



The Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland

Annual General Meeting

Europa Hotel, Belfast

Thursday, 27th March 2025

FWINI Sub-Committee Reports 2024-25

Arts Sub-Committee

A new Committee was formed after last year's AGM. The first function we were involved in was attendance at Balmoral Show 2024, where the Committee manned the art exhibition of paintings for sale by WI Members. There wasn't as many paintings as usual to display but there were quite a few sold. Beautiful tapestry pictures were donated by the family of a deceased member to be sold with proceeds going to WI Funds. These proved very popular and sold well. Thanks go to the family involved.

The Festival of the Spoken Word was held on 19th October 2024 at Templepatrick Presbyterian Church Hall. There were 63 entries in 6 classes. The adjudicator was Jenny A. Marshall, FVCM LVCM (TD) BSc Hons PGDip. She praised everyone for the variety of entries and gave professional and encouraging critiques. Templepatrick WI provide morning refreshments, which is always very welcome to all. Participants and audience are asked to bring their lunch with them. Tea and coffee are provided by the Committee and this arrangement seems to work well.

A very successful Coffee Morning and Arts Festival was held at Headquarters on 7th February 2025. The theme for Paintings this year was 'My Favourite Place' and there were 42 entries. There were 5 entries for 3D Decoupage, 6 entries in Calligraphy and 30 entries for Handwriting. The judge was Sinéad McDermott, a teacher of Art and Design and owner of The Design Factory. She commented on the high standard and variety of the works submitted. We had a good attendance and it was a very successful morning. Committee members supplied prizes for the ballot which was well supported.

After 5 years we were able to host the Drama Festival at Templepatrick Presbyterian Church Hall on 1st March 2025. Templepatrick WI as usual provided the morning refreshments. Thanks go to the 5 WIs that entered – Armoy, Garvagh, Moneymore, Muckamore and Richhill. I hope we will have more entries next year. There were 4 sketches and 2 plays. It was a very enjoyable and entertaining day. The adjudicator was Louise Nelson, former Head of Drama and CCEA Drama Moderator from Ballymena Academy. We had great acting and Louise gave great praise and professional advice to all those who entered. I admire all those who took part.

We now look forward to the Music Festival on 5th April in Templepatrick Presbyterian Church Hall. It was very successful last year with 5 choirs taking part. It was good to see a large audience, which gives support and encouragement to those performing. I am hoping for the same again this year. I would like to thank Templepatrick WI who provide scones, tea and coffee in the morning of each of our Festivals at Templepatrick.

My thanks to the Arts Committee members who are so willing and who work so well together in getting all the events organised. I very much appreciate the work of the office staff, Caroline and Kathleen, who have been so helpful to me since I became Chair of the Arts Committee.

Thank you to all those who attend our events and I hope more of you will consider attending future events. It is always a very enjoyable day out and it offers great support and encouragement to all who participate.

Margaret McCracken, Arts Sub-Committee Chair

Balmoral Sub-Committee

The Balmoral Show is always an important event in our Women's Institute calendar. As well as being a major source of income for our Federation the Show with its thousands of visitors, provides the opportunity to showcase the many activities of our wonderful Women's Institute and also gives our entire membership the opportunity to contribute and participate in baking for the tea room, providing for the market stall and taking part in the various competitions. It also highlights the talents of our members in art and craftwork.

The Women's Institute is renowned for the quality of the home baked produce which we provide for our traditional teas during the four days of the Show. While we had a very successful Show in 2024 our takings were slightly down from the previous year and the Committee thought that some changes had to be made in order to move forward.

Various suggestions and ideas were explored and we decided to reorganise the tea room and try out self-service this year. We also hope to have better signage to make our tea room more easily located. We are once again accommodated in the annex behind the Eikon Centre.

Our work in the Showgrounds will start on the Saturday before the Show opens when all the equipment needed will be transported from Headquarters. From an empty space the WI Balmoral team under the leadership of the 'Balmoral Committee' will work their magic and transform this empty space into a tea room and kitchen, leaving ample space for our market stall and usual display of beautiful crafts and competition exhibits.

While we are enthusiastic about our new arrangements we need your support in providing for the tea room and the market stall as well as helping with the various tasks associated with the Show, so please contact HQ if you are willing to come to the Show to help.

We are indebted to all our members for their commitment and willingness to contribute and hope this tradition continues for years to come.

