

Environmental Education Forum

Annual Report

January – December 2005

The year marked a major transition – a coming of age – of the Environmental Education Forum. It moved from a period of short term funding and temporary staff to the employment of a full time Co-ordinator on a three year contract. The funding moved from grant aid to a contract basis, and Articles of Association have been drawn up and a new Management Committee will come on board at the AGM on 25 January. Activities were low during the first nine months while the contract was being advertised and awarded, but the final three months of the year have seen great activity, with two Local and Global Days for student teachers and a revised booklet to accompany them, a new edition of LEEF and a major conference for January.

Management Committee

At its meeting on 13 January 2005 the Management Committee was delighted to learn that the Environment and Heritage Service planned to move to funding the Forum on a contractual rather than grant aid basis. At subsequent meetings on 17 February and 5 April matters relating to the contract and Articles were discussed. While it had been hoped that the contract could be progressed to begin from April, administrative delays meant that the contract could not be awarded until August, which caused a delay in Forum activities as no work could be conducted during the period prior to its final awarding. The Committee then met on 2 September and on 1 December to move forward plans for future activities.

Draft Articles of Association were prepared by EHS and circulated to the Committee for discussion and revision. These were finalised at the Management Meeting in September and will be presented for adoption at the first EEF Annual General Meeting on 25 January. The Articles formalise the workings of the Forum and stipulate the composition and role of the Committee.

Nominations were solicited for Management Committee from the sectors and organisations stipulated in the Articles. Nominations were also solicited for Officers. The new Management Committee will be elected and inaugurated at the AGM. The Committee will then elect its Chair and Vice Chair from among its members. All meeting dates will be set at that time to encourage good attendance.

Environmental Officers' Group

The EOG met on 1 December to discuss future activities. A new format was introduced to meetings, whereby there is a special discussion item for each agenda, as well as dealing with business and updating members of each others' work and activities. This format was successful and will be continued for future meetings. As with the Management Committee, EOG meeting dates will be set for the entire year.

Contract and Staff

The contract for servicing the Forum was advertised in June, with tenders to be in for July. The contract was awarded to Northern Ireland Environment Link in August with a start date of 1 September. The contract stipulates the employment of the Environmental Education Co-ordinator and the duties of that Officer, and includes support services to ensure the Co-

ordinator's efficient functioning. The contract includes all basic secretarial and support services but does not include the costs of events or publications; these are to be the bid of a separate grant aid application to EHS. Due to financial strictures this year on the EHS Grant Aid budget this application will be completed for the EEF activities from 1 April 2006.

The post of EEF Co-ordinator was advertised in Belfast Telegraph on 9 September for a three year contract. Shortlisting took place on 4 October and interviews on 14 October. From amongst an excellent field Andy Griggs, formerly of TACT and Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, was appointed and began work on 1 November. Andy worked four days per week for November and December, but will work full time from 1 January.

In the absence of a Co-ordinator during September and October but with Local and Global Days to be run at St. Mary's and Queen's Universities, temporary staff were employed to revise and prepare the Local and Global Day document and arrange for the conduct of the Days.

Events

With no staff in place it would have been difficult to proceed with the conference planned for April, and the Management Committee decided to postpone the event to January of 2006. This event has now been organised and will include the first EEF AGM. This event, entitled ***Taking the Vision Forward***, will take place on 25 January at St. Columb's Park House in Derry.

LEEF

An edition of the Newsletter of the Forum, Lines from the Environmental Education Forum (LEEF), was produced and distributed in January 2005. The Supplement for the first edition of the revised LEEF, from September 2004 on the subject of Ecological Footprints, was also circulated with that edition, which had Wildlife Gardening as its theme and the theme of its supplement. The Supplements were circulated to the Education and Library Boards.

At its 5 April meeting the Management Committee decided that LEEF should be produced each term, with a fourth edition produced in the summer with no supplement and targeted just at Forum members rather than the wider audience of most LEEF editions.

The next edition of LEEF will be produced for the Spring term in January 2006, with a supplement on the 'Waste Free Classroom'. This will be formally launched at the Conference and distributed immediately thereafter.

Local and Global Days

A Local and Global Day was held at Coleraine University on 18 January 2005.

Local and Global days for the 2005-06 academic year were held at St Mary's University College on 13 October and at Queen's University on 28 October, with the Coleraine University day scheduled for 17 January 2006. Negotiations to hold a similar day for the students at Stranmillis University College and for primary level teachers at University of Ulster are continuing.

The document to support Local and Global Days, including contact information on relevant Forum members and examples of lessons, was revised, reformatted and photocopied. For all students attending the Days, nearly 400 copies. In the future we hope to print this document after further revision which will take place over next few months.

Members' Communication and Networking

Since his appointment the Co-ordinator has been visiting and speaking with EEF Members and other organisations to develop his knowledge and contacts for future expansion of the EEF activities and membership.

Assimilation and distribution, usually by email, of relevant information, including the ESD Best Practice Guide and miscellaneous conferences and meetings takes place as requested by members.

This work requires a detailed and up to date database of contacts, including EEF members, ELBs, other education bodies, local authorities and others with an interest in education in Northern Ireland. Work continues on ensuring the accuracy of this database.

Website

Updating the website is a major priority for January/February. We have put a 'temporary under construction' page on the existing site address and pulled the content, which was woefully out of date. We hope to complete this by April 2006.