

# The Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland



## AGM 2024

*Thursday, 28th March 2024*

*Europa Hotel, Belfast*

### Chairman's Report

***Former Chairmen, Honoured Guests, Executive Members (past, present and future) and my Fellow Members,***

I have almost reached the end of my tenure as Federation Chairman, I will hand over to the new Chairman at the end of April. I would like to take this opportunity to wish her the very best and hope she gets as much out of it as I did. It has been a most wonderful three years – were there challenges? Oh yes, many, but despite them I have enjoyed my time representing our superb organisation at home and abroad. During all my many attendances at WI functions, be it anniversaries, dinners, AGMs, ordinary meetings, or whatever, I have been met with the utmost kindness, respect and helpfulness. Our members are second to none and I am very, very proud to have been your leader.

I know we tend to blame the Coronavirus epidemic for everything and it did have a massive impact, not only on our organisation, but on all membership organisations. We lost many members and a huge amount of revenue; although our income dwindled, prices soared and bills still had to be paid. We are making progress, membership is back to pre-Covid numbers, thanks to new members joining us – some of them in the younger age group! Finances are still tight with unexpected expenses such as repairs to Federation House. However, the increase in membership fees, grant aid, fundraising and cost cutting exercises are making a difference. If the further increase in fees is agreed, we should be in a much healthier situation next year.

Decision making is never easy, whatever the outcome someone is sure to be unhappy but rest assured that none of our decisions were taken lightly. There was discussion, consultation and a majority vote, very often over a few meetings. We are well aware of the consequences but at each and every stage the ultimate aim was the welfare and sustainability of our Federation. Changes are inevitable and if we want to be able to celebrate our 100th anniversary in 2032 then we have to move with the times. Personally, I am not a great fan of change, I have always regarded myself as a conservative, with a small c, but even I can see that we cannot remain as we are and survive; but rest assured that the fundamental ethos of WI will never change.

Since October, I have gone to anniversaries in Armoy, Ballyrashane and Portrush with Exorna still to come. A wreath was laid by Sheelagh McRandal with Kathleen Verner and myself at the City Hall on Remembrance Day. I went to the Christmas Event in Armagh, delivered the knitted items with Sheelagh and Sandra Ledlie to the Salvation Army in Sydenham and St. Vincent de Paul on the Antrim Road. I attended The Townswomen's Guild lunch for International Women's Day at Stormont, the Young Farmers' Club Gala evening in Londonderry, a Seedtime Service at Ballyblack, the Ulster Farmers' Union dinner in Enniskillen and hope to join with the ICA and National Federation of England, Wales and the Islands at an event in Dublin looking at Women's Grassroots Activism in England and Ireland. I have also had the honour of doing a talk at Muckamore WI with further ones at Gosford, Lower Bann and Cullybackey still to come. We continue to be involved with the Strategy to End Violence to Women and Girls and the Good Relations/Together groups. I know how passionate the WI is about volunteering so hope you with all become involved in The Big Help Out in June this year.

They say 'the Devil makes work for idle hands' – so I'm keeping mine busy!

As my term of office draws to a close, I have many people to thank. The Executive team have been a tower of strength to me and without their support this would have been an impossible task, I am very grateful to each and every one of you. Kathleen my Vice-Chair, has given me advice and friendship which was invaluable, her experience and knowledge instrumental in helping me to fulfil my duties.

Sheelagh has had a very tough three years when our finances were severely curtailed but she has kept us up and running, sometimes chastising us if we wanted to spend more but always bowing the majority decision.

Kathleen and Caroline stepped up to the plate after Irene left, it was a very difficult time and at times they struggled but they did a magnificent job. Kathleen is a fount of all knowledge, when we need to know something she is our go-to person and Caroline not only edits our superb magazine but also keeps us up to date on Facebook. They are a great team and we would be completely lost without them.

Mary joined us in October 2022 and hit the ground running, she has been a great asset to our staff team and has brought in a huge wealth of knowledge and expertise. Our staff do a magnificent job and we all owe them an immense debt of gratitude. Thanks also needs to go to you our wonderful members, you are the glue that binds us all together and without you we would not exist.

Finally, before I end, I would just like to send our best wishes for a full recovery to His Majesty King Charles and to her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales. They are undergoing treatment for an illness that has touched each and every one of us at some stage but in the full glare of publicity. The last thing they need at this time is public speculation and conspiracy theorising.

*This concludes my report.*

**Margaret Broome**  
**Federation Chairman**