



# **National Federation of Womens Institutes**

## **Guide to Communications**

*Updated by the NFWI Communications department – April 2017*

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## **Role of Communications Department in NFWI**

*“Public relations is about reputation - the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you.*

*“Public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.”*

***Chartered Institute of Public Relations***

The WI is the largest women’s voluntary organisation in the UK and as such, we are regularly asked for our opinions, thoughts and ideas on a huge range of different topics. The size of the organisation and the respect given to members as a result of their engagement in local, regional and national issues, as well as their skills and expertise in a huge range of topics, means that the reputation of the WI is of the upmost importance. This is what communications and public relations are all about; the protection and promotion of an organisation’s reputation, and it is something about which the NFWI cares a great deal.

At the heart of everything that the Communications team does is WI membership; promoting it to women who might not have thought that the WI was for them, and retaining members who are already part of the organisation. Every query that we respond to is considered in light of whether it will promote the organisation as something that all women can join, and every article, interview and web entry intends to open the general public’s eyes to the WI and what membership can offer to every woman. Despite being contacted for a huge variety of topics and issues on a weekly basis, the Communications department will only ever work on something that fits within the charitable objects of the organisation, and promotes the organisation as a place where all women can come together in their local communities, get involved in issues that matter to them, learn new skills, and make new friends.

## The Communications department

There are currently four members of the Communications department:

- The Head of Communications who oversees the work of department and manages all aspects of the organisation's public profile and deals with communications strategy and development, and the promotion of the organisation's external engagements,
- The Press and PR Officer who is the first point of contact for the department, runs the WI's social media channels, and works with Federation Press Officers (PROs) on regional media issues,
- The Web Master who manages all aspects the WI website
- The Online Content Editor who manages and oversees everything on the new WI members' website portal *My WI*

The Communications Department deals with a range of different issues including:

- Dealing with all media enquiries,
- Publicising and promoting WI stories, events and campaigns to the media through press releases, statements and media briefings,
- Managing and developing the WI website,
- Approve all federation and WI web activity on the WI website,
- Developing and updating all content on the *My WI* membership web portal,
- Responsible for all training and training materials relating to the WI website,
- Managing media at national events e.g. AGM,
- Providing media training for all spokespeople,
- Supporting spokespeople at media e.g. accompanying the NFWI Chair to interviews on TV or radio,
- Monitoring and evaluating media coverage,
- Working with all NFWI committees to promote relevant activities,
- Working with key partner organisations to promote joint working,
- Supporting federation PROs ,
- Managing the WI website,
- Managing the NFWI's digital communications channels including (but not limited to) Facebook, Twitter and YouTube,
- Managing the logo and house style guide,
- Management of all social media channels e.g. Facebook, Twitter etc.

Whilst we actively work with Federation PROs, any WI member is more than welcome to get in touch with the Communications Department if they need any help with working with the media. This guide will provide instructions on how to work with local journalists, promote meetings and events, and how to prepare for interviews, but the Communications Department is always available for individual help with any issue from providing briefings for interviews, to helping with negative publicity.

## Reputation management

Every organisation – large or small – relies on its reputation. As the largest women’s voluntary organisation in the UK, the WI’s reputation is of the utmost importance, and it is something that every member should consider before making contact with any member of the media to promote an activity or event to the wider public.

As a customer, there will be certain brands and organisations that you turn to on a regular basis – be it your local shop, or a clothing brand that you know you can rely on for something special – and the same is true for the WI; the organisation has a long established reputation from WI members’ hard work across England, Wales and the Islands to make their communities a better place for everyone since 1915. So that we can honour and protect this work and dedication of those members who came before us, and those who will come after us, the NFWI Communications Department works tirelessly to make sure that the best possible image of the WI is projected to the general public, and that any kind of negative coverage is addressed as quickly as possible. The WI as a brand – the WI, inspiring women – is the most powerful thing that we have to promote and preserve what we offer to women across the UK and as such, it should be protected to ensure that we can continue to do this for many more years to come.

Journalists still have many misconceptions about the WI as a women’s organisation and it is up to all of us to dispel these myths, but also to promote our strengths and achievements. Communications should combine promotion of those activities, campaigns and events that the general public does not expect the WI to be involved with, as well as the promotion of expertise in areas that members have been working on for years. For example, the recent trend and popularity for baking and crafting could not have been predicted ten years ago, but it’s something that WI members have been doing for years, so for many journalists looking for more information on the subjects, the WI is an obvious place to call and we are their first contact. This reaffirms the assertion that WI members are experts in cookery and craft, and can be contacted if further information on the topics is needed. On the flip side, recent campaign work on the Care not Custody promise attracting media coverage because the general public did not expect the WI to have an opinion on the topic – something that was adopted as a mandate back in the 1990s – so it was a wonderful opportunity to make a real difference to many people as well as engaging members in a campaign topic that reached millions of people through the media. This media exposure promoted the WI as a campaigning force for good, and has shown that WI membership does not fit the stereotypical image that many believe, which attracted more members.

