



The Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland

Autumn Council Meeting

Mossley Mill

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

Saturday, 26th October 2024

Federation Chairman's Report

Lady Anthony, honoured guests, Executive Members and fellow members

This is my first Autumn Council Report since taking office.

It has been a busy 6 months since my appointment and I had to hit the ground running.

My first outing was two days after my election, to the Music Festival in Templepatrick. This was a very enjoyable and entertaining day. I was really impressed by the choirs and soloists. Well done everyone.

Next came the Balmoral Show. This was a busy but enjoyable week, meeting and talking to members and visitors to the Tea Room, selling ballot tickets and helping out at the other stalls. I admire and thank the members from all the Sub-Committees and volunteers who worked hard to make it a success.

Then there was the Quiz Final and the Golfer of the Year tournament. I also attended by Zoom the National Federation of WI's AGM which took place in the Royal Albert Hall. It was very interesting and I was particularly impressed by the number of new members that had joined over the past year, over 5,000.

Our Operations Manager Mary McManus handed in her resignation at the beginning of June. She had worked for us part-time but was offered a full-time job working for Living Wage, one of her many interests. We wish her well in her new position.

Our Treasurer, Sheelagh McRandal and I have had a busy time since the end of August with meetings with Investec who take care of our investments, our Insurance Broker and last week with our Auditors.

In September, I enjoyed dinner with Ballydownfine to celebrate their 30th Anniversary. After dinner we were entertained by a guitarist and had a great sing-song of all the old favourites.

Iveagh Area invited me to a lovely afternoon tea in Brownlow House, Lurgan. Over 100 ladies attended and we were entertained with a talk about the history of Brownlow House and a very interesting talk about candles from Gail Lynas of Buick House Candles, I would recommend her to your WIs. We were also entertained by a well-known comedian. It was great to meet and talk to a lot of the members. Congratulations to Margaret McKee for organising the smooth running and compèring a great event.

The Executive is back after the summer break and at our meeting in August we had a celebration lunch for Kathleen, our Finance Officer, who has been working for the Federation for 25 years. To mark the occasion, she was presented with a lovely silver bracelet and flowers.

As you are now all aware, our new website went live at the beginning of September. We are hearing very good reports about it from members. The Members Section gives you all the forms you need to make your returns, etc. Treasurers and Secretaries can fill in and forward returns direct to HQ or you can print them off and send them in. This should be your first port of call for information, resulting in less paper needing to be sent out to Institutes. Our Magazine Editor, Caroline is now taking charge of it. The site will be developed further as necessary.

The Executive recently decided to appoint a Public Relations Officer and Judith Wainwright, the Area representative for Quoile, has agreed to fill the post. She is supported by a small Committee who have already started work. A new leaflet has been designed which has a QR code giving links to our website, Facebook page, etc. It will soon be available to print off the website which will enable Institutes to print their own leaflets for advertising.

This year's City of Belfast Autumn Fair took place in Botanic Gardens in September. It was very successful, with 13 entries from Institutes and one Area entry in the WI Competitions. There were 9 entries for jam and chutney. We also won the Belfast City Council Show Rosette for Best Society Display. The public showed a great interest in our displays and we did a lot of talking about the WI and persuading people to join us. My congratulations to the Homecraft and Home and Garden Sub-Committees for all their hard work making the show a success.

The process of becoming a Limited Company has begun and hopefully will go smoothly and not take too long.

As I mentioned earlier, we had a successful Balmoral Show, however, concerns have been expressed about visitors not being able to find us. The Balmoral Sub-Committee met earlier than usual to discuss improving signage and attracting more customers. Unfortunately, we ran out of items for the bran tub last year. The Balmoral Sub-Committee is asking for an increase in your contribution to £10.00. Your Executive Member will be in touch to ask each of her Institutes for £10.00 for the bran tub. They would like to gather the money in early so that items can be bought and wrapped.

I am pleased to say that we have recruited a new Operations Manager named Zoe Hunter who will commence employment with us on 2nd December.

Last Saturday, I attended the Festival of the Spoken Word in Templepatrick. Again, the talent of the WI was on show. The 'Prepared Speech' class had 3 themes to choose from and I was amazed by how much the speeches were all different and all had a humorous element. The 'Humorous Verse' section was also very entertaining. I particularly liked the verses about the *Three Brothers*, *Ode to a Fart*, and *Matrimonial Matters!* My only disappointment was that there was not more support in the audience to enjoy the talent on show.

