to women who believe in biological reality? It is not a neutral position, but one that promotes a controversial viewpoint (that an inner gender identity should override biological reality and society should accept this unquestioningly as demonstrated by the NFWI Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy and its Glossary). The NFWI could have remained neutral by following the single sex provisions in the Equality Act 2010, rather than choosing to not rely on them.
5. The NFWI has admitted to: not relying on the single sex provisions contained in the Equality Act 2010 as it believes it is not right to do so (the 2023 EDI policy has removed most references to this); stifling debate on the inclusion of trans-identified males in women only spaces; and has removed sex based language from some campaigns, marginalising women's experiences. Therefore “how are we enriched” by the inclusion of trans-identified males?

6. Please can you provide specific examples of what the something is: “we learn something about being a woman through the eyes of transgender women”. We are firmly of the belief girls do not learn to be women; it is a natural part of the developmental process. It is misogynistic to suggest we should “learn” about being women, unless it is about coping with biological functions such as, but not limited to, periods, pregnancy, childbirth, breast feeding, and the menopause.

7. The article states that this policy has been in place since the 1970s. At that time there were strict medical and psychological assessments required before any medical interventions. In the 1970s it was unconscionable that an inner gender identity should take precedence over biological reality. In 1979 the WI actively campaigned for single sex hospital wards, we are firmly of the opinion the WI would not support such a campaign nowadays as it would be deemed ‘transphobic’. This is demonstrated by the removal of the word “woman” from the 2021 ovarian cancer campaign.

8. The Guardian reports in 2015 the majority of [WI] members were supportive of its stance. How was this ascertained? Is this still the case? Members were not consulted prior to any policy changes, and it was specifically pointed out there was no need to consult members on policies.

9. Since 2015 there have been various scandals including: the placing of male rapists in female prisons; a report by Women’s Rights Network revealing 6,500 sexual assaults and rapes in hospitals between January 2019 and October 2022; a convicted male paedophile being housed in a women’s refuge; as well as problems in sport. Given all of this, members’ opinions may have changed. Therefore, how will you as Chief Executive ensure the membership remains “supportive” given the rejection of our request for a moratorium, debate and vote?

10. You are quoted as saying “we’re not an organisation that is sort of stuck in one place - we’re constantly evolving and reviewing opposition”. Please explain what you mean by “opposition”.

11. You said the WI is “making sure we’re relevant to women in the 21st century”. Please explain how you know the WI remains relevant to women as the WI does not define what a woman is. As per the letter dated 7 February if you cannot define the group you seek to represent (women), how can you understand their needs and demands?

12. You stated that “we’ve received no communication suggesting that that’s what our members want” regarding changing the policy. We have been made aware that members had written to the NFWI about their concerns and received dismissive replies prior to the media furore of the week commencing 17 April 2023. Therefore, do you accept this is not true?

13. The Guardian also says that the WI will not stifle debate, yet the request for a debate and a membership vote has been ignored. You are quoted as saying “we talk about it and we have a process” please explain what this process is, as so far our attempts to discuss this have not been accepted. Furthermore, Ann Jones has acknowledged she actively stifled debate at the Million Women March pre-meet on 4 March 2023. Signatories of this letter

have had their Facebook posts, challenging the membership of trans women, removed. We also have evidence of Twitter posts being removed, and disentangling us from Twitter threads.

14. Do you acknowledge the “external panic” has been caused by the refusal of the NFWI to engage with members on this matter. If channels of communication were open members would not have to resort to social media, attracting media attention, which is not conducive to constructive dialogue. As per the point above please explain how the membership can engage with the Board of Trustees about their inclusion of trans-identified males in a constructive manner.

15. What does it mean that the WI is a “progressive community”? This phrase is widely used regarding the WI, in the context of politics this is generally taken to be left-wing. However, the WI is supposed to be politically neutral, as per the 2023 EDI policy.