## Making your voice heard

When planning to publicise your meeting or event, it is important to consider the full range of promotional opportunities available to you. Far from being limited to local newspapers, WIs across the UK now engage with the public on every available media platform, so it is key to remember that although one option might not be the right one for you, there are various ways of getting your messages out into the public domain, and attracting more members to your meetings. Potential members no longer just keep an eye on the local paper for new things that might interest them; they are checking local events listings online, listening to local radio channels, checking Facebook groups with news on the local area, and checking into Twitter for inspiration to name just a few – there has never been a better time to spread the word about your WI and what your members get up to.

The most important thing to remember is that we all need to make our information as accessible as possible to as many women as possible to gain new members; as information continues to move online, we all must update websites, blogs, and social media sites as often as possible to ensure that the most up-to-date information is available to everyone. Many new members access news almost exclusively online – especially news relating to their local area – so ensuring that meeting times, programmes, and interesting speakers are updated and highlighted on social media channels and websites is especially important alongside the more “traditional” media outlets.

Many WIs and federations have great relationships with their local media that they have built up over many years of providing timely and interesting content for the local community, but when considering how to approach your local journalists, it is helpful to work through the following checklist to make sure your approach is as successful as it can be:

- Build a good up-to-date contact list. Knowing who should get your press releases and event invites is a vital first step in securing good media coverage; many journalists receive hundreds of press releases on a daily basis and some do not even have the time to read through every email carefully, so ensuring that your email is sent to the correct person is the first step towards making sure your event appears in the news. Find out the names of your newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations; websites like [www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk](http://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk) provide lists of regional weekly and daily newspapers and their telephone numbers. Give them a call and ask which journalists cover your area and make sure you get their name and contact details. Keep an up-to-date contact list for your local media; start a spreadsheet that includes email addresses and telephone numbers. List the subject(s) the journalists usually write on too so you can target the right journalist for your story, and include a comments section and update it when a journalist writes about your WI or federation, giving brief details about what they covered.
- Always consider your audience. It is really easy to forget that some people have never heard of the WI, or know very little about the organisation, because we are all surrounded by WI business on a daily basis. Think about who you would like to reach through your media work and promotional activity, and tailor your news to these members of the public e.g. if you would like to encourage new women to come along to a meeting, make sure you include some background information on the WI in question, and the type of members that you already have; by doing this, you will encourage those new to the WI to picture themselves at a meeting, and reassure them

that there will probably be women very similar to themselves there already, waiting to meet them!

## **Planning**

Before embarking on any new activity or event, take some time to plan the steps that you are going to take to publicise it to make sure that any publicity or media work is not left to the last minute.

Making PR an integral part of every campaign or activity will mean that it becomes the norm for all members, and with every piece of work, you will improve your skills in working with journalists. Holding planning meetings well in advance of any action will mean that everyone understands what will be going ahead and what is required of them, and will allow you time to select and brief any spokespeople so that they get the best possible information across to the media.

## **What is news?**

This is something that you should think every time you write every press release, and before you get in touch with every journalist. News is newly received noteworthy information; that is, it is a report of something that has not happened before, or something that is new and is not widely known by the general public. If something has been covered before as a piece of news, but there is now something additional to add to the discussion, or there have been some developments, this could also be of interest to the media.

A good example of this is the WI's campaigning activities: every year a new campaign issue is selected by the membership, and therefore, the activities that follow are new and have not been worked on by WI members before. An example of something that has been covered before in the papers is healthy eating and the WI's involvement in the campaign. When you are considering adding to an existing discussion, it is important to think very carefully around what you have to add to the debate. Simply reporting that the WI has been working to improve education on healthy eating in local communities is not news; members have been doing this since the organisation was formed in 1915, but the WI's involvement in Love Food Hate Waste was news because it saw members working to educate people on how to use their leftovers, and suggested new and innovative recipes to help families and communities use as much produce as possible with little waste. This was of interest to the public because it was the first time that members had worked on such a project on a national scale. The journalists were able to illustrate the story of using leftovers by featuring WI members and their recipes, and the WI was able to promote members as experts in cookery, and by doing this, promote the range of different activities on offer to members.

## **Print media**

Printed news is usually the first option that springs to mind when considering how to promote WI events, and it is still one of the most successful in terms of media coverage. Your local printed media could include a local daily newspaper, a wider reaching weekly paper, and some kind of monthly magazine – many local authorities print their own magazines, and several publishing houses have more glossy monthly county-wide magazines – all of these could be interested in your meetings and activities. The first thing to do is familiarize yourself with your target titles; journalists often comment that it is really disappointing when new contacts get in touch and they haven't read through their newspaper or magazine to find out where their news might fit – it is essential to have done your research and worked out where you think your story should go. For example, if you are inviting a journalist to an event, make sure you contact the events or "what's on" pages; if you are sending in a press

release reporting on some community campaign action, send it over to someone on the news team.

