

## **Report of the 101st Annual Wales Conference held at the Great Hall, Aberystwyth Arts Centre on 26 March 2026**

The Conference was opened with the singing of Jerusalem. **Jill Rundle**, Chair of the Federations of Wales Committee, welcomed members and guests to the Conference organised by the Wales Committee and hosted by Ceredigion Federation.

**Gay Evans**, Chair of Ceredigion Federation welcomed members to the host county.

In her Chair's address, **Jill Rundle**, Chair of the Federations of Wales Committee focused on the theme of adapting to change. Everyone, she said, had to accommodate change in their lives, as she reflected on the life experiences of an inspiring woman who helped people - her husband's grandmother Kate who was born in the late 1800s - and how she had responded to the many new challenges and threats that she had faced during her lifetime.

Just like Kate's achievements, Jill Rundle reminded delegates that the WI was established to encourage the education of women and girls and continued to do so, campaigning tirelessly on issues which were important to members. Jill Rundle reflected on how the WI had responded to change and adapted over the last 111 years and noted that it was constantly challenged by new issues and threats. WIs, she said, were constantly challenged and had to move with the times to encourage new members to join.

Highlighting some of the challenges faced over recent years, Jill Rundle noted that the WI was still the largest women's organisation in the UK and continued to evolve and change to meet the needs of successive generations. As the WI headed towards its next 5 year strategy, she emphasised that WI could not stay still. She discussed the commitments in the 5 year strategy which would include a review of the percentage allocation of the annual membership; a new approach to the resolutions process; introducing a revised system for member data collection, storage and analysis to replace MCS; a comprehensive review of the WI Life magazine to include more stories from the WI universe; and to review and extend the membership model to build options that worked for women at all stages of their life to ensure that the WI reached as many women as possible. Jill Rundle added that by getting the offer right for women in the 21st century, this would build the foundation for ensuring that the WI moved forward stronger than ever before.

To conclude, Jill Rundle said that by working together, the WI would continue to succeed.

In her report of Work, **Rhian Connick**, Head of NFWI-Wales shared with delegates the work delivered over the last year.

Rhian Connick started by sharing the success of the Connect and Grow project which had captured useful learning and this was supporting the current focus on making the WI more visible in communities and the production of resources.

Rhian Connick updated delegates on the public affairs activities. Thanks to the funding received from the Waterloo Foundation, she reported that there were Not in my Name WI champions who were raising awareness of violence against women and recruiting allies in their communities. Training had been provided and resources developed to support members and it had been heartening to see an event in every Federation during the 16 Days of Activism last year. Rhian Connick also reported on the events held at the Senedd to mark the 16 Days of Activism and congratulated Minera WI, Clwyd Denbigh on winning the Not in my Name banner competition.

Other public affairs highlights included WI member Judith Merritt from Sir Gâr/Carmarthenshire Federation contributing to a climate justice conversation panel event in Swansea and the production of a manifesto for the Senedd election.

In relation to events, Rhian Connick reported on NFWI-Wales' presence at the Royal Welsh Show, hosted by Gwynedd Caernarfon Federation; the National Eisteddfod in Wrexham, hosted by Clwyd Denbigh Federation; and the Royal Welsh Winter Fair. In addition, NFWI-Wales had a stand at the Everywoman Festival in Cardiff and WI member Nicola Awni from Gwent Federation also took part in a panel discussion on the theme of ending violence against women.

Rhian Connick congratulated the competition winners. Glamorgan Federation was awarded winner of both the Rose Bowl and Brecon cup competitions at the Royal Welsh Show on the theme Shades of One Colour. The winners of the Winter Fair competitions were Kay Rowlands Gwynedd Meirionnydd for the best fiddle mat and Angela Lloyd, Gwent Federation for the best chilli jam.

NFWI Vice Chair **Pam Beedan** addressed delegates on 'a journey with the WI'. She explained that her journey with the WI began with rivers and canals, her love of photography, and an invitation from a member of Outwood WI for Pam and her husband to show photos of their trips after a speaker had cancelled. That first talk 'A Journey on the Inland Waterways', she said, had changed everything.

