

National Federation
of Women's Institutes
104 New King's Road
London SW6 4LY

T +44 (0)20 7371 9300
F +44 (0)20 7736 3652
hq@nfwl.org.uk
www.thewi.org.uk



9 June 2023

Re. Letter to Melissa Green, Chief Executive, dated 30 May 2023

Thank you for your letter of 30 May 2023, which we have considered carefully. We have previously set out fully our policy position so do not think it helpful to reiterate NFWI policy here, or to further elaborate on this or the various media statements which simply reiterate our policy position.

I should clarify that this letter is sent on behalf of the NFWI. Although your letter was addressed to me personally, the policy and the expression of it as referred to in The Guardian reflect the organisation's position, not the personal views of particular members of the NFWI Trustee board or NFWI staff.

In the context of your comments about the development of NFWI policy, and the matters discussed on your website, we thought it would be helpful if we clarified how NFWI policy is formed and how members' views are represented.

In summary, the NFWI movement, which is made up of 180,000 members and just under 6,000 individual charities, is based on democratic principles laid down in our legal constitution (which is itself regularly reviewed and voted on by members).

Representation of members' views is delivered through a number of different routes, both direct and indirect, but on central policy matters is through our National Council. The National Council, which is made up of 138 members (2 Trustees from each of our 69 federations), is a consultative body to the NFWI Board. Both the National Council Members and the NFWI Trustees are all elected directly by members as their representatives with delegated authority to guide the organisation and represent the views of members.

We would be grateful if you could clarify the wording on your website at <https://wdwi.co.uk> by including the above two paragraphs.

The National Council meets formally at least twice a year and informally on a regular basis. Its last meeting was on 7 June 2023. The entire session was dedicated to discussing our E,D&I policy and specifically in light of the concerns you have raised. We remain committed to ensuring that we hear the voices of members and respond appropriately to the issues. The session was one of open discussion and included an anonymous online forum where Council members could share experiences, thoughts and perspectives if they felt unable to share these publicly. Federations were encouraged to share the feedback they had received from members and the discussions they had been involved in directly with individual members and WIs. We have always been, and we remain committed to, providing a space where all views can be shared respectfully, and we are grateful to our National Council for its unswerving ability to explore and address sensitive and complex issues.

During the meeting the policy, local practice and member views from discussions that have taken place in federations and WIs were discussed. Although many concerns had been raised about the information shared by the media and the impact this was having on members and the way the WI was being viewed, very few members had expressed concern about the policy itself and it became clear that many federations have received no communications at all from their members on this issue, with volume of correspondence reflecting what we have received nationally and representing far less member communication than a great number of other WI matters.

There was a robust and honest discussion about the policy and the way forward and the overwhelming feedback was one of support and solidarity for and with our transgender members. Though we appreciate this is counter to your view and we respect that view, equally we must ask that you respect the views of other members who do not feel the same as you. We have suggested to our National Council that last night's session becomes an annual discussion which will help ensure we remain in touch with, and understand the feedback from, members, while giving dedicated space for discussion and development of our E,D&I policy. We hope this will provide you with at least some reassurance that we are not trying to stifle debate on the issues.

Important questions about safety have been raised and this has always been a key priority for us. However, safeguarding is not just a transgender issue but is a much broader concept in the context of our duty of care to our members. We have a robust safeguarding policy and process for reporting and addressing concerns within the WI, including safeguarding volunteers in each of our 69 federations. Our members have information on how to report any issues or concerns about anything relating to safety or safeguarding. We do not hold the view that our trans-inclusive policy of itself increases risk and from our discussions with our National Council we were reassured that our federations were confident in the processes and approach for managing safeguarding issues. Given the

not infallible and are always open to learning, so thank you for taking the time to request the update to the glossary to ensure it is as comprehensive as possible.

We understand from your letter that you intend to publish your letter to us and, we presume, our response. We respect your right to do this and are happy for you to publish this response. We would ask, however, that to ensure that there is no misunderstanding this response, if published, is published in full.

In closing, I want to thank you for raising this crucial issue and encouraging debate. Whilst the issues it engages have always remained high on our agenda, your recent media coverage has encouraged even more open discussion and exploration of the issues, which is to the benefit of us all. We welcomed the opportunity to spend more dedicated time on this with our National Council and we feel that the correspondence we have received (both supporting and in opposing our policy position) has only strengthened and informed the debate.

Yours sincerely,

Melissa