Another key element to consider when promoting your story or event is photography; many journalists want to use a good clear image to illustrate their story, and if you have one ready to use, this could make the difference between your stories being chosen. Invite a local photographer along to your event, or arrange for a photographer to come along and take photos for you to use; these photos could also be featured on your website, social media and promotional materials, so even if they don't end up in the local paper, they won't have been wasted. It can also be worth getting in touch with a local newspaper's picture desk if you are planning something particularly exciting e.g. a surprising campaign action, or a mass participation event like the library hugs that took place as part of Love Your Libraries day; many of these were featured in local newspapers as they were out of the ordinary, but illustrated a really important local campaign that engaged many members of the local community.

An important thing to remember when considering print media is lead times; whilst daily newspapers can take press releases in one morning and print the news the following day, a weekly paper will obviously need more planning time, and many monthly magazines follow a three month schedule. It is usually worth getting in touch with any titles that you would like to work with in future just to check how much notice they need, and which method of communication they prefer to make sure you have the best chance possible of featuring in future editions.

### **Broadcast media**

Local radio and TV are a great way of inviting people in to your meetings and events as they get to experience the activity almost first-hand, which will hopefully attract them to your next meeting! If you are inviting broadcast media along to an event, it is really important to make sure that you have a spokesperson who is ready and willing to speak to the journalist and let them know all the key facts that you wish to share.

The best way to prepare a fellow member – or yourself – for such an interview is to put together a media briefing containing a few short key facts that you wish to get across. The PR department is always very happy to send over facts and figures if needed for any interview, and there is a draft media briefing at the end of this pack for you to use as a template if you wish.

### ***WI Life***

As the WI's membership magazine, *WI Life* is always keen to hear stories from particularly interesting WI meetings and events. Make sure that you have the editorial team on your press release list to keep them up-to-date on your activities, and invite them to regional events that could be of interest to the wider membership; even if they cannot send someone along to cover the event itself, they might be able to send a photographer, or even use your own images to accompany a news mention or bigger feature. They are also always on the lookout for members to profile for their regular membership feature so if any of your members have particularly interesting jobs or hobbies, get in touch with the editorial team to find out more.

Space in the magazine is obviously limited so please do not be too disappointed if they are unable to use your feature or news item, but as they are keen to feature anything that promotes the WI as an organisation for all women, and demonstrate that it does not adhere to stereotypical images, keep them in mind when planning promotional work.



For further publicity, many members also take their copy of *WI Life* to a local doctors/dentists surgery for their waiting rooms once they have finished with it. It's a great way to attract new members and also promote the WI to your local community – recycling also helps the environment too!

## **Digital communications**

### **Social media**

With more and more people sharing information online, it is important to have an up-to-date social media presence for your WI and federation. Many journalists check social media to keep abreast of developing stories as they happen, and anecdotally we have been told that many potential members check their local WIs on Facebook and Twitter to see if there are any activities taking place that they would like to attend, so it really is worth keeping these updated with your schedule and programme of events. It is also good to report on meetings and events using photographs wherever possible, to give an idea of what happened and to provide as much information as possible for someone considering whether your WI/event is for them.

Sharing your news using social media is as important as traditional press releases as it has the potential to reach so many more people than a local paper or website. Twitter and Facebook also provide an immediate forum for discussion, so people who might be interested in coming along to your meeting or event can ask questions straight away, and find out more about whatever interests them.

It is also important to spend time developing links and relationships with neighboring WIs and local journalists and newspapers/websites using your social media platforms, to encourage them to follow you to find out what is happening in your WI. This can be more helpful than sending out a press release as it is far more immediate, and can let the world know about things that might not warrant or be suitable for a traditional press release that might not be picked up by a newspaper, but could be interesting to the wider public, or for things that happen quickly and need to be shared fast e.g. if a new speaker is booked for an event or meeting, or to announce a new president or visitor to your WI.

There are guides to help you with all aspects of using social media from setting up your accounts, to staying safe online on the WI Moodle – [www.WItraining.org.uk](http://www.WItraining.org.uk). Always take care when sharing information online and remember that it is a public space; whilst there is no need to be worried about using it, make sure that you take care to note security settings, and check online agreements with providers before signing up.

### **Websites, events listings and blogs**

Online events listing pages can really boost visitors to your events and meetings, which can lead to a great increase in membership figures. If someone enjoys attending a local event organised by a WI, then hopefully they would like to know more about the organisation and will come along to your next meeting.

