

Dr Joan Smyth CBE,

SI Bangor, N. Ireland

Joan became a member of SI Bangor in the early 1970s and has been an enthusiastic and committed Soroptimist. She was Club President for the Club's 40th year, having held Executive posts and been particularly active with PAC. Joan's dedication and the calibre of her work were recognised by her election as Regional Club representative and then Regional President in 1992. She organised the International Post-Convention tour in 1991, bringing 45 delegates from all over the world to Northern Ireland to be hosted by local Soroptimists, thus increasing international goodwill and understanding.



Having served on the FEC, Joan was elected Federation President in 2002, leading the SIGBI delegation to the Sydney Convention in 2003 and visiting clubs in the distant parts of the British Isles. Her Conference in Belfast attracted 1,600 members and the large profit provided bursaries to bring new members to subsequent Conferences. Enthusiastic about Constitution, she chaired the local committee supporting NI Clubs to submit Resolutions to Federation AGMs.

A loyal supporter of No. 63 in London, Joan regularly introduced friends and colleagues to the Residential Club. She has been a regular attendee at North/South and Federation Conferences, often making arrangements to encourage members from Club and Region to attend. She has enjoyed many International Conventions and been invited to chair sessions at two Federation Conferences. Currently, Joan is Deputy Chair in charge of Programme and Speakers for the 2023 International Convention in Dublin.

Joan served on NI public bodies covering education, careers guidance, health and housing, before being appointed Chair and Chief Executive of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which promotes sex equality in NI, from 1992-1999. She supported applicants at tribunals, and attended and chaired the European Committee on Equal Opportunity. She has spoken on equal opportunities at Commonwealth and international conferences.

From 1999-2007 Joan became the first woman to chair the Board of the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company, responsible for all public transport in NI. She successfully argued for funds (£105 million) to update the railway system and procured new trains under European rules, updated the bus fleet, and supported local initiatives such as encouraging women drivers, Ulster in Bloom and Schools Art.

When Joan was Chair of the Progressive Building Society, the organisation funded the NI Soroptimist Public Speaking competition for a number of years.

From 2007-2016 (2 years as Deputy Chair) Joan was appointed to the Board of the All-Ireland body developing the electric grid, introducing significant wind power and meeting climate change targets.

Amongst other appointments, Joan was an independent member of the committee appointing County Court judges and Resident Magistrates and an Independent Assessor for Public Appointments, ensuring adherence to equal opportunity. She was also elected by her peers as the

first woman to chair the NI Chief Executives Forum, innovating private-public sector interaction with elected representatives in the absence of an Assembly.

Joan is President of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland, ensuring the future of steam trains throughout Ireland. She chairs the NI Women's Fund, awarding small grants to women for training, childcare to pursue studies, to set up a business or to learn English. A long-standing member of Bangor Drama Club, promoting arts in Bangor she was instrumental in establishing a small theatre.

Joan was appointed a Member of the UK Women's National Commission and a Board Member of the British Council. Currently she is a trustee of GAPS UK, which works with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (formerly DFID) to ensure that women in areas coming out of conflict are part of the peace process and trained in political decision making. She is a Trustee of the Church of Ireland Retirement Fund, assisting clergy to be housed as they leave active ministry.

Joan was awarded the CBE in 1998 and was made an Honorary Doctor of Law of Ulster University in 2000.