

## **Lancashire Federation of Women's Institutes Best Practice Guidance on Visitors and Guests Policy**

This guidance is written to support and in accordance with recent documentation from NFWI regarding "Visitors" and "Guests" at WI monthly meetings. (This can be found on MyWI)

NFWI's Stance as detailed in March 2026 email following an enquiry from a WI:

Arrangements for open meetings, guests and visitors are decided locally by WIs in consultation with their members.

It is important that WIs focus first on what members receive and ensure they receive a protected membership offer which meets the charity's requirements (as laid out in the constitution) and offers value for money.

The Constitution states that WIs must provide 11 meetings a year for members. Although we know many WIs welcome visitors to different meetings, and may have **some** fully open meetings, with the agreement of members, it is very important for each WI to protect the member experience and have a clear member benefit, **which is offered based on eligibility for membership**. In this instance potential members need to be considered as well, as open meetings could put people off joining.

With regard to visitors, the WI Handbook states:

*It is up to each WI whether they wish to charge a visitors' fee and, if so, the amount. If a fee is charged, this may have Gift Aid implications as meetings would then count as a benefit for these purposes. Alternatively, visitors can be invited to make a donation to the WI upon visiting. For more information on this, please see the NFWI Gift Aid guidance. It is recommended that an individual is permitted to attend as a visitor up to three times before she is obliged to pay the subscription fee and become a member, although this is the WI's decision.*

There is no formal definition of 'visitors' and 'guests' and WIs may use these terms differently. **We usually refer to 'guests' as anyone who attends an 'open meeting', whereas 'visitors' is more about women who are eligible for membership seeing if they wish to be members.**

If WIs are opening some of their meetings to guests, they must bear in mind two things particularly – firstly, they must be able to demonstrate that they maintain a clear member benefit (for example, keeping the majority of their meetings closed to members and only opening those with a wider appeal). Secondly, they must adhere to the principle of ‘open to all’, which means as an example that you would need to apply the same rules to anyone who wished to attend.

**Lancashire Federation have drawn up the following best practice guidance to support WIs.**

It is useful to draw a clear distinction between the term “visitor” and “guest”

Visitor = a woman attending a WI meeting with the intention of potentially becoming a member, meeting membership eligibility

Guests = anyone who is specifically invited to attend a particular meeting or someone attending an “Open Meeting” (see below for further information)

**Visitor Policy Recommendations:**

1. Decide on whether you will charge a visitor fee and how much this will be. Note that if Gift Aid is claimed by your WI, no visitor fee can be charged. However, visitors can be invited to make a donation to the WI, but no amount can be specified.
2. Decide on how many times a visitor may attend before they are expected to make their decision to join. Make this clear to visitors.
3. You may wish to include attendance at a WI subgroup as one of the allowed visits – this can be an ideal opportunity for visitors to gain a better insight into the group in a more social setting and potentially with more opportunity to chat with other members.
4. Have a mechanism to record visits.

5. Ensure that visitors have been shown the Membership Registration Form so that they are aware of the requirements for eligibility before being asked to sign.
6. A meet and greet team is a perfect way for visitors to be made to feel welcome and seated with members who will chat easily and be able to answer questions.
7. Welcome any visitors by name at the beginning of your meeting.

#### Guests:

Examples where you have specifically invite individuals may include

- A local dignitary (mayor / councillor etc.) to help raise the profile of your group within the community
- A representative from a charity that you held a fund raising event for
- A member of the local community or local organisation that you have supported in line with WI Objects
- A member of a parish council or local vicar/ priest if you are supporting a fundraising initiative

#### Open Meetings:

Another example of guest attendance is the holding of what is referred to as an “Open Meeting” e.g. a speaker who may have a wider appeal than just to your members. This could be open to all within the community; members’ partners etc. A guest fee could be taken at this event as a means of boosting funds or supporting the payment of the speaker fee. Open meetings may support recruitment too.

#### Points to consider:

- An open meeting must be **open to all** and therefore should be proposed and approved by your membership
- Be aware of the Fire and Safety room capacity for your venue
- It would be advisable to issue tickets in advance so that you can ensure room capacity is not exceeded

#### Carers at meetings:

There is specific guidance regarding the attendance of carers at WI meeting and this can be found on MyWI.

We advise that the following are considered with caution:

- Allowing women who have not renewed membership to attend as regular visitors – this can set a difficult precedent
- Allowing non-renewing members to still attend sub groups – again, this sets a precedent and does not make a clear enough distinction with regard to the benefits of membership.
- Over use of “open meetings” – this may put off some woman from joining and again does not make distinct the benefit of membership
- Allowing non-members / relatives to attend social events, trip and excursions. We would always recommend that if for example spaces are available on a trip/ to fill a coach, a neighbouring WI is approached and places offered to them. Remember that members from another WI will need to pay the full price of the trip; their attendance cannot be subsidised by your own WI.

Finally, always remember that The WI is a membership led organisation and the efforts of volunteers and the finances of any particular group are to be utilised for the benefit of the paid up members in line with the WI Objects as outlined in the Constitution