My thanks go to the Executive Committee, especially Sheelagh and the Sub-Committee Chairs who work hard to ensure that events are organised and run smoothly.

An organisation like ours cannot run without a great office staff and my thanks go to Kathleen and Caroline who keep the FWINI running and answer a myriad of questions from me, the Executive Members and the members.

I thank you all.

Finally, ladies, without you the members, there would be no Women's Institutes in Northern Ireland. However, the organisation is only as good as its members – and I would like to set all 126 Institutes a challenge to each get 5 new members this year. This would mean 630 new members. So, fellow members, we all need to get out there and talk to people, advertise and get the WI seen. I know that a lot of Institutes are proactive, and one Area recently had a recruitment drive in a local department store.

The WI is a fabulous organisation, we contribute to the community, learn lots of new things and especially form friendships that last for many years. So, let's get out there and promote this great organisation **the Women's Institute.**

Lady Anthony this concludes my report.

Brenda Richardson
Federation Chairman



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Treasurer's Report

Madam President, Madam Chairman, guests and fellow members

Good afternoon, how do you like our venue? A bit different from our previous ones – a lovely and sympathetic restoration of a spinning mill. I'm glad though that we are not facing out through that window and the magnificent view, how could I compete with it?

Anyway, the summer and early autumn months are the busiest time with the finances as our financial year ends on 31st August. We have the audit of accounts, reviews of the insurances and investments and to prepare the budget and cash flow for the coming year.

Preparing the budget is a major exercise which involves not just the Treasurer but our Financial Officer, Kathleen, and the six Chairmen of the Sub-Committees who all have to prepare a budget for their Sub-Committee. When all the information has been collated, the draft budget along with the predicted cash flow for the year, are presented to the Executive Committee for its approval. Thereafter, each month our predicted and actual income and expenditure and cash flow go to the Executive so that it can monitor our performance and make adjustments to the budget and cash flow as necessary.

The three officers, Brenda, Rosemary and I have had two meetings and a lot of contact with our insurance brokers, Towergate, Dawson Whyte as we carried out an in-depth review of our insurances. These cover not just the Federation but our members and any property the Institutes may have. It was so in depth, we got down to the regalia that the Institute Presidents have. What a can of worms! I am buried in their estimates and photographs which were quite a shock not just for us but you all, one came in at £11,400!

The good news is that we have managed a significant reduction of over £2,500 in our premium for 2024/25.

We have also had a meeting with our investment advisors Investec, or Rathbones as they are now called. We have had a good year having a slow but steady growth.

This year due to a major effort by Kathleen, the audit of our accounts started mid-September as scheduled. This is an important date as we need to have the first draft with the Executive for its October meeting and the final financial statements for its November meeting. This is all tied in with the AGM which is held in March. As we must get all papers out eight weeks in advance of it, everything has to be ready to go to the Institutes with the Magazine at the end of January. No problem you may say, but we have Christmas and no Executive meeting in December so all has to be signed off at the end of November.

So far so good, the officers and the Financial Officer had a meeting with the auditors on Thursday afternoon. This was a very lengthy, technical meeting. They explained why they had had Kathleen and I going round like headless chickens looking for an awful lot of information which had never been asked for before. They are taking a more strict approach to control, thus ensuring that our accounts are fraud proof and compliant with the Charity Commission's accountancy requirements.

At the same time, they brought us more good news, it looks as if we will have a surplus for the year, so our financial strategy of raising the fees and implementing strict control of expenditure

is starting to work. I will have the full information for you at our AGM on 27th March 2025.

Membership is key to our wellbeing and survival, and we are delighted to get reports of Institutes attracting new members but also disappointed at losing some, citing the cost of the fees as the reason. This is very sad, but we hope that as our finances come out of the doldrums and we explain them to you, you may be able to attract them back. If every one of our 126 Institutes recruited just one new member that would bring us in an extra £3,150.

As ever, the Balmoral Committee worked their socks off and the WINI members came up trumps yet again with all the baking, jam making, competition entries, etc. etc. Ladies ,we cannot do it without you.

Unfortunately, now that the final figures are in, we find that we made £2,623 less than last year. This is not acceptable considering all the hard work that has goes into it, we cannot keep going as we are. So, at the May Executive I asked that a complete review of our activities at Balmoral is undertaken and changes implemented as necessary.

