

IFUW Membership Committee Brief on the Application of the Scottish Association Of University Women

Issue

According to the IFUW Constitution, it is the prerogative of the Membership Committee to bring applications for membership in IFUW before Council for discussion and vote. The Scottish Associations of the British Federation of Women Graduates have formally requested that they be admitted as a Federation to IFUW in their own right.

Council is now being asked to consider and vote on this issue. Council members will be asked to either:

- a) choose to postpone the vote until the 88th Council Meeting in Manchester in 2007; or
- b) cast a vote on the admission of the Scottish Associations as a Federation to IFUW in their own right.

Background

Following Annual Meetings of the Scottish Associations of the British Federation of Women Graduates and discussions with the Membership Committee in 2004 and 2005, IFUW received a formal request from the Scottish Associations for recognition as a Federation in their own right.

When the Membership Committee discussed the proposal in 2004 and 2005, the Committee agreed that the proposal could be accepted as a special situation under the provisions of Article II.2 of the IFUW Constitution. In making this decision, the Committee considered a number of issues:

- The Scots have a long history of national independence which is being recognised in Great Britain through the process of devolution of powers that has been occurring over the last few years. The Scottish Associations put forward a strong case for independence as an extension of this devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament.
- This separation of Scottish Associations from the British Federation of Women Graduates is not opposed by the British Federation.
- While IFUW normally follows the United Nations definition in determining what constituted a country, IFUW has already recognized a special situation concerning Great Britain. The United Nations admitted the United Kingdom as a single member state, covering English and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. When BFUW (now BFWG) founded IFUW along with the American and Canadian groups in 1919, Ireland as a whole was still part of the British Isles. In 1924 with the formation of Eire as an independent country, the IFUW groups in all parts of Ireland chose to form an Irish Federation, something applauded at the time as showing remarkable evidence of Irish unity'.
- Both organisations will continue to be part of IFUW.
- While the Committee believes it would not be appropriate to apply the existing provision concerning special situations to cases where improved internal communication and conflict resolution mechanisms would remove and/or resolve internal issues, the Scottish situation was considered to be a long term and permanent situation.

In 2006, when the Membership Committee considered the draft constitution of the proposed Scottish Federation, it was agreed that it met all of the requirements for membership of IFUW and that the issue should be put to Council for consideration.

Choosing the most appropriate decision making process

The Membership Committee strongly feels that it is important for a decision to be made on this matter as soon as is possible using the written vote process. The IFUW Board, however, is of the opinion that Council needs to have the opportunity to discuss the question in a face-to-face because the proposal involves the special circumstances clause, meeting. The Board has suggested that the most appropriate forum is the pre-Conference 88th Council Meeting in Manchester in 2007. On advice from IFUW's constitutional advisers, the ballot for the written vote will include the option of postponing the question until Manchester.

The Membership Committee believes that the written vote process, which was put in place when the mid-term Council meeting was abolished to enable business to be conducted between Conferences, should be used. If it is determined that there is a need for discussion amongst Council members on this issue prior to a decision being held, then opinions can be shared via e-mail and/or using an online discussion forum. IFUW has successfully conducted important and significant business using this process.

The Scottish Associations have been discussing this issue internally, with BFWG and with IFUW since 2004 and are ready to function as an Association now. They have had lengthy discussions with their membership, drawn up their Constitution and elected their Board of Officers and Advisory Committee. The Scottish Associations have given their assurance to the British Federation that the formation of a Scottish Federation will not impact adversely on the preparations for the Conference in Manchester in 2007. The Scottish Associations have organised a pre- Conference tour and contributed to the Conference funds. Moreover, they look forward to working closely with the British Federation in the future. They have also informed IFUW that they are afraid "any further delay will undoubtedly cause members to lose interest and this will have an adverse effect on the Scottish membership numbers and, in turn, result in loss of revenue for ourselves and for IFUW."

Importantly the BFWG has decided to proceed this year with a budget that assumes the Scottish Associations will leave BFWG and that many of its Scottish members will not rejoin BFWG when membership becomes due in September 2006. Instead, regardless of when the Scottish Federation is affiliated to IFUW, Scottish members will save their money for the Scottish Federation itself.

In conclusion the Membership Committee believes it is important that a decision is made on this matter as soon as possible and not held over until the 88th Council Meeting. The Membership Committee recommends to Council that the Scottish Federation of University Women be admitted to membership under the special situation clause of Article II.2(2) and that this decision be taken by Written Vote.

Kathryn Seymour, Deputy Convener
IFUW Membership Committee - 2004-2007