You should follow the same format for getting in touch with online journalists as outlined for print journalists; research news and events website carefully to make sure that you get in touch with the most relevant person to discuss your event. It is also worth dropping over a short introductory email before sending over a press release or event invite; this will make sure that you have the right person's contact details, and you can also check lead times and deadlines.

Local community blogs are also being established all the time so make sure you check to see if there are any for your local area. As more and more people look online for their news now, bloggers play an important role in reporting and sharing local news, so make sure you research any relevant blogs in your area and invite bloggers along to your meetings and events. It is worth remembering that many bloggers write their blogs alongside working full time, so they might not be free to attend events during the day on weekdays, but it is always worth getting in touch beforehand to see whether they would be interested in learning more.

The NFWI blog – <http://behindthedoormap104.blogspot.com/> – is also open to contributions from members who have held a particularly interesting event or taken part in some campaign action so please bear this in mind. Members have guest blogged for us on a variety of different topics so please take a look to see if you could add to the discussion. Similarly, if you blog on your own site about WI activities or events, please let us know through social media and we can alert our followers to your features.

## Getting your message across

Writing press releases may seem intimidating at first, but with practice you will soon be at ease writing text to promote your WI activities and events. Remember to always follow the same formula outlined below to achieve a professional and clear format, and try to include images wherever possible to really bring a story to life.

The one vital thing to remember whenever you sit down to write a press release is that it is the announcement of new information – of news – so make sure that you are always saying something that hasn't been featured before, or that you are adding something original to an existing conversation.

### Format and style

The style throughout your press release should be concise and as catchy and intriguing as possible. Remember that this is an announcement of new information – what would you like to read about if you knew nothing about the WI? Does this story stand out? Is it clearly of interest to readers/viewers? In short, is it tempting enough to catch the eye of an editor who receives hundreds of news releases every day?

### Do

- Use A4 letterhead, or include the WI logo on the right hand top corner of the page.
- Clearly state what this document is: use the phrase PRESS RELEASE or NEWS RELEASE underneath the logo.
- Use double spacing and leave wide margins on both sides. This allows journalists to edit if they wish.
- Headlines should be in bold but do **not** underline.
- Most releases should be one page of A4 only, two is the absolute maximum.
- Paragraphs should be kept short and to the point.
- Give your contact name(s), email address, and phone numbers for the journalist to obtain for further information.
- Include a photo where possible. Always include the names and titles of the people included on the images and make sure you have consent from everyone.

### Do not

- Use a range of different fonts or colours for the main text – this looks unprofessional and messy. Use the WI style guidelines for clarification.
- Overuse adjectives like 'amazing' or 'fabulous' in your text; save these types of words to liven up your quote and make it more personal. Most importantly, stick to presenting the facts and do not put words/thoughts the journalists' mouth.
- Let the release run on for more than two pages. Try to include all of your key information on one page, and then use a second page for your contact details and the notes to editors section.

### Date

Put the date at the top and then put 'For immediate release' underneath, or embargo it with a formula like 'EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.00AM 01 June 2013' if the news is time sensitive. Use an embargo if you do not want the press release to be used until a specific time. If you think

that you will attract coverage in local newspapers, radio and TV, an embargo will mean journalists will know the story won't have been used by competitors before a specific time.

## **Headline**

A good short headline is important in attracting the attention of the journalist. Keep the headline short – approx. six-nine words long – and interesting. Try to use an active verb, and avoid jargon and abbreviations.

## **First paragraph**

The first paragraph of your press release is vital. When a journalist is faced with a pile of releases every day, there is not enough time to read them all so most will be glanced at and discarded after the first few sentences. Aim to keep this paragraph to a maximum of 40 words. The first paragraph must include the main news and your chosen angle; do not get bogged down in detail.

Be sure to include the five W's in your press release in the first paragraph:

1. Who? e.g. the Women's Institute, the leading women's organisation
2. What? e.g. unveils a nationwide campaign or local community initiative
3. Where? e.g. at a conference or festival
4. When? e.g. to be held or published today
5. Why? e.g. to raise awareness of a new campaign

## **Second paragraph**

This should provide the next piece of information: either more details about the above or new information. This could be further information on a local VIP or WI spokesperson.

## **Third paragraph and additional paragraphs**

This could be a quote from someone involved who is willing to talk to the press if requested. The quote must add a new dimension, such as the personal side of the story. Using a quote provides the opportunity to be passionate and more subjective. Alternatively it could be a quote from a WI spokesperson explaining the importance of the story in strong, authoritative language.

## **ENDS**

Always write ENDS at the end of your press release to show the journalist that anything above this is available to use and now in the public domain.

## **Contact details**

Your name, email address, and telephone numbers – home and/or mobile phone – should be included in clear, bold print at the bottom of the document, and make sure that you provide a contact number for when you are out of the office. This can make the difference between your story being covered or not. If a journalist is planning to use your press release, they will usually get in touch with you to check final details before printing to avoid any errors; always make sure that you can be contacted after sending out a release or all of your hard work might be wasted.

