

Subscription Flexibility Guidance for WIs

This new initiative gives WIs the freedom to make an annual decision in the run up to the subscription renewal on whether to charge members the full amount of the WI portion (as set by the NFWI and National Council each year), to reduce the WI portion of the subscription, or to waive the WI portion completely. This decision should be determined annually based on your level of reserves and the money you plan to spend in the year ahead. Therefore, although you may be able to waive or reduce the portion for one year, you may decide the following year that it is necessary to request the full portion. This decision must be made whilst ensuring that your WI still has enough funds year on year to carry out its [charitable objects](#) and offer a meaningful WI experience. WIs need to ensure they are making the best decision for their WI, and although we advise WI committees to discuss this annually with members, the decision is ultimately down to the committee based on the above considerations.

Please note, this does not affect the NFWI and federation portions of the subscription, and the full NFWI and federation portions (also set by the NFWI and National Council each year) will still need to be paid annually, at the appointed time.

The subscription from April 2021 to March 2022 is £44, of which £12.10 (27.5%) goes to the NFWI, £10.30 (23.4%) to the federation, and £21.60 (49.1%) to the WI. This means the minimum amount to be collected from each member in April 2021 is £22.40 (NFWI+ federation) and WIs have flexibility over charging the remaining £21.60.

How will it work?

The payment system will be exactly the same as in previous years, with WIs still responsible for collecting the NFWI and federation share of the subscription at a local level and passing this on. The difference is that WIs can now choose whether to collect the full WI share, a reduced WI share, or waive the WI share completely.

What if our members want something different to the committee?

WI committees need to be as open with members as possible about this new initiative, even if you do not wish to make any changes to the WI portion this year. All members will hear about this initiative from members of other WIs, via social media, on My WI, in your federation newsletter, and in WI Life, so it is much better for them to hear it directly from their WI committee so they know the position of their WI. Ultimately however, as Trustees of the WI, the committee is responsible for making the decision in the best interests of the WI, both now and for the future. Whatever decision is made should be minuted and shared with members so they understand the rationale.

Can we still claim gift aid if we don't collect the full WI portion?

You are only able to claim gift aid on subscriptions that have been collected. You therefore cannot claim gift aid on the WI portion if you waive it for members, and if you reduce your portion of the subscription you can only claim gift aid on the amount you collect.

Can we offer a refund or give back money that we have already in the reserves from last year's subscriptions?

No. Refunds are not possible within our constitution and therefore no money can be returned to members once it has been collected as these funds must be used to deliver the WI's charitable objects. This initiative does not allow for retrospectively returning money, but instead allows you to flex the amount of money you collect each year. Once membership subscriptions have been collected these are legally WI charitable funds.

We have enough money in our account to also pay our members' portions of the NFWI and federation subscription this year, meaning that our members would not have to pay anything. Is this allowed?

No. Under charity law, this would not be considered an appropriate use of charitable funds. All members must individually pay the NFWI and federation portions in order to be WI members, as per the constitution.

Can we instead choose to collect the WI portion in instalments throughout the year?

Whilst we did consider this option and included it as a question in our pilot, the consensus was that WIs felt this would be too much work for WI Treasurers to administer. This may be something we revisit in the future as part of a wider payment review, but it is not part of this current initiative.

Can we offer flexibility to some members and not others (if some members are less willing or less able than others to pay the full amount)?

We also considered this option and understand that a one size fits all does not always work for the WI. However the feedback from our member consultation raised concerns about applying this fairly and that any method for doing so would be too close to a form of 'means testing', which would put WI committees in a very difficult position to try and justify allowing different subscription rates for members.

However if you do go ahead with waiving or reducing your portion of the subscription, members are able to pay the full amount as a donation (see below).

If we reduce the WI portion, can members still pay the full amount as a donation if they are able to?

Yes. Members are able to make donations to their WI if they are able to, but it needs to be treated as a donation and recorded as such in your records.

Can we waive the WI portion for existing members but charge new members the full amount?

No. All members within a WI need to pay the same subscription rate. Each year the committee can decide on the approach to be taken but this will be applied to all members of that WI.

The possibility of new members joining throughout the year needs to be a consideration of the WI committee if choosing to waive or reduce the WI portion, as your budget should allow you to cater for growing numbers.

If we waive or reduce the WI portion, does the pro-rata rate apply throughout the year?

Yes. If new members (who are eligible for pro-rata subscriptions) join throughout the year, they will still pay a pro-rata rate. The NFWI and federation pro-rata portions will be the same whether you are charging the full WI portion or not, but the WI pro-rata rate will differ if your WI has opted to reduce its portion. We will be publishing the pro-rata amounts broken down by NFWI/federation/WI at all price points on My WI, so it will hopefully be clear for all WIs what they need to charge pro-rata.

What about dual members?

The rules for dual members will remain unchanged. A dual member will only pay the NFWI and federation portion once, when joining her primary WI (along with the WI portion as set by the WI). At the dual member's second WI, she will pay the applicable WI portion of the subscription fee only. If her second WI opts to waive the WI portion for the year, then she will also have her portion waived.

A dual member may have one WI that waives the fee and one that does not, thus a dual member may be paying different fees year on year for her WIs.

If a WI waives or reduces their portion, it may cause increased interest from new dual members, so (as with all new members) WIs will need to consider this as part of their forward planning before changing the WI portion. WI committees should only consider waiving or reducing their portion if they would still be able to cater for new members, as it is so important to consider recruitment as part of annual planning and budgeting.

Will this initiative cause competition between neighbouring WIs?

