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Friday, 26 May 2023

Dear WI Member,

We know many of you have been waiting for an announcement about what is next for Denman, following the sale of the college and our extensive consultation with members last year. You will be aware that we have been working hard behind the scenes to develop a new model that works for our members today, a model which is inclusive, flexible, and accessible for all our members.

The proceeds from the sale of Denman College are held in permanent endowment and so I am afraid this is a necessarily long legal process to ensure we are releasing these funds to be used in the best way to reach all members. When Denman was opened in 1948 it was innovative and filled an identified gap. In 2023 we face the same challenge to ensure the Denman legacy lives on.

It is fair to say that the fall-out from Covid-19 has shone a light on education nationwide, prompting sector wide reflection and discussion about how we move forward in a post-Covid world. The Denman Trust have therefore needed to develop a model that is innovative and attractive to the membership both now and in the future, especially as we face overwhelming economic challenges and the cost of living continues to rise. We have worked closely with other providers to see how they are responding and to ensure that we can offer something unique for members that doesn't compete with the educational activities available locally, provided by federations or other providers.

Throughout the history of Denman College you raised concerns over course fees, location, and felt that it was inaccessible for some members. This has been central to all our conversations about the future of Denman and how we use the proceeds from the sale. With this in mind, and keeping your views from our consultation at the heart, we are delighted to introduce you to the fundamental pillars of our new proposal, 'The WI Learning Hub, powered by Denman'. We hope this offers something for everyone.

Our fundamental vision of the new model is one that offers free nationally available online education to WI members, supported by a fundraising and commercial strategy, making education more convenient and accessible for all. This means our online Denman at Home offer will continue as it today, but with no costs for WI members, allowing members to access these courses whenever and as often as they wish.

In addition, to support the continuation of in-person education, but not fixed in one physical location, we will offer national grants to federations, along with expertise and support from our national team, to regionally expand the WI's educational network based on the needs identified by members locally and in a way that can be accessed without significant travel or personal expense.

We have been delighted with the enormous success of Denman at Home since its launch in Spring 2020, and know how much our members appreciate having an extensive online offer. But equally, we know how much members value the in-person teaching too, and that is why it is important to us that our model allows for both and offers this in harmony with the educational offer in each federation. We want to ensure that the new Denman educational model caters for everyone with virtual and in-person opportunities whilst also supporting the work already happening at all three levels of the organisation.

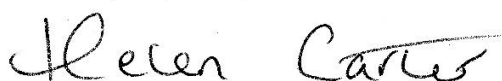
Our vision is for the WI's educational offering to reach all members, regardless of disposable income, geographical location, or accessibility requirements, allowing all members to pursue their passion or academic goals and reach their full potential. An educational model that reaches those who have previously felt excluded from opportunities internal and external to the WI due to time and financial constraints. We are excited to be in a position where this is something we can achieve.

Please bear with us as the final stages of plans are put in place. We know you will have questions about how this will work in practice and we will keep you updated as the model develops.

We are sharing this information with you now as we are completing the final stage of the Charity Commission consultation, which includes a public notice of the intention to use part of the permanent endowment fund, and the details of where you can share your feedback. The proposal is that we release £2.75m of the proceeds of the sale to fund this new educational model. This will leave the remaining funds (£4 m) in permanent endowment accruing interest and ensuring a sustainable future for the Denman Trust.

This notice of the intention to release some of the proceeds of the sale goes live today, Friday 26 May 2023, and is attached to this email. This notice is also on the WI website and the Denman website. If you have any feedback, please share this directly with the Charity Commission using the details on the notice.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Helen Carter
Denman Trust Chair