Janette Graham, Balmoral Sub-Committee Chair

Home and Garden Sub-Committee

It gives me great pleasure to present my report for Home and Garden. We are all looking forward to the longer evenings and the warmer weather and with Easter later this year we can only hope for a sunny one. May 2024 saw us back at Balmoral with once again a successful Show. Competitions were well supported and the children's birthday cake was a big hit. Competitions for this year's Show are advertised in the magazine and we look forward to seeing many entries. Once again, we are depending on the generosity of our fellow members throughout the four days.

At the start of this WI season, we took part in The City of Belfast Autumn Fair Flower Show which was held on 14th & 15th September 2024. 13 Institutes entered tables for the WI Competitions. It was lovely to see so many different entries and displays. Seaforde WI won first overall. The WI also won the Belfast City Council Show Rossette, awarded for the Best Society Award.

One of our most popular events in our WI calendar is our Christmas Event which took place on 23rd November 2024 in Armagh City Hotel with over 400 members attending. We had cake decorating with Jennifer and Dawn and the Christmas cake was donated to our ballot. Geri Martin from The Chocolate Manor demonstrated making her artisan chocolates and each member received a sample. After lunch we were entertained by the *Just Sing!* Community Choir.

The Christmas Event Competition was for a handmade Christmas cushion and was won by Hazel Brown from Ballywalter WI. Hazel was awarded the Romanian Platter.

Once again, we had our Christmas tree decorated with hats and scarves. These items were later donated to St. Vincent de Paul and The Salvation Army. Thank you to everyone who donated. Plans are now underway for this year's Christmas Event, which will take place on 22nd November 2025 in Armagh City Hotel. Details in upcoming magazines.

Climate change is still very much in our remit and the Committee members are still providing articles for the magazine. As you can see, Home and Garden have a busy year ahead. I would like to thank my Committee for all their hard work and support over this last year, and also Kathleen and Caroline in the office who do great work.

Teresa Feeney, Home and Garden Sub-Committee Chair

Homecraft Sub-Committee

It gives me great pleasure to submit my first AGM report as Homecraft Chairperson. Thanks to my Committee who have worked very hard this year promoting Homecraft and the WI at events.

At the 2024 Balmoral Show the Homecraft Committee raised £2,173 through the sale of knitted toys and other handcrafted items. Thanks to our members for making this possible by donating items for sale. Lisnagarvey Area provided the display of handicrafts. The competitions were well supported, there certainly was a large clowder of cats!

In September 2024, we attended the Belfast City Autumn Fair in Botanic Gardens. There were 13 entries and the Homecraft items of a patchwork table runner and a decorated crochet pumpkin were all beautifully worked and popular with the public. I am very pleased that the joint Homecraft and Home and Garden display was awarded Society Display of the Show.

A One Day School was held in WI HQ on 21st September and attended by 25 ladies. Classes were: English Quilting, Millinery, Patchwork and Unfinished. It was a lovely, relaxing day, catching up with friends old and new.

November was a busy month. 5 days were spent at The Knitting & Stitching Show. This gave us an opportunity to showcase the talents of members within the WI and also to promote the organisation to potential new members. A Christmas Craft Day was also held in November. This was a fun and relaxing day, when members got together at HQ to handcraft some Christmas decorations whilst enjoying mulled wine and mince pies.

In January 2025, we attended a 'Craft Destash' fair to help with fundraising. £100 was raised.

Unfortunately, the planned Homecraft Weekend had to be cancelled due to low numbers. My Committee and I will look at other options for providing skill sharing and craft education that meets the needs of our members.

From September 2024 to March 2025, a total of 183 items were received for judging. The standard of entries remained high with 33 A+ and 125 A grades. 68 Ribbons, 5 Silver and 2 Gold awards were obtained this year. 66 entries were received for trophy judging.

Finally, I wish to thank Kathleen and Caroline for their support.

Elizabeth McKinty, Homecraft Sub-Committee Chair

International Sub-Committee

This year we welcomed our new Committee and it was very pleasing to see a number of new members, as well as some returning members on to the Committee.

We are glad to report a very successful Rural Women's Day in October 2024 with Nadia Manchandra from Dungannon (originally from Ukraine) as our guest speaker. Nadia gave us a very insightful presentation on life in Ukraine during the conflict and how she came to live in Northern Ireland.

The Mary Boyd Competition at this event was a reusable shopping bag – 1st was Lyndsay Johnston (Maghaberry WI) receiving the Mary Boyd Trophy, and 2nd Elsie Miskimmon (Ballysallagh WI) receiving the Margaret McMillan Award – *well done ladies!*

Margaret Broome was the worthy recipient of the Evelyn Lord Trophy for her previous contribution to UN / ACWW Committee.

