

**Janice Langley – Chair’s closing remarks
2016 NFWI Annual Meeting**

As we move toward our 101st birthday in September and the beginning of the 2nd Century for the WI movement what are the challenges ahead and where will the future take us – oh for a crystal ball!

What makes the WI so special?

As I said earlier we are not a ladies group we are a group of ladies who belong to a very robust organisation and as Julia said NFWI is in a good and secure position financially

What makes the WI different?

From the very early days members have been developing their skills in public speaking and leading a meeting as well as many traditional skills.

As women working together we have a collective voice; women influencing society and women’s roles in society.

One person can make a difference; as WI Members we can make a difference, for example by putting forward a resolution.

The WI has a set of rules which forms the structure of the organisation and is the skeleton in which we operate although these might sometimes appear unnecessary and perhaps even petty they have kept the WI stable and functional for 100 years.

As I’m sure you all know the WI is made up of 3 tiers and the constitution gives a clear structure to all three levels of the WI; it sets out the boundaries that make us one organisation.

The constitution also gives the WI its purpose - its charitable objects - and allows every federation and WI to be unique and individual.

However, with this individuality also comes responsibility - each WI must abide by Charity Law.

We are all volunteers doing our best at whatever level we may be supporting the organisation and we need to respect each other and value everyone’s diversity.

Women have changed in the last 100 years - we are better educated, have the right to vote and play a prominent part on society; you only have to have listened to our two speakers today who have showed what women can achieve.

The WI is there for any woman and the diversity of the membership makes the WI what it is today and how it has progressed since 1915 – women making a difference, all kinds of opportunities for all kinds of women - just 2 of the straplines that pop into my head.

What about the future – 3 words come to mind all starting with “T”

- Technology
- Time
- Tradition

We need to think about the future of the WI and not sit back and be complacent.

1. TECHNOLOGY

Communication must be the key - many WIs already use email to communicate between meetings and use the webpages, Facebook and Twitter

One of the best tools for communication is the WI website.
Every WI has pages on the website to share their meeting details and much more if they wish.
There is no cost to WIs for this.

Social media is now a key element of everyday communication and a great way to promote the WI to a wider audience.

It is often the first point of contact for potential members and the media.
Social media sites are free to use for sharing information and images.

There are also guidelines for WIs on how to use these on the WI Moodle.

The Moodle is an online educational resource used by many organisations and we have adapted the software as a learning site for the WI.

WI members can access all kinds of educational documents, training, information and courses via the WI Moodle from the comfort of their homes at any time.

You will find specific areas for certain posts such as MCS Reps, WI Treasurers, WI Advisers or Judges and many of these have their own interactive forum.

When I came onto the NFWI Board, the NFWI had no means of contacting individual members. There was no list of names, only WIs knew who their members were and federations probably only knew those members who had a position within the federation, for example WI Adviser, Cookery Judge.

In 2006 The Board asked every member to submit their names and addresses to enable easier and quicker communication between members, federations and the NFWI.

We now have 226,402 members on the MCS, some of them with an email address and telephone numbers.

Ideally we would like an email address for everyone, please, and for it to be kept updated.

If you are not on the system you won't get your copy of WI Life. WI Life is a key method of communicating with members and the magazine regularly contains vital information for you.

I would like to stress that the NFWI is strictly compliant with the Data Protection Act and members' details are never sold - please let us know your email address to ensure we can keep you updated on your special interest area.

We have dedicated April and September as MCS months – what does that mean? We would like you to update your information please.

Although technology is the future and we are moving with the times and we should use all methods of communication, we will not forget those members who have no internet access – you know what works best for you!

The NFWI Communications team is always happy to advise and guidelines are available on PR, website and social media.

Coming soon –

This year, the NFWI is working with our website agency Squiz to develop a dedicated members'-only section of the WI website.

Think of this as an added benefit to you as part of your membership subscription, not delivered to your door as is WI Life but an online information source.

The content will be easy-to-access and there will be exclusive resources that showcase everything on offer to members from the NFWI; these will include the various projects I was referring to this morning.

It will be a new way for the NFWI to communicate and engage directly with WI Members, and it can also be used by federations.

We must use technology to our advantage as we plan for the future.

The WI Website will continue to be the first port of call for information and new member enquiries.

The WI Moodle will continue as a training platform as was its original purpose.

And -

The Members' Only area on the WI Website will be designed specifically for you as a WI member and will enhance your membership by making all kinds of learning opportunities available through the website.

2. The 2nd of the 3 is TIME

More and more members are working and as the retirement age increases they are going to be working longer.

NFWI, Federations and WIs need to consider the amount of time spent at meetings.

Does the WI committee have to be on the same day every month, does it have to be on the second Tuesday afternoon at the President's home?

Do we need to change the way we communicate with each other?

Being a WI Officer or committee member or a Federation Trustee is a commitment which should be possible to undertake for all members who would like to do it, not just those who are free on a specific day.

Meetings need not be set in stone, flexibility is a key word.

We are trying and testing alternative ways of communication as board members, Skype, teleconferencing and discussing how to make the meetings shorter – we have cut down on the paper usage by using email, memory sticks and iPads.

NFWI Board meetings are over 2 days, Board members are also on at least 2 sub-committees.

If you are an NFWI Officer the board meeting is over 3 days 5 times a year and as you can see this is only the tip of the iceberg.

We realize that we need to look at how we can make changes at all levels, including the NFWI, so that working members have an equal opportunity to play an active role in the governance of the WI.

Even though I probably have the best job in the world it is almost 24/7 and unpaid, I'm a volunteer I said "yes".

3. TRADITION

Let us not forget what we are really about –learning new skills and sharing our own experiences with others and last but not least fun and friendship.

Do you remember the 3 Key Messages

- The WI is here to inspire you
- The WI is everything you want it to be
- The WI is what you make of it

The WI needs good leadership – this is the future

WI members are the WI, we all shape the organization and its future is dependent on all of us, the WI needs responsible leadership and the constitution is there to guide us.

With this in mind the Board, wanting to know as much as they can to give the members what they want from the organisation, will be asking you to fill in a census form which will be available both online and in WI Life.

Please fill the Census in to help the NFWI Board of Trustees inspire you and make the WI everything YOU want it to be.

Thank you.

Janice Langley
June 2016