

I'm sorry I can't be with you this morning for your conference.

The Women's Council of the Isles is an important event in the trade union calendar and I am delighted that it has once again returned to Northern Ireland.

I hope that those who are visitors to our shores will have some free time to have a look around the city and beyond; and to enjoy at least a sample of what Northern Ireland has to offer.

We are all aware of the contribution women make to our society, particularly in the world of business and in the workplace. While there has been great progress, and the Women of the Isles event is proof of that, there is always room for improvement. I firmly believe there is a vast reserve of untapped talent which could become an even more significant driver for the economy. It is important that we continue to provide opportunities and encourage women to fulfil their potential.

The Women's Council of the Isles brings together delegates who are focused and determined to make a difference, not just in the workplace but to our society as a whole.

I am confident that the knowledge, the networks and the new connections events like this offer will play a valuable role in building confidence, removing barriers and helping women progress further within their chosen field of work.

I wish you an enjoyable conference and continued success in contributing to the better outcomes that we all want to see.

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