## **Notes to Editors**

This is where you can add additional background information for the journalist e.g. details on the history of the WI, or when your own WI/federation was formed, and remember to include your website address if you have one.

### **Important points to remember**

The press release should be able to stand on its own without any additional information. Can the first paragraph be printed as it stands and still get the message across? Once you have finished writing your release, always ask someone else to read it to see if they can make sense of the story without reading further.

Unfortunately if you get it wrong, your press release will end up in the bin with the other 80% of all those received, or it will appear in a very different form. If the information in your press release doesn't get used at all, then it may be that you are trying to push 'non-stories', you are not identifying an angle, or you are targeting the wrong publication. If a story is strong then journalists will ask for more details.

Always remember to announce your news via social media as well as sending out a press release. This is particularly important if you have built links with neighboring WIs and/or other community groups who might be interested in your news too; a journalist might not think that your press release is particularly interesting when it arrives in their inbox, but if they then see lots of online discussion of the story, they might be more inclined to follow it up.

Don't forget that if you require any advice from the NFWI Communications Department contact us on 020 7371 9300 or [communications@nfwl.org.uk](mailto:communications@nfwl.org.uk). There is an example of a press release at the end of this document that you can use as a template.

## Preparing for an interview

Always prepare for an interview with a journalist; have the facts ready and available in front of you if the interview is taking place over the phone or in person, and if it's live on screen, make sure that you have fully familiarized yourself with the messages that you want to convey before starting. Even if you are simply talking about WI membership in general and your own personal experiences as part of the organisation, it is really good practice to prepare a simple media briefing document to remind yourself of what you would like to say during the interview to make sure you don't forget anything.

One of the most important things to remember is that **there is no such thing as off the record**: this concept simply does not exist and you should consider that everything that you say to a journalist could be used. Remember that everyone feels nervous before and during interviews so this is completely normal, and taking the time to prepare will help to ensure that you feel ready as you can be before speaking to the journalist. There is a draft media briefing document at the end of this document to help you prepare your own plan.

### Questions to ask before the interview (depending on whether it is with a print or broadcast journalist):

- Is the interview live?
- Who else will be taking part? Is it just a one-to-one, or will there be additional contributors? If there are other people taking part, will there be a discussion/debate? If it is on radio, will there be questions coming in from members of the public?
- Check how the interview will be used: will it be packaged by a reporter and contain a number of elements?

### Points to consider before your interview:

- The shorter the interview, the clearer you must be.
- Think about the audience you are going to be talking to – what do they know about the WI already? What would they like to hear about?
- Think up anecdotes and illustrations involving people – this makes the information easier to relate to.
- Talk to the journalist to find out the line of questioning.
- Prepare for any potentially tricky questions in advance.

### Points to remember during the interview:

- Project yourself – inject more authority into your voice than you would in normal conversation.
- Do not take apparently hostile questions personally. Remember that you are taking part as a member of the WI, not as “yourself”, and you are representing the organisation as a whole.
- Respond positively and assertively. You can disagree with the interviewer (it is likely that you know far more than they do), but never be rude.
- Speak clearly and do not be rushed. It is better to make one point well than try to make several badly.
- Give brief informative answers to questions. Treat each question as an opportunity to get a point across.

- Do not deflect questions. Instead say something along the lines of, “that is a good point, but even more important is the fact that...”
- Do not worry about mistakes; even the most experienced interviewee will make mistakes. If the interview is live, simply apologise and continue. If it is pre-recorded, ask for the question to be repeated.

### **Points to remember after the interview:**

- Nothing is off the record. Even if the interview has officially finished, do not say anything that you would not like to be attributed to you in print, on radio or on screen, as a representative of the WI.
- If you are taking part in a radio or television interview and you have been wearing a microphone, always remove this before having any other conversation – you do not want your private discussions broadcast for everyone to hear!

### **Appearing on television and on video**

How people appear on screen matters almost as much as what is being said – think about how you view different people on screen and how much you notice about their mannerisms and clothing etc. – so it is important to plan how you will appear beforehand. Whilst gestures can help illustrate a point, do not use too many hand gestures or you could detract attention from your discussion points. Try not to wear anything distracting, and make sure that your hair is not covering your face or distracting you; the audience’s focus should be on your messages and not your appearance to make sure that you come across clearly and directly without any other interference.

### **Appearing on radio**

A smile can completely transform the tone of your voice to try to smile during your interview and sound as lively and interested in your topic of conversation as possible. Have your key points in your media briefing document in front of you to refer to and be prepared to explain and elaborate a point but avoid reading anything from a script and do not rustle papers. Speak into the microphone and turn away if coughing etc.