Pam Beedan told delegates that she enjoyed the WI meeting and joined at the age of 26 where she discovered fun, friendship and a network of supportive women. She joined the Committee and was eventually elected President. Soon other WIs and organisations began inviting her to give a talk and she visited WIs across South and West Yorkshire.

She said that speaking about something she was passionate about increased her confidence and the talks gave her confidence to take on various roles later in life.

Pam Beedan reflected on how the WI had enabled her to develop skills that were invaluable in her career. She highlighted that she was one of the first ladies to become Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Taxation. Later on in her career, the skills and confidence gained through the WI helped when she designed and delivered training in work. Pam Beedan noted that the most valuable skill was people skills, explaining that being President had taught her about listening, and seeing people grow and achieve their potential had always been her pleasure.

Pam Beedan told delegates that a career move resulted in her moving to the Isle of Man and joining Marown. She later got involved at Federation level as a Trustee and later as Chair. She also trained as a WI Adviser.

In 2022, a member encouraged Pam Beedan to stand for election as an NFWI Trustee and she was currently in her third period. She described it as a huge honour to represent members.

Closing her talk, Pam Beedan stated that throughout her WI journey, she has tried to encourage other members to step forward and try new roles, whether that was within their own WI, at Federation level, or even nationally. The WI, she said, had given her endless opportunities to learn new things and each step of her WI journey had enabled her to continue to thrive, develop and learn.

Linking to the WI's Bystanders Can Be Lifesavers campaign, **Julie Starling**, Clinical Out of Hospital Arrest Programme Manager for Wales, Save a Life Cymru discussed "Developing a Nation of Lifesavers".

Julie Starling highlighted the chain of survival: early recognition and call for help; early CPR; early defibrillation; post resuscitation. The fourth link was supporting survivors. Save a Life Cymru had worked collaboratively with the Resuscitation Council to develop quality standards for survivors to make sure they received the care they needed. A booklet providing support after a cardiac arrest had also been produced.

A website was being developed full of resources for people who had performed or witnessed CPR. The BHF's Heart Helpline was a source of support. Julie Starling mentioned that cards were provided to police forces, ITUs, and A&E so that all survivors knew that support was available to them.

Julie Starling spoke about The Circuit, the UK's national defibrillator network where defibrillators were registered. She explained that there had been an increase in registered defibrillators over the last four years. Save a Life Cymru had been educating people about The Circuit and 95% of defibrillators were registered as rescue ready thanks to collaboration with communities. A team of community coordinators were looking at the reasons for some not being rescue ready.

Julie Starling discussed the work that was being carried out with schools. Save a Life Cymru's vision was to embed CPR in the population and it was keen to engage primary and secondary schools and universities. Since January 2026, questions on CPR and defibrillator use were being included in the driving theory test.

A video promoting CPR skills, which was developed by Save a Life Cymru exclusively for the WI, was shown to delegates. Members were encouraged to promote the video widely via the WI network and wider.

The difference between cardiac arrest and a heart attack was explained and a video on defibrillation was shown.

Julie Starling noted that women in Wales were less likely to have CPR than men and Save a Life Cymru was doing research into the reasons for this. She noted that until recently people had been testing on male mannequins only. Do women feel empowered to do CPR? she asked delegates. She stated that all women could have CPR and it was a myth that a bra had to be removed before doing CPR. This was in line with the 2025 guidelines from the European Resuscitation Council.

Julie Starling informed delegates about Restart a Heart Live, an awareness raising event that took place on 1 October every year. Last year, the online event, which included some pre-recorded items, was promoted widely to schools and the number of people reached went from 5000 in 2024 to 44,000 in 2025. Julie Starling urged WIs to get involved in supporting Restart a Heart Live by reaching out to local schools to sign up to the initiative.

## **Questions**

What age were the children that got involved in Restart a Heart Live? There were age appropriate bilingual programmes for primary and secondary school pupils. Last year, primary schools were more engaged in Restart a Heart Live than secondary schools.

Should the airway be checked before performing CPR? When flat and not breathing, CPR was the answer.

A WI member stated that 'what3words' was asked when phoning 999. She had printed off the what3words and stuck it on her fridge so that it could be found easily if needed in an emergency. Julie Starling responded that by being registered on The Circuit, the ambulance would know accurately where they were.