16. You stated that “we’ve had an incredible outpouring of support for Petra, and for our policy position, so we feel confident that it’s a strong position”. Policies should reflect the legal position of an organisation, subjective feelings should not be taken in account. The 2021 EDI policy reflected the Equality Act 2010 as how you and the Board of the NFWI wanted it to be, not how it is. The 2023 EDI policy has almost completely removed the references to the single sex provisions contained in the Equality Act 2010. Do you acknowledge this?

17. Given you “feel confident that it’s a strong position” why not hold a debate and a membership vote to change the constitution to include trans-identified males? The 2023 EDI policy has changed the constitution and allowed men to join the WI, this has not been disputed by the NFWI. We firmly believe this is against the founding principles of the WI.

18. In the article you singled out one member, Petra Wenham. In the letter dated 7 February 2023 the language was carefully chosen to ensure trans-identified members were not scapegoated. The letter concentrated on the legal position of the WI, the interaction of the 2021 policy and the constitution and the WI’s charitable objectives. We believe referring to specific members is emotive and not helpful to productive dialogue, especially as the initial letter specifically stated any current trans-identified members should not be subject to the adoption of single sex provisions, as per the Equality Act 2010. Do you accept your use of unhelpful, emotive naming of members?

19. You stated in the article the WI offers support to trans-identified males in “what is often a very difficult journey for them.” Do you accept that women who have been abused by men also face a difficult journey. They may have post traumatic stress leading to hyper-vigilance in a situation where a man is present and an inability to relax, even if the man believes he is a woman. Trans-widows speak of their erasure and how difficult life can be for them as their partners manipulate them and their friendship group. Therefore why is the WI prioritising one “difficult journey”, that of a man, over another?

20. The Guardian article reports that the WI campaigned in 1983 demanding the prohibition of female genital mutilation. How are you able to reconcile this campaign with an ideology that promotes mastectomies of healthy breasts, ‘chest’ binding (which restricts

healthy tissue growth) and the harvesting of healthy muscle to create phalluses that have a high surgical complication rate and do not function as a penis. As well as cross sex hormones that lead to vaginal atrophy, abnormal clitoral growth, early menopause and hysterectomy?

21. You have stated that “we’ve not been afraid to tackle things that cause us or other people discomfort in an effort to inform and educate and move society forward”. Is the inclusion of trans-identified males part of our re-education? The letter dated 7 February 2023 was comprehensive in the reasons why the NFWI should hold a moratorium, debate and a vote. The moratorium request has been completely dismissed and the two other points ignored, this does not demonstrate a willingness to engage in thoughtful debate.

22. How is supporting the removal of single sex provisions contained in the Equality Act “move[ing] society forward”? The WI is now unable to campaign for single sex provisions due to the 2023 EDI policy.

23. You stated: “since 1915 we’ve been a group of well-informed, strong-minded women who debate the big things of the day and this just happens to be one of them”. Please give us examples of how this matter has been debated with the membership and their concerns given adequate consideration when expanding the membership to include trans-identified males, in conflict with the constitution.

24. We completely agree that the WI is a hugely diverse group of women and “we’re not always going to agree on everything”. But it is imperative to group cohesion that a workable compromise is agreed, this may force a decision that no one particularly likes but everyone can work with. However, you have ignored members’ legitimate concerns and not sought to reach a workable compromise. How will you as Chief Executive endeavour to create a workable compromise?

25. We did not approach the media. Our campaign started quietly on Mumsnet, which we knew would be sympathetic and then was extended to Twitter. The media found us due to our tweet on [17 April 2023](#). As soon as we knew the Daily Mail were running an article about our petition we alerted the NFWI in order for them to prepare a response and not be caught unawares. We are easily contactable via social media, our member who wrote the initial letter (you have her email and home address) or our website. Why did you not see fit to contact us about our petition and take our concerns seriously, but put a response in the Guardian, which, we repeat, is not conducive to constructive conversation.

We look forward to your response. This letter will be published on 14 June 2023, 10 working days after receipt.