## Negative publicity

Understanding how to deal with any negative media attention is as important as working to promote your activities and events. Negative publicity can undo many hours of hard work and determination to promote your WI or federation. Sometimes WIs can get involved in issues or events that can lead them to be viewed in a negative light by the press or the community. This can be through the printing of factually incorrect information, misquoting someone, or simply negative actions from members. However; by maintaining good relationships with your local media and learning how to handle negative publicity quickly and effectively when it arises, more often than not something can be done to limit any damage.

The first thing to remember is do not panic; everyone experiences some negative attention from time to time, the most important thing to do is work out to remediate it and move on. If you think there is negative media attention developing around something that your WI, federation or WI members have done, the first thing to do is to get in touch with your Federation Chairman to inform her of the situation. She will in turn inform the NFWI. If you can't speak to your Federation Office or Chairman, please contact the NFWI Communications Department on 020 7371 9300 or [communications@nfwl.org.uk](mailto:communications@nfwl.org.uk) to let them know what has happened. This step is absolutely vital, although it might seem difficult, to ensure that everyone who needs to know about the situation is informed. Journalists will usually try to get a comment on a situation as soon as possible, and will try several different channels of communication to get one e.g. if they cannot speak to you or your WI, they may call the federation themselves before you have had a chance, or even the NFWI to get a comment. By ensuring that everyone is informed and aware of what is happening, you are taking the first important step towards diffusing the situation before it gathers speed.

### **What do to if...**

#### **You have been misquoted**

If your local paper quotes you and the information they print is clearly inaccurate, write a letter to the editor for publication clarifying the situation, explain what you actually said, and ask them to publish your letter or print a correction in the next edition of the paper.

#### **Your WI has been portrayed in a negative way by a journalist**

Take the same action if it is a negative article. In this letter, explain that your WI has been misrepresented and go on to summarise the positive aspects about the organisation/your federation and the impact it has made on the local community.

#### **A story breaks regarding your WI's involvement in a sensitive event or issue**

If your WI has been embroiled in a sensitive event or an issue that has been leaked to the press, you will need to plan a strategy. If a journalist gets in touch to e.g. let you know that someone has made a complaint about your WI/has had a bad experience at a recent WI meeting and asks you for a comment, do not panic. Politely let the journalist know that you will try to find out more information and you will call them back as soon as you can: do not feel that you have to give a reaction or comment immediately as you may not be fully aware of the background, and you should take some time to consider the official response on behalf of the organisation, after discussion with your federation and/or NFWI PR department.



*Step One:* Let your Federation Chairman know what is happening, and then contact the NFWI Communications Department. Then inform all members in your WI and ask them not to talk to the media. Ask them to direct all press enquiries to the NFWI Communications department.

*Step Two:* Draft a press statement with help from the NFWI Communications Department if appropriate.

### **Negative comments on social media**

Facebook and Twitter play an important role in many people's lives now, and as mentioned before, many people use both mediums as a way to check local events and community activities. As more and more people engage regularly with one another – regardless of whether they have “met in real life” – using these instant online communication tools, there are probably going to be occasions when this interaction is not wholly positive.

If you have been contacted by someone with negative feedback on your WI meeting or event, remember not to take it personally and ask for more details so that you can help them get to the bottom of their grievance; ask what happened and why they feel negative towards the organisation. Ask for background information and then speak to members involved. Sometimes, a simple apology if someone did not enjoy the meeting they visited will suffice, but remember to let them know that whilst this WI might not be for them, they can try other WIs in the local area in case they might be more suitable; there is a WI for everyone! If someone is unwilling to interact or engage, or is posting offensive or upsetting personal messages on a WI or Federation social media page, we would recommend that these are removed and the follower blocked from posting similar messages in future; advice is the same for Facebook and Twitter.

Some organisations will also try to use your WI Facebook and Twitter feeds to advertise their own companies; as a charity, we cannot allow other organisations to advertise using our name – on our social media platforms – and as such, these adverts should be removed. The NFWI Communications Department is happy to provide further clarification on this if needed, please just get in touch.

## Writing newsletters and promotional materials

Many WIs send their meeting reports to local newspapers to let them know that local members are up to, and what activities are planned for the coming months. The more exciting and lively these reports appear, the more interested journalists will be in your meetings, so make sure that you present your news in a clear and interesting way, to encourage as many new members along to your meetings as possible.

There are further guides to writing newsletters and promotional materials on the WI Moodle and remember to always use *The WI Guide* when putting together all information material – it is full of useful information and pointers on how to make your information as appealing as possible, including the WI's key messages that should be used to underpin everything that we all do.