Poor signage is cited as a major factor and this year I added a sum of £3,000 to the budget for improved signage at the Show as well as other publicity material.

We still need you to support it not just with helping during the week but with ballot tickets. I know that some Institutes are in Halls where it is not permissible to sell them, but can you bring them home and sell them to your friends and family and not just to your members. There is also the Fireside Quiz and the bran tub. All these make a small but important contribution to our Balmoral takings.

Last year, we asked Treasurers to get their Federation Fees in as soon as possible and not leave them to the December deadline. There was a terrific response, so will you please keep it up and do it again this year, it really is necessary to keep our cash flow healthy.

Other things that have happened are:

The long-awaited website is live, I know that some members with Apple devices have had problems but I hope that has been resolved. Overall the feedback has been positive, please use the Members Section, which has a wealth of information, it is easier to access than ringing or calling in Federation House.

A big thank you to those who responded to our campaign for you to Gift Aid your subscriptions, but I am sure many more would be eligible to do so. If you haven't done so please do consider it this year. We get 25p from every pound which you donate, so your £25.00 subscription is worth £31.25 to us and at no extra cost to you.

Work is well underway on the formation of our new Limited Company.

The updated Institutes Annual Financial Statement form is now available on the website. There are explanatory notes on the back page. I have had no feedback, so I assume you are all happy with it.

The 2025 diaries have arrived this week. They are on the Sales Table for £4.50 or you can get them through your Executive Member.

We got a Lottery Grant of £18k to cover the cost of carrying out a Five Year Strategic Plan and setting up a members data base.

I continue to do Notes for the Treasurers on page 4 of each Magazine and I urge you to read them. I do try and give advice on things that are relevant to the moment.

Don't forget the Ulster Countrywoman, our most excellent Magazine. Please do not be a sharer, every member should have one.

Now, the news you all have been waiting for: the hole in the floor of one of the downstairs toilets has been repaired and even better, the insurance covered the cost.

On a more serious note, something you may not have thought about and maybe don't want to – Remembering the WI in your will. There are no forms to fill in, just a few words, it does not have to be much. Think about it.

Finally, we have a magnificent staff. With the resignation of Mary McManus in June, Kathleen and Caroline have been under great pressure to keep the show going. Brenda and I try to help and we cannot wait for the arrival of the new Operations Manager. Kathleen and Caroline work extremely hard on your behalf and are dedicated to you and WINI, we would be in a very sorry state without them.

Ladies, that concludes my report which I am pleased to say is much more positive than my previous ones, my main message to you is: appreciate what you have in this great organisation and let everyone know how special it is, use every opportunity you get to promote it to the public. We are now in our 92nd year, here is to our centenary.

If you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them now or afterwards.

Sheelagh McRandal
Federation Treasurer



The Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland

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**Mossley Mill, Carnmoney
Saturday, 26th October 2024**

Sub-Committee Reports

Arts

A new Arts Committee was formed after the Annual General Meeting and will serve for three years. Our first activity of the new WI season was the Festival of the Spoken Word, held in Templepatrick Presbyterian Church Hall on Saturday, 19th October 2024 at 10:30 am. There were a magnificent sixty-three entries for six categories and ladies came from Institutes across the province. A brilliant day – well done to all who entered and entertained! A round-up of this event will be published in a the magazine.

The Arts Coffee Morning will take place at WI Headquarters on Friday, 7th February 2025 when entries from the Arts Festival Competitions will go on display. This is always a very enjoyable morning, so do come along and support our WI artists. 'My Favourite Place' is the theme for the Painting section. There are also classes for 3D Decoupage, Calligraphy and Good Handwriting. (The deadline for submitting Arts Festival entries to WI HQ is Thursday, 30th January 2025).

On Saturday, 1st March 2025, the Drama Festival will be held in Templepatrick Presbyterian Church Hall. Unfortunately, last year (and just emerging from the pandemic) we had to cancel the Drama Festival due to lack of entries, so I do hope we can hold it in 2025 and repeat the success of our Spoken Word event. It would be disappointing for those who want to enter the Drama Festival if we had to cancel again – and I just know there is so much talent out there among our Institutes!

