education for sustainable development forum

30 YEARS

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

www.esdforum.org.uk

Northern Ireland environment link

Education for Sustainable Development Forum Annual Report 2025

2025 marks 30 Years of the Education for Sustainable Development Forum. Started in 1995 and previously known as the Environmental Education Forum, ESDF was established with the aim of enhancing the profile of environmental education in the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. ESDF, as part of Northern Ireland Environment Link, has been working together in partnership to develop positive attitudes and change behaviour towards the environment ever since. There has been a considerable amount of change in 30 years, and how and what is delivered through ESDF has evolved to suit our network and audience. However, that core aim still remains and continues to grow.

This year has been a positive reflection of the direction of travel of ESDF for the future, featuring more events, partnerships, network collaboration and new ideas in line with the ESDF strategy and action plan. It has been -and will continue to be a challenging period as we navigate the NI Curriculum Review and strive to advocate for Education for Sustainable Development. The climate crisis impacts all of society, locally and globally and should be addressed throughout education. As the review states - 'these are no longer abstract possibilities, but realities that today's young people are growing up with and are concerned about'

In Summer 2025 myEARTH, a new digital hub for environmental knowledge and action, officially launched in Northern Ireland. Developed in Collaboration with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, myEARTH's mission is to empower everyone in Northern Ireland to take action towards tackling the climate and biodiversity crises. A Summer ImpACT Competition has seen engagement with the platform from users, particularly families, signing up and completing action cards.
As part of the myEARTH project, we have delivered a range of in-person training days and skills workshops to encourage content creation for the site from organisations that use the website. These have included photography, podcasting, Canva and artificial intelligence. Further to these upskilling days, ESDF have also offered free training for our network. In June, we held 2 sessions of the 'Nature Wellbeing, Taking Notice' training by Field Studies Ireland. We were hosted at the Northern Ireland Forest School Association (NIFSA) base in the beautiful surroundings of Clandeboye Estate, Bangor. We welcomed a diverse range of participants for this free training day, which provided not just a learning experience, but also a chance to network and learn from each other whilst hearing more about ESDF, Field Studies Ireland, and the NIFSA site.

As well as these training sessions ESDF hosted and collaborated on first-time events. In spring, ESDF ran an event as part of Belfast Learning Festival by Belfast City Council. The event, Creating Connections in Education for Sustainability, brought together interested organisations and individuals from across Northern Ireland's education and environmental sectors. Four speakers from our network presented their unique work on Education for Sustainable Development. The session concluded with a panel Q&A, allowing attendees to explore the speakers' work more deeply and share their own perspectives.

Over the last year, ESDF have been working in partnership with the Northern Ireland Museums Council and the Natural History Museum, London. This culminated in an event held at National Museums NI called Museums of Hope: Fixing Our Broken Planet. The day featured a rich mix of talks, workshops, and participatory sessions, focused on sharing tools, ideas, and real-life case studies to support more hopeful, place-based responses to the planetary emergency.

Another project that ESDF have been supporting the organisation of was a youth-led event through the Northern Ireland Commission for Children and Young People (NICCY). At the 'Hear our Voices' event, we heard from passionate young people, sharing their views on climate and environmental issues, delivered a workshop with Climate NI and provided an information stand, along with other organisations from our network.
Key areas of delivery that ESDF have created this year include - opportunities for our network to avail of information stand spaces at events and careers days, continued signposting to funding opportunities, case studies from our network and a new summer spotlight highlighting our network's summer schemes, events and opportunities. In recent months, it has also been key to share the developments from the Education Department, as well as a survey to inform the new section of our website on placements, internships and apprenticeships.

This year's ESDF conference celebrated 30 years of ESDF and focused on the NI Curriculum Review at a key strategic point for the forum. Hosted at Oxford Island Discovery Centre on Lough Neagh, the event also included the AGM. Around 50 attendees from a range of organisations attended on the day. Presentations were delivered by Caitlin Quinn, Biodiversity Education Assistant, Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Dr Karen Kerr, Senior Lecturer (Education) PGCE Science co-ordinator at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work in Queen's University Belfast. Beth Frazer, Education for Sustainable Development Officer, presented on the ESDF annual review, 30 years of ESDF and the NI Curriculum review. In the afternoon, we welcomed Josh Watts to deliver the facilitation of workshopping on the NI Cirriculim review theme.

Our social media, newsletter, and website engagement continue to increase month on month, showing steady growth and a widening of our reach within our network. Resources and the work of our network continue to be shared and supported with more partnership work taking place.

In 2026 the growth of our network will be transferred to memberships while we onboard existing and new members. An exciting development is the plans for ESDF to introduce a free Youth Membership for 16 -24 year old students. Our member network are key to what we do at Northern Ireland Environment Link, and the introduction of a youth membership will elevate the youth voice, support young people with an interest in the environment and signpost to future opportunities.
This year, the committee have actively encouraged a suitable youth committee member to join. Caitlin Quinn was nominated and elected at the 2025 AGM.

Finally, a thank you to the NIEL team and our ESDF Committee, who continue to support and guide the work of ESDF. Thank you for the continued interest and support from the forum members and network for another year.
For further information on Education for Sustainable Development and to access resources and documents, please visit www.esdforum.org.uk

Current Committee

Chair: Charlene McKeown (KNIB Eco-Schools)
Vice Chair: Anne Cahill (RSPB)

- Alexey Janes (Ulster Wildlife)
- Caitlin Quinn (Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council)
- Karen Kerr (Queens University Belfast)
- Leah O'Neill (Architectural Heritage Fund)
- Mark O'Connor (Field Studies Ireland)
- Melanie Mulligan (Council for Curriculum Examinations & Assessments)
- Michael Cross (Education Authority NI)
- Natalie McLucas (Education Authority NI)
- Tammi Lowe (National Trust)
- Maia Taylor (DAERA) Observer

ESDF Members: https://www.esdforum.org.uk/our-members/

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