As usual, our ladies have worked extremely hard to support ACWW projects through *Women Walk the World*, auctions and other very creative fundraising events. We are most grateful to everyone who contributes to ACWW and we look forward to seeing at first hand, the impact of the first project in Bucharest, Romania when we visit our European Conference later this year.

The Committee have also made contact with Flourish which is an organisation that aims to restore hope and dignity to survivors of human trafficking and ending modern slavery. Flourish has stated that they are most in need of toiletries for their survivors and we are actively looking at ways in which we can support their request.

I had the privilege to attend the second Women's Parliament which was held in Stormont on 28th February and was delighted to hear one of the Ranfurly WI ladies speak on the Provision of Child Care in Rural Area. The Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Children was also one of the topics raised and I am pleased to report that The Programme for Government (2024 – 2027) has pledged to continue to support this Strategy in the coming years.

The European Conference was originally planned for Netherlands in October of this year, but unfortunately the venue has had to be changed to Bucharest, Romania (14th – 17th October 2025); please look out on the ACWW website for further details as they become available.

Next year, the Triennial World Conference is to be held in Ottawa, Canada (26th April – 1st May 2026) and we look forward to attending this Conference and participate in the election of officers and debate proposed resolutions.

I would like to finish by thanking Rhoda and all the Committee members for their support and hard work over the year and look forward to joining as many of you as possible at the European and World Conferences. Thank you to Kathleen and Caroline for all the behind the scenes work which allows us to function as a Sub-Committee; and helps us promote the work of ACWW.

Ruth Carroll, International Sub-Committee Chair

Magazine and Leisure Sub-Committee

The Magazine and Leisure Sub-Committee are responsible for the publication of our monthly magazine, the Ulster Countrywoman and the organisation and running of the following sporting events and competitions.

Sporting Events: Bowls, Quiz and Golf.

Competitions: Photography, Literary, Scrapbook, Best Magazine Cover, Best Magazine Article and Best Poem in the Magazine.

A total of six editions of the Ulster Countrywoman are now produced on a yearly basis - September, Autumn, Christmas, New Year, Spring and Summer. WIs are invoiced for all 6 magazines in October for the year – Please note that once invoices are issued a WI cannot decrease an order but may increase its order as and when required.

Our Editor, Caroline does an excellent job in producing informative and interesting magazines from the articles sent in by WI members. The complimentary remarks reflect her expertise.

The Spring edition will be available at the beginning of April. Members are always encouraged to submit interesting and unique articles not necessarily all WI related, along with photographs including those for the front cover. To assist the Editor, we would be grateful if you could send in your content well in advance of the deadlines, keep to the word count where applicable and no blurry photographs – these are no longer used. Please refer to the article on photography in the September 2024 magazine. Not all photographs, articles or activities can make it into the magazine but they may appear on the FWINI Facebook page, on Instagram or on the website.

The magazine competition page continues to be well supported and our annual Fireside Quiz is greatly enjoyed by the membership. The Phyllis Gaily Literary Competition has attracted a large number of entries as has the Scrapbook Competition – the winners will be announced today at the AGM including the winners of the Quoile Trophy (Best Magazine Cover) and Mourne Cup for the Best Poem.

Congratulations to all the winners and runners-up in the competitions and to all those who enter the competitions supporting the Magazine and Leisure Sub-Committee.

The Bowls Final was held last Saturday with 19 bowlers competing for the Milk Marketing Board Salver.

Upcoming events:

Quiz Final – Thursday, 29th May 2025, Connor Presbyterian Church Hall, Kells.

*Starting 7:30pm *sharp!* Teams need to be registered by 7.15pm.

Golfer of the Year – Monday, 16th June 2025, Greenacres Golf Centre, Ballyclare.

Photographic Competition – Title: *'On It's Own'*. Closing date for entries: Monday, 7th July 2025.

Details of these competitions, closing dates and winners are published in the magazine, WI Facebook page and the website.

The *Ulster Countrywoman* is the magazine of the Federation of the WI of Northern Ireland and as such is the showcase of what we do. The magazine is not only enjoyed by its members but also sent to family and friends abroad as well as the businesses and organisations who advertise with it. An excellent read keeping the WI 'connected'.

Christine Rankin, Magazine and Leisure Sub-Committee Chair