Templepatrick again is the venue for the Music Festival on Saturday, 1st April 2025. Last year, we had a very successful Music Festival, featuring our talented soloists and choirs, including a new choir. We hope it will be a repeat success in 2025. Now is the time to start rehearsals and details of the set pieces have recently been released, with web links to the music now available. An updated advert will be published in the Autumn magazine.

It is always nice to see a good audience at all our Arts events. It is appreciated very much by all those who take part and gives them such encouragement.

Thanks to Templepatrick WI who serve the refreshments at our festivals when they are held in Templepatrick Presbyterian Church Hall – tea, coffee and scones from 10:00am, priced £3.50! (Remember to bring along your packed lunch! Tea/coffee will also be available.)

Details of all the Arts promotions can always be found in the *Ulster Countrywoman* magazine, as well as the WINI website and Facebook page. I would like to thank my fellow Arts Committee members for all their help and support to me as Chair of the Arts Sub-Committee.

**Margaret McCracken
Chairperson, Arts Sub-Committee**

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Homecraft

Since the AGM in March, the Homecraft Sub-Committee has been busy. In May, we had a successful Balmoral Show. Your knitted and crocheted toys, along with other handmade items on our stall, raised an amazing £2,173. Please continue to knit farm animals, dinosaurs and other small toys for next year's Show. The Committee will be making some items to sell as well. We will also be setting the Craft Competitions for next year's Balmoral and look forward to seeing all your entries.

On Saturday, 14th and Sunday, 15th September 2024, we put on a display of handicrafts at the City of Belfast Autumn Fair Flower Show in Botanic Gardens – and are pleased to have been awarded the BCC Rosette for Society Display of the Show! The Institute/Area table entries for the WI Competition 'Autumn Bounty' were of a high standard and really showcased the talents of our members.

On Saturday, 21st September 2024, twenty-five ladies attended a One Day School at WI Headquarters. Classes were English Quilting, Millinery, Patchwork and Unfinished. A productive day was had by all.

Homecraft are running a Christmas Craft Day workshop at WI Headquarters on Saturday, 30th November 2024. This is suitable for both beginners and seasoned crafters. We hope to see you there for crafty fun and friendship. Full details will be published in the Autumn *Ulster Countrywoman* magazine.

Please support our workshops at WI Headquarters. They are reasonably priced compared to equivalent private events. If you are organising a One Day School in your Area, the Homecraft Committee can help you with classes. Suggestions for future classes are always welcome.

Something new for Homecraft is that we are delighted to have been allocated a stand at The Knitting & Stitching Show, running from Thursday, 7th – Sunday, 10th November 2024 at Titanic Exhibition Centre, Belfast. Hopefully we can encourage some of the crafty shoppers to join WI!

The Committee is also currently busy planning a Spring Workshop for 2025. Plans are also being put in place for the Homecraft Weekend in March next year, which will again be at Drumalis to keep the cost down for you. Classes to be confirmed. Details will be in the magazine. Book early to secure your place!

Running all these events wouldn't be possible without the help of my Committee and of course Kathleen.

Elizabeth McKinty
Chairperson, Homecraft Sub-Committee

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Home and Garden

This year has flown by, and we are all making the most of the autumn days. Once again, Home and Garden has another busy year. We had success with the Balmoral Show Competitions back in May, entries were steady and the standard was high. It was great to see so many members supporting us. We are already discussing the Competitions to be set for Balmoral 2025.

Home and Garden's next big event will be the Christmas Event, taking place in the Armagh City Hotel on Saturday 23rd November 2024. I look forward to seeing many of you there. There will be lots of stalls to start your Christmas shopping. Our demos for the day include Cake Decorating, Chocolate Making (*Chocolate Manor*) and the *Just Sing!* Community Choir who will all hopefully get us in the Christmas spirit! The Competition for the Romanian Platter is to make a Christmas-themed cushion (12inch by 12inch, any medium).

Climate change is still part of our remit and articles are still ongoing in the *Ulster Countrywoman* magazine. In the Autumn magazine we look at the subject of electric cars.

The City of Belfast Autumn Fair Flower Show took place in September this year and it was lovely to see so many Institutes and Areas entering displays for the WI Competition '*Autumn Bounty*'. Congratulations to Seaforde WI on being the overall winner!

My thanks to my Committee and to Kathleen and Caroline in the office for all their help and support over the year.