How could the WI get a defibrillator in the community? Most were registered on The Circuit. The pad map would highlight hot spot areas where a defibrillator was needed.

### **2025/26 Recruitment Awards**

Congratulations to **Rhose WI, Glamorgan Federation** for winning the award for WIs with 24 members and under. The WI had increased its membership from 18 to 51 members, an increase of 183%.

Congratulations to **Ton Pentre & Gelli WI, Glamorgan Federation** for winning the award for WIs with 25 members and over. The WI had increased its membership from 33 to 47 members, an increase of 42%.

Barbara Bowring, Chair of Glamorgan Federation accepted the awards on behalf of the WIs and shared some of the secrets of their success.

**Rhose WI** attributed its success to having a fabulous programme, social media and marketing and promoting in the free Glamorgan Star whenever it could. The WI's walking group, community coffee morning and lunch club also played to play in its recruitment success. The WI had also introduced online banking and card-net for members', had a craft group that upcycled and made new items, organised on-line bake sessions to share the old favourite recipes, and organised fun trips and days out and community events like Bingo and Tribute nights.

The WI branched out into the community, networking with the local am-dram society, supported the local Repair Café with volunteers doing textile repairs, supported the British Legion and served teas at the village Remembrance service.

Most importantly, the WI has a fantastic support network and were fortunate to have talented, dynamic committee members who gave the valuable gift of time with genuine kindness and integrity. The committee wore pink badges, had pink diaries and pens and everyone knew to ask a "*pink lady*" if they needed anything. They fitted together like a jigsaw to make things happen and made members and visitors feel welcome and were open to new opportunities with real commitment to taking members' suggestions forward.

**Ton Pentre and Gelli WI** was formed nearly three years ago to meet a local need for a daytime WI, particularly for women with caring responsibilities or who preferred not to go out in the evening. Posters were created promoting the formation of the WI and friends, neighbours and colleagues also got involved in encouraging women to attend and join.

Since then, membership had grown rapidly with a wide range of regular daytime activities, supported by grant funding. The WI had established a craft group, a knit and natter group and a walking group and there were Tai chi sessions twice a month. Part of our growth had been down to grant funding from the lottery and Rhondda Cynon Taf and Interlink which had allowed the WI to utilise the community centre for many additional hours without having to worry about the rent for all the extra activities. The funding had also enabled the WI to purchase materials for craft group, resources for the Ukuladies and fund the Tai Chi lessons and much more.

The WI had also discovered that members loved a trip. Members had visited the local colleges to sample delicious food cooked by the students training, the Brecon canal using public transport, Minehead for fish and chips and afternoon tea, Nantgarw China works and had been on several theatre trips and concerts.

At its heart, the WI focused on friendship, inclusion, wellbeing, and fun, helping members build strong connections and enjoy shared experiences.

### **2025 Rose Bowl and Brecon Cup Awards**

The **Rose Bowl**, awarded for the best produce and handicraft display, was won by **Glamorgan Federation**. The Award was received by Myra Thomas on behalf of the WI that represented Glamorgan Federation in the competition.

The **Brecon Cup** for the best floral exhibit was also awarded to **Glamorgan Federation** and accepted by Margaret Maguire, the member that represented Glamorgan Federation in the competition.

The theme of both competitions was Shades of one Colour.

### **Afternoon session**

Poet, novelist and lecturer **Eurig Salisbury** informed delegates about the recent designation of Aberystwyth as Wales' first UNESCO City of Literature. This meant becoming a part of a network of UNESCO creative city networks across the world. The status could facilitate the exchange of ideas and raise the profile of literary creativity in the area. It was not a financial designation but hopefully a catalyst to attract sponsorship now and in the future. The City of Literature partnership, chaired by Mererid Hopwood, included key partners such as Aberystwyth Town Council, Ceredigion County Council, Books Council for Wales, National Library for Wales and Aberystwyth University. A film about the UNESCO designation was shown to delegates.. Further information was available at <https://cityofliterature.wales/>

**Dr Rhodi Llwyd Morgan**, Chief Executive of the National Library of Wales addressed delegates on the history of libraries, the digitisation of materials and the strategy of the National Library for Wales.

Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan gave an overview of the establishment of libraries, from clay tablets to modern libraries. The first public library was established in France in 1643 and the National Library of Wales came into being in 1907 making it the oldest library in the UK. In 1911, it became a legal deposit library hence received a copy of everything published in the UK and Ireland. It was the primary repository for Welsh heritage, dedicated to collecting, preserving, and providing access to materials relating to Wales and other Celtic nations.

Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan discussed the digitisation of materials noting that around 8 million books and over one million maps had been digitised. He highlighted that historic newspapers in Wales were available to access online and showed images of the first newspaper published in 1804.

Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan showed a report from the North Wales Chronicle on 16 Sept 1916, a year after the establishment of the first WI in Great Britain in September 1915, which included a report about Madge Watt and Colonel Cotton and the involvement of women in food production.

Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan discussed the National Library of Wales' new strategy which had an ambition to reach out to all communities across Wales and had the 'Every School Every Town' goal.

Concerns and ambitions around the conservation of our past were highlighted by Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan. Conservation was a core pillar, with significant investment in both physical and digital preservation aimed at tackling the challenges of an aging building and a growing digital archive. A key ambition was to the development of a Conservation Centre of Excellence.

A Wales broadcast archive also existed and a website had been developed giving people access to every single programme on BBC Wales, HTV Wales and S4C. The scripts from the broadcasters had also been obtained and these would also be digitised.

Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan shared fascinating historical video footage and photos focusing on highlights on the history of Wales and on women's lives. He also shared the story of Welsh Women's Peace Petition of 1923-24, led by 4 women from Wales, which was signed by two thirds of the female population of Wales at that time and presented to the President of the US. He explained that the story had been forgotten for many years, but volunteers had helped transcribe the whole petition.

## **Questions**

It was moving to hear about the history of libraries. Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan was asked about his feelings about what was happening to libraries in terms of reduced hours and closure of libraries in some areas.

Libraries had to adapt and be available online. There was work happening in Swansea City Centre to bring partners together. The Libraries Alliance brought academic and national libraries together to make the case for and promote libraries. There was work happening, but it was concerning.

Emma Holland Lindsay, NFWI Director of Campaigns and Membership highlighted that the WI was instrumental in establishing public libraries, supporting the Carnegie libraries. WI archives showed that many WIs organised their own libraries.

Are women's stories adequately heard in libraries, to share the history and reality of women's lives? A lot of middle-aged men were represented and that needed to be changed.

In response to a question about what materials were appropriate to share, Dr Rhodri Llwyd Morgan noted that the National Library of Wales was a depository of all resources, and it had a legal responsibility not to edit anything out.

**Professor Dame Elan Closs Stephens**, who had held a number of high profile positions in public service, spoke about her period at the BBC including being Acting Chair of the BBC's UK Board during a very turbulent period in 2023/24.

With the recent appointment of Mat Brittin as the new Director General of the BBC, Elan Closs Stephens discussed the importance of the role in terms of setting the policy, keeping stakeholders on board, looking after the 'shop' of increasing channels and coverage, and keeping on top of what they were doing. She also highlighted the role of Director General in discussing issues with the Chair. Reflecting on her period as Acting Chair of the BBC, Elan Closs Stephens described it as relentless and little did she know what was in store.

Elan Closs Stephens shared her journey with the BBC which started in 1984 when she was a member of the Broadcasting Committee of Wales. When appointed to the role of Acting Chair, she recalled a newspaper article heading focusing on the fact that she was a 'state educated Welsh speaker'.

The BBC, she said, was going through a difficult period when she was involved. She highlighted that Radio Cymru was adding more English content to its programmes.

From 2010, Elan Closs Stephens was a non-executive director with responsibility for Wales on the BBC representing the needs of Wales. At the time there was too little representation of Wales on BBC drama. A number of serious problems were faced by the BBC during this period such as the Jimmy Saville report and the resignation of George Entwistle as Director General. Another challenge was in 2023 with the resignation of Richard Sharpe for providing a loan to Boris Johnson at the time of being appointed Chair by the former Prime Minister.