Although we have considered the possible impact of this, we believe that affinity to your own WI will hopefully be strong enough to keep members from moving to another WI just because the overall subscription is lower. The intention of this initiative is not for WIs to set a lower price permanently, but to adjust it if necessary when they can afford to do so, therefore it shouldn't be the case that one WI is permanently 'cheaper' than their neighbour. Please be aware that each WI will need to record the amount of the WI portion that has been set for its members to pay, with the reasons why this amount has been decided on. Creating a competitive advantage over a neighbouring WI is not an acceptable reason to set a lower WI portion.

Why are you only allowing flexibility for the WI portion and not the NFWI or federation portions?

NFWI and federations have fixed costs in order to deliver fixed aspects of the WI experience, such as WI Life, newsletters, promotional materials, member support, etc. These do not change greatly annually and have largely remained consistent (and in many cases increased) throughout the Covid period. However we are aware that WIs may have saved on their own fixed costs this year if they have been unable to maintain activity, and in some instances may not always need their full portion of the membership subscription in order to deliver their WI experience to members.

Can we increase the WI portion and charge our members more?

No. The constitution states the annual subscription is decided by the National Federation Board of Trustees, in prior consultation with the National Council.

This means the set subscription fee (and the apportionment of this fee for each level of the organisation) is fixed annually and is the maximum each member can be charged.

Questions for WI committees to consider when determining what option to offer their members

The following questions are designed to help your committee decide whether there is room in your accounts to waive or reduce the WI portion, or if you should keep it the same.

This process will need to be repeated annually to ensure your WI is making the best financial decision regarding whether to keep the full WI portion of the membership subscription in place or reduce it in any way.

- **What is your WI's budget for the coming year?**

Once you have planned your programme of events for the year, you'll be able to identify how much money is needed for each event or activity. Even if you haven't yet planned your entire programme, you should have an idea of the costs of different events and activities, and you should make allowance for this. You will also need to take into account any venue hire and other associated costs of running your meetings. There may be promotional activities your WI was planning on doing which need accounting for as well. Don't forget to also budget for unforeseen costs, such as needing to change your planned activities at the last minute.

WIs need to ensure that the WI programme is in keeping with the WI's charitable objects and educating your members. The budget needs to be designed to provide educational aspects throughout the year, whether at the meetings or other events.

- **Do you have enough funds currently to cover the costs for the coming year?**

Looking at the money currently in your WI's account and your budget for the coming year, you may already have the right amount to cover your costs, or you may be relying on the WI subscriptions. The committee needs to determine whether you have enough funds to be able to waive or reduce the WI portion of the subscription, or if the whole portion is needed in order to pay all associated costs for the year.

Due to unforeseen circumstances such as Covid-19, your WI may have saved money in the past year because you have not been able to do all the events/activities/trips that were planned. Your WI may have been doing everything virtually for the past year which may have saved money as well.

If your WI often relies on fundraising to cover some annual costs, this should not be taken for granted, as the amount you raise in fundraising will differ year on year. This is particularly important to remember in this coming year (April 2021 – March 2022) as there will likely still be restrictions on events for some of the year.

- **Does your WI have a reserves policy?**

Just because you have funds available in your WI account does not mean you can automatically waive or reduce the WI share, and you need to think carefully about your

level of reserves and the consequences of using reserves to cover WI subscription costs, even if just for one year. As Trustees of your WI your role is not only to support the current year but also to ensure you look ahead to the future and support the long-term future of your WI.

Read more about reserves policies and how to use them here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/charities-and-reserves-cc19/charities-and-reserves>

- **How many members do you have and how many members are you sure will renew?**

Depending on the number of members you currently have, you may have enough money in your account for the next year without needing to collect the WI portion of the subscription. Of course you may not be sure if all the members will renew but it would be good to have a general idea of who may renew. This will help to estimate how much money could come in April and how much of that is needed to cover the planned programme and how much will go into reserves. Also think about whether your WI is planning on charging visitors fees this year and how that could help with the budget.

You also need to consider new members, especially if you are planning to reduce or waive the WI share, and think about how your WI would be able to cater for a much increased membership.

- **Thinking about the next 5 years, would it be better to keep it the same this year and waive the fee the year after that?**

The decisions can be different year on year. Maybe this coming year is not the best time to have less money coming in from subscriptions, and instead waiving or reducing the fee could be something best placed in two years' time. If your committee want to reinstate the full portion the year after, think about the effect this will have on the members and the impact it could have on the budget in two years' time, for example. On the other hand you may want to give something back to your members this year after the disruptions of Covid-19.

Every year in the run up to the subscription renewal, these steps will need to be taken:

1. Organise a committee meeting where the committee will go over the WI programme and budget for the coming year in order to present a decision to the members on what to do about the WI portion of the subscription. Ensure the decision is minuted.
2. Consider new members and how your WI would cater for an increased membership. This is particularly important if your WI is waiving or reducing their portion, as this might attract new members (including new dual members) and your WI needs to be prepared (logistically and financially) for this.
3. Present the decision to your members, giving the rationale and background to your decision as appropriate.
4. Ensure that all members are aware of the decision in time for membership renewal in April, and that you promote this to prospective members when thinking about recruitment.

5. Always remind your members that any decision made is only for the coming renewal. It is not a permanent decision, and the WI portion of the membership subscription will be reviewed every year.

Contact us

If you have any questions or comments, please contact your federation or the NFWI Membership and Engagement Department via email at membership@nfwi.org.uk or phone 0207 371 9300 (Ext.201).

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