### Tips for writing newsletters

1. Develop a clear and consistent design including a masthead and stick to it every issue.
2. Always use the correct WI logo – you can download a copy from the WI Moodle along with guidelines on how to use it effectively.
3. Have obvious sections to the newsletter so readers can easily find what they are looking for e.g. put some sections in boxes, or divide with clear lines.
4. If space allows, always use 12pt.
5. Try to avoid underlining headings; this is dated and can make the overall look of the newsletter clumsy. Instead, try to use bold text.
6. Stick to a maximum of two font styles; anything more than this looks confused and unprofessional. For information on the WI fonts, please use *The WI Guide*.
7. Make sure that the newsletter is carefully proofread. Most people who work on a document, be it a report, article or essay are usually too close to it to see errors.
8. Encourage dialogue with your readers – this could take the form of praise, criticism or ideas – all of which you should welcome and will ultimately make your publication better.
9. Don't be tempted to just stick to two columns. Without making the newsletter look too busy, you can experiment with other combinations.
10. If you have email address, why not email the newsletter?
11. Many people shy away from change with the excuse that their readers won't like it. People only fear change as it represents the unknown; once they see something new, they often forget what it looked like before.

### Meeting reports

Reports of WI meetings are often about routine business and therefore of limited interest to others and are not newsworthy. Dull and dreary descriptions of meetings can create a bad impression of the group and can undo all the efforts you may be putting in to promote your WI as a lively and interesting group to join. Some regional newspapers print a whole page of meeting reports – good and bad. Others have a policy of printing only the most interesting from the WIs in the area, so reports written for the local newspaper should never be regarded as the same as a report of the minutes for members absent from the meeting.

Better publicity will result if reports are sent only when something interesting or original happened; for example, if the speaker is a well-known personality or has done something unusual. Do not report on routine matters, such as the singing of Jerusalem, that the president presided and the secretary read the minutes and someone else made the tea; this information is of no interest to anyone other than to those attending the meeting. Pretend

that you are a non-member and read through your report – does it make you want to attend the next meeting? If not, think about how you could make it more engaging, or perhaps ask someone else to add their thoughts and opinion, or even ask a new member what they would tell a friend about your meetings to get some new input into your content.

### **Tips for writing engaging reports**

- Send your report to your local paper promptly after the meeting to allow them time to publish, and give as much time as possible for potential members to find out about the next meeting.
- Follow guidelines for length and style.
- Type or print all information clearly.
- Report on the highlights, not the routine business – mention the activities or speakers, rather than the business section at the beginning of every meeting.
- Make it lively and interesting – you could include a quote from new members to bring the report to life.
- Give a contact telephone number and email address to make sure that any interested journalist to get in touch in they need further information.

### **Promotional materials**

Putting together interesting and informative promotional materials to advertise your WI activities and events in your local community – leaflets, posters, banners etc. – is key to attracting new members along to meetings, and there is step-by-step advice in *The WI Guide* on how to do this to achieve some great results. Making these documents is another great reason to arrange for some images to be taken at key events and meetings; the photos can be used throughout your promotional materials and really paint a vivid picture of what being part of the organisation can be like for potential members.

The WI Guide also outlines how to put together professional reports and newsletters and is available for download from the WI Moodle, where you will also find useful templates.

## Requests from the media for WI contributors

As the largest women's voluntary organisation in the UK, it isn't surprising that the NFWI Communications Department is contacted on a daily basis by a huge range of journalists and production companies asking for WI contributors for their projects.

These requests range from interview requests with the NFWI Chair for an article in a national newspaper profiling a WI campaign, to asking for a media advert to be circulated to all members looking for women to take part in a new quiz show. Obviously every request is considered carefully from the starting point of whether such a project would promote WI membership as something for all women, and increasingly, we have found that researchers and producers are getting in direct contact with WIs and federations through their own websites and social media platforms.

Anything that we cannot directly work on i.e. that would not promote the WI as an organisation in and of itself (it wouldn't feature a WI judge, or show WI members taking part in campaign activity etc.), but that we believe would be of interest to a large number of WI members is advertised on the PR Noticeboard on the Moodle. This area is updated regularly with requests for WI members to take part in a range of different programmes such as *Channel 4's Superscrimpers* where WI members offered money saying tips, and the *BBC's Great British Bake Off*, where a WI member reached the last few weeks of the competition in its second year. When there is significant benefit to the organisation in terms of publicity, we very happily work with production companies to find contributors and contestants e.g. Anne Harrison features as a judge on ITV's *Food Glorious Food* so when the programme makers asked if we could help them to arrange a WI members-only episode, we were happy to help them to find willing members to take part because prime time television exposure of members positioned as cookery and baking experts is of benefit to the organisation; this is a rare situation and not something readily offered by production companies.

We receive a range of other requests where a production company is essentially trying to advertise their show to a large group of people – WI members in our case – at the same time for as little effort as possible, without really considering whether the programme would have widespread interest amongst the membership. Whilst we do not want to pass judgment on these show, if they would not advertise the WI in and of itself, and we do not believe would have widespread interest to the membership e.g. do not involve WI members sharing or practicing skills learned and developed through the WI, we do not advertise them. As previously mentioned, the Communications Department probably receives between ten and fifty of these requests on a weekly basis, so it could quite easily turn into a full time job trying to find people for television shows unrelated to the promotion of the organisation; which is why there is a PR department.

