

To: Federation Secretaries
CC: Federation Chairmen
Federation Treasurers
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Dear Member,

I am writing to you on behalf of the NFWI Board of Trustees following the recent negative press reports. Like us, I'm sure you're saddened to have read about so much negative feeling towards the WI, but I wanted to let you know that these articles are based on many factual errors. We have in fact written to the Editor of the Daily Mail pointing out the inaccuracies, but to date no retraction has been printed nor was mention made in the most recent article of the many letters of support for the WI organisation which members have sent to the Daily Mail.

We don't believe that the national press is the right platform for debate about internal issues, but I assure you that the question of subscriptions is always very carefully considered by the NFWI Board, in consultation with federation officers, and the financial needs of all levels of the organisation are taken into account. This has resulted in WIs keeping half of the increase to this year's subscription, as we know that many WIs, particularly smaller WIs, find it increasingly difficult to cover their costs. If your WI falls into this category, we'd urge you to seek help from your federation's team of WI Advisers, as they will be able to help you with ways you can keep costs down as well as suggest fundraising ideas, which will not only increase your income but will provide events for your members and your community to enjoy. WIs have always been encouraged to fundraise to supplement their income, and for many WIs this is a central part of membership. This year alone we have seen WIs get creative in an incredible array of fundraising schemes, showing that WI members are as resourceful and active as ever. We know that some of our members have restricted budgets, but we also know that federations do their best to help WIs give their members excellent value for money. We will shortly be starting discussions about next year's subscription and we will certainly take all views into account.

Far from losing members, the WI today is flourishing, with approximately 222,000 members, and almost 30,000 new members joining last year alone (Oct 2016-Sept 2017).

Much was made in the articles about the location of the London office. The NFWI office is described as an "elegant HQ" and later an "exorbitant office". Nobody who has visited the office would describe it as such, indeed it is a very modest space, and this view is always voiced by members who visit for our open days or for other meetings or training. The location is also described as "such an expensive part of London", but is considerably less so than anywhere in central London, where a lot of charities have their head offices. This property is also owned by the NFWI so there is no rent to pay.

The question of relocation to Denman is not viable. Office accommodation at Denman is very limited, and we know we would not get planning permission to build additional space in the grounds. Having more staff at Denman would also detract from the ambience of the college, and take away space for courses and accommodation. The cost of relocating staff and travel costs would also negate the one off profit if we were to sell our premises in London.

The article claims the WI cannot afford to keep running Denman and that money is wasted on it. This is not true. None of the WI subscription goes towards the upkeep of Denman. As trustees we are committed to

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keeping Denman open as long as courses are filling and Denman is making sufficient, albeit modest, profits. Denman is currently doing very well, with courses filling up and lots of positive PR, but we have always been very open about the future of Denman, and the situation is constantly reviewed. As you are aware there is currently a member-led fundraising appeal for the ongoing maintenance of the house and grounds, which has so far raised an impressive £537,980 (since it started in April 2016). This is organised entirely by members, and is testament to how much members love Denman.

WI Life was also mentioned in the article. *WI Life* brings in a great deal of revenue for the WI from its advertising, far more than it costs to produce. Indeed membership costs would be far higher without *WI Life*. It is also an invaluable communication tool, and the only communication which reaches every member. The purpose of *WI Life* is to share with WI members the far-ranging interests and activities of the WI and to showcase the amazing stories of WI members around the country. The feedback we get from members about *WI Life* is overwhelmingly positive. Also, most of the advertisers have been using the magazine for many years, which would not be the case if WI members did not respond.

The NFWI Board of Trustees, like your federation trustees, are all volunteers. We are members just like you: we regularly attend our own WI meetings when possible and we take our turn with doing the refreshments and putting out the chairs. As charity trustees we have a legal obligation to do the best we possibly can for the WI. We are bound by charity law, as well as all the other legal obligations any organisation has. Board and committee members are paid expenses, but it is only right that reasonable expenses are paid to those who give up their time for the WI. We have strict guidelines about expense claims and these are always checked by our staff members.

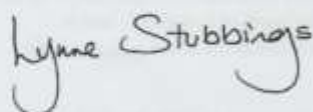
We have paid staff in London, Wales and Denman, but I can assure you that we do not pay them exorbitant salaries, and in fact the Daily Mail did admit in the article that in terms of the charity sector our salaries were by no means excessive. Our staff are dedicated and choose to work for us because of our ethos and ideals, and many staff members have been with us for several years. Most federations also employ staff, and again they are paid modest salaries.

Since the publication of the articles, we have received many emails, letters and messages of support for the NFWI and for that we are very grateful. We know that the majority of members feel that the WI is a fantastic organisation and the subscription offers great value for money.

I want to reassure you that the NFWI Board always has members' interests at heart and we are doing our best to keep our wonderful organisation as vibrant and forward-looking as it always has been over the last 103 years.

I'm very honoured to have been invited to several events by federations, and indeed WIs, celebrating their centenaries this year, and I look forward to meeting many of you at these and other events over the coming months.

With best wishes,



Lynne Stubbings

NFWI Chair