Some challenges during her period as Acting Chair included addressing the Huw Edwards and Russell Brand scandals, the situation that developed regarding Gary Linekar's posts on social media, and criticism of the BBC's coverage of the Hamas attacks on Israel. Elan Closs Stephens emphasised that the BBC was an impartial organisation and that was what gave journalists permission to go into war zones.

On her departure from the BBC, Elan asked everyone at the BBC to say something in Welsh.

Elan Closs Stephens discussed how the way people received their news had changed greatly and said that there was a need for space for rational discussion. She believed passionately that the BBC could serve the public space and the concept of a public service had never been more important. The BBC, she said, had to regain public confidence to reassert its values.

## Questions

What did you think of President Trump suing the BBC? Elan Closs Stephens hoped that the court case would be dropped eventually.

Do you feel that the BBC is biased? It strives not to be. There might be the odd sentence or a presenter that appears biased but the desire to be unbiased is there.

**Ann Jones**, High Sheriff of Dyfed, spoke on the title 'The Lady with the Feathers' explaining the role of High Sheriff and how she was appointed to the position.

Describing the role as wonderful, Ann Jones noted that it was a voluntary and non-political one year appointment and did not cost the public purse. Ann Jones shared the history of the role noting that it was the oldest secular office under the British Crown. High Sheriffs were established in Saxon times and were around at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. At the time they were extremely powerful but unpopular as they collected taxes and levies. The Magna Carter had 27 clauses relating to power of sheriffs and the role changed under the Tudors. Over the years, she said, the powers had diminished.

Ann Jones said that she and the Lord Lieutenant worked together in going around the country.

Ann Jones, who wore a velvet teal jacket, discussed the outfit of the High Sheriff and some of the requirements such as having buckles on shoes and a hat with a white ostrich feather in any style.

Sharing the story of how she became a High Sheriff, she said that she was invited by Dame Elan Closs Stephens, the Chair of the county panel. The county panel comprised the CEO of the County Council, the police, university, health board and others to make sure all parts of society were represented.

Ann Jones noted that there were currently 55 high sheriffs in England and Wales. Looking back at past sheriffs in Dyfed, Ann Jones noted that many came from big houses in Cardigan, Carmarthen and Pembrokeshire. The first female high sheriff in the UK was Dame Nicolaa de la Haye, Sheriff of Lincolnshire in 1216. The first female high sheriff of Cardiganshire had been Gladys Mary Fraser in 1971; Molly Phillips, in Carmarthenshire in 1961 and Penny Drew in Pembrokeshire in 2004.

Ann Jones discussed the role of High Sheriff today and what she had done over the last year. She said that the High Sheriff supported high court judges on circuit. She had sat on 3 family court cases which she said was very challenging. She had worked with the prison and probation services and all the blue light services. She had also attended 2 Royal visits. Additionally, the role involved supporting the community - charities, organisations and volunteers - and she shared her experience of attending a performance by the Lighthouse Stage School youth theatre group in Burry Port. During her year as High Sheriff, Ann Jones reported that she had attended 120 events and travelled nearly 15,000 miles.

Ann Jones told delegates that ending violence against women had been the issue she had chosen to focus on. She had met with Dyfed Powys Chief Constable, Police and Crime Commissioner and Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, and had been reassured that ending violence against women was one of their priority issues. The second focus for Ann Jones has been celebrating youth as the pillars of the community. Young people, she said, had a sense of responsibility and youth organisations should be appreciated, encouraged and thanked for the good work they did.

Ann Jones spoke about her attendance at the 80<sup>th</sup> commemorative events to mark VE Day and VJ Day stating that she learnt a lot about the way each area commemorated in their own way.

A highlight for Ann Jones was supporting a group of men from Dale who took part in a 'Row4MND' fundraising rowing challenge to raise money to help find a cure for Motor Neurone Disease.

Ann Jones stated that her chosen Charity of the Year was the Wales Air Ambulance and she was proud that around £14,000 had been raised through the generosity of the community.

To conclude, she advised delegates that if they were offered an opportunity to do something, say 'yes'.

The vote of thanks was given by **Mim Roberts**, Chair of Gwynedd Meirionnydd Federation.

Mim Roberts extended a warm welcome to members to attend the 2027 Wales Conference in Porthmadog on 18 March.

The conference closed with the singing of Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau and God Save the King.