If television production companies and programme makers get in touch with your WI or federation with similar requests, it is of course up to you to decide whether your members would be interested, but please bear in mind that if members do take part in anything that does not fit within the charitable or educational objects of the organisation, or does not promote campaign objectives within the existing mandates, they must do so as an individual and there must not be any mention of the WI at all.

As always, the Communications Department is on hand if you would like to discuss any proposals for involvement in any programmes.

### **Advertising to members**

As previously mentioned, many organisation, and occasionally other charities, will sometimes place unsolicited adverts on WI social media platforms in an attempt to advertise to many women at once. Unless an organisation is paying to advertise with your members, we would advise that all advertisements are removed, in line with regulations under charity law.

## Contact details

General communications advice – [communications@nfwf.org.uk](mailto:communications@nfwf.org.uk)

NFWF queries – [hq@nfwf.org.uk](mailto:hq@nfwf.org.uk) / 020 7371 9300

## WI members will start a nation-wide conversation about organ donation

**XX%** of WI members today voted on the organisation's new campaign at the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) Annual Meeting, imploring all members to discuss their family and friends. The resolution: *"The NFWI notes that three people die every day whilst waiting for an organ transplant. We call on every member of the WI to make their wishes regarding organ donation known, and to encourage their families and friends, and members of their local communities to do likewise"* will now become the campaigning focus for over 212,000 WI members across England, Wales and the Islands.

WI members have campaigned for organ donation as far back as 1952, and asked for the Organ Donor Register to be set up in 1972 so this resolution follows a long history of highlighting the importance of organ donation and of ensuring that organ donors' wishes are known. This renewed call for a conversation to make your intentions about organ donation clear goes one step further by encouraging WI members – and their friends and family – to discuss an often uncomfortable topic. We hope the campaign will abolish myths, banish the taboos about this conversation, raise awareness of the need for donation and prevent confusion over individual wishes if organ donation is a consideration.

The UK's organ donation consent rate is amongst the lowest in Europe, yet while only 30% of the UK population is on the Register, over 80% of people say they are willing to donate organs or consider donating after their death. There is huge public support for donation but despite recent successful campaigns, there are a number of reasons why this hasn't translated into an increase in consent rates for organ donation.

**XXX XXXXX, WI spokesperson,** said:

"WI members have never been afraid of making their voices heard when an issue is important however difficult the conversation might be, and few things are more important than making sure your family and friends know what you'd like to happen to your organs if the worst should happen. There is still a staggering discrepancy between the number of people requiring organs and the number of people who wish to donate organs after their death, and the best way to address this problem is through a national conversation; a heart to heart about organ donation.

“There are taboos about death and many are left confused and unaware of their loved ones’ wishes after they die so making a decision about organ donation can be tremendously difficult. This resolution calls on all members to make their intentions on organ donation known to their loved ones, taking away the burden of deciding whether or not to donate organs and allowing family to honour decisions.

“No one wants to think about such tragic events but having these conversations and making your wishes known is key; ultimately we want to end the reluctance to talk about organ donation and help to make it a normal part of end of life care that people will expect to be asked about donation and expect to know their family members’ wishes. To agree to donate organs or tissue is a unique act of kindness, made all the more special by the fact that donations often take place at a time of great loss. The WI campaign will celebrate this and get people across the nation talking about their own organ donation decisions.”

**-ENDS-**

**If you would like further information, please contact PRESS OFFICER  
CONTACT DETAILS INCLUDING EMAIL AND TELEPHONE NUMBER**

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**Notes to editors:**

1. Existing NFWI mandates on the issue:
  - *This meeting urges that the law should be altered to permit people to bequeath their eyes so as to allow surgeons, without obtaining the permission of the executors or next-of-kin, to remove the cornea (front covering of the eye) with adequate safeguard, and in suitable cases, from patients who have died. (1952)*
  - *The meeting urges that improved arrangements should be made for people who wish to donate part of their own body for transplant purposes. (1974)*
  - *To facilitate the donation of organs for transplant and thus reduce the alarming time spent waiting for donors, this meeting urges HM government to consider the systems of presumed consent and required request or other appropriate measures. (1994)*
2. The WI is the largest voluntary women’s organisation in the UK with more than 212,000 members in over 6,600 WIs. It plays a unique role in enabling women to develop new skills, giving them opportunities to campaign on issues that matter to them and their communities, and provides wide-ranging activities for members to get involved in.
3. For further information please visit [www.theWI.org.uk](http://www.theWI.org.uk)
4. National Transplant Week 2014 will take place from 7 – 13 July to raise awareness of organ donation. This week of awareness raising is organised annually by NHS Blood and Transplant.