Teresa Feeney
Chairperson, Home and Garden Sub-Committee

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International

As we welcome our new Committee members for our International Sub-Committee; it is heartening that we have some new members and some who have agreed to stay on Committee to serve a further term. This brings a healthy mix of experience and fresh ideas and enthusiasm to the planning and work of our Committee. Everyone is very welcome.

At the end of our last term of office, we reflected on how much we had achieved as an organisation and we were heartened to read of the new project supported by ACWW which is called '*Planting the Seeds of Peace*'. Over 200 children from Ukraine who had suffered from the result of conflict and had been displaced to Romania have been offered the opportunity to learn about planting and growing, as well as climate change. The update on the success of this project should be available soon. A call for new applications to the Education and Community Development project closed at the end of August so we hope to hear of the outcome of these applications soon.

There are a number of podcasts which have been posted on the ACWW website (www.acww.org.uk) relating to Leadership for Equality by UNESCO and ACWW jointly. They have different themes, such as '*Women in Community Development*' and '*Women in Sport*'. It is worthwhile having a listen to these podcasts and finding ones that interest you most to gain some more information on the work of ACWW.

We are very much looking forward to the next ACWW European Conference which will be held in Netherlands and as information becomes available, we will pass this on to members so we can plan to attend in October 2025. The ACWW World Conference will be hosted by Canada, in Ottawa from 24th April – 5th May 2026. So please save these dates and look out for more information as it becomes available.

May I take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support, whether it is financial contributions, *Women Walk The World*, promotion of our work, or participation in craft work and competitions. I also want to congratulate the worthy winners of the Evelyn Lord Trophy and the Mary Boyd Competition.

We have an exciting three years ahead and no doubt will be reporting on our achievements at the next Rural Women's Day next year.

Ruth Carroll
Chairperson, International Sub-Committee

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Magazine and Leisure

A total of six editions of the *Ulster Countrywoman* magazine are now produced on a yearly basis – September, Autumn, Christmas, New Year, Spring and Summer. 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. Institutes are now invoiced for all six magazines with the October edition at the cost of £12.00pp.

In this new season, we had the September edition which you have received, Autumn edition (available from next Thursday) and a Christmas edition at the end of November. 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. News and photographs that do not make it into the magazine may appear on the FWINI Facebook page, on Instagram or on the website.

Items for the Christmas magazine should be submitted to the Editor *before* **Friday, 1st November**:
editor@wini.org.uk

Should you wish to increase your order of the magazine, please let WI HQ know as soon as possible so that the staff can try to accommodate you and the correct number of magazines can be sent to the relevant Institute.

So far this season, two business meetings of the Magazine and Leisure Sub-Committee have been held – one to elect the new Sub-Committee and Office Bearers for the term 2024 – 2027 and a business meeting for the new season.

The Bowling and Quiz finals earlier this year were well attended, with both venues providing excellent facilities. The *Golfer of the Year* Competition took place at The Riverside Course, Portstewart on a beautiful Monday in June. This was a most enjoyable day for all concerned. The Photographic Competition was well supported and the array of different photographs for the subject theme captured the judge's imagination. The planning for 2025 Bowls, Quiz and Golf are well under way – dates and venues to be confirmed.

The **Phyllis Gailey Literary Competition 2025** titled '***Out With The Old In With The New***' is an opportunity to write an exciting original story coining this phrase – closing dates for this Competition and the **Scrapbook Competition** are the end of January 2025. All details are in the Autumn magazine.

The **Photographic Competition 2025** with the theme '***On Its Own***' should produce many interesting images as you are out and about. The closing date for entries will be Summertime 2025, but hopefully in the meantime this title will inspire you. Further details will be published in a future edition of the magazine.

We extend our congratulations to the winners of our competitions, the runners-up and to all those who enter. Details of all competitions, closing dates and winners are published in the magazine, on the WI Facebook page and the website.

The **Fireside Quiz** will be delivered with the Autumn magazine, at still just only £1.00 – no price increases here! It's a fun way to pass an autumn evening. All Institutes will receive 10 sheets and I would encourage you to sell these 10 sheets to your WI members or friends and family. This income helps keep costs down when booking halls/catering, etc. for our other competitions. Please send in your entries before the closing date. (Additional sheets can be requested from WI Headquarters).

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
Chairperson, Magazine and Leisure Sub-Committee

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