

ESDF AGM 2014

At our meeting on the 14th May which was held in W5, Matt Craig gave us a talk **Exploring the STEM Project** (*Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics*). Two of our members, Catherine Gleave and Carmel Fyfe showcased how STEM worked for them. It was a very interesting and informative conference.

During the past year I compiled 10 E-Bulletins which were sent to the members and all the schools and youth service west of the Bann and what was the BELB. Please keep sending information through as this is a great way for you to promote your work free of charge and to a wider audience. The new Education Authority came into effect on 1st April 2015.

One feature we re-introduced to the Bulletin this past year is the 'Member of the Month', thanks to those who have already taken part, don't worry if you haven't been asked your turn is coming.

The website continues to be updated regularly and I have to say the analytics reflect more people are using the site which is great and many are returning which is even better.

During the past year our ESD Days didn't happen, this was mainly due to change of people and certainly in St Marys due to illness. I am currently in negotiations and am hopeful of getting these days up and running again this Autumn/Winter term.

The management committee met 4 times during the past year. Attendance isn't as good as it should be but I am also very aware that two of our members are ill at present. I am also aware that funding cuts have left many of you not able to take time out to attend meetings. This is something we will look at when we have our next meeting.

In January Alyn, Catherine and Andy met with the Environment Committee at Stormont, they outlined what the ESDF is about and the following is what they would ask the Committee help with

What we would like to see:

The ESDF Forum would therefore like to seek the Environment Committee's help in assisting us closing the gaps in environmental education and advance ESD in Northern Ireland. We believe this can be achieved through the following:

1. Leadership and policy
 - Stormont to provide a lead in creating policy similar to the EOTC (Education outside the classroom) Manifesto in England which went out to consultation in Nov 2005.
 - Learning outside the classroom, in nature, for a meaningful amount of time, in order to understand nature better, should be made mandatory for all schools.
2. Partnership
 - Department of Environment and Department of Education to work together through their agents to provide a co-ordinated approach to the development of policies and strategies for the delivery of EE and ESD within the formal and informal education sectors.
3. Funding
 - Made available to support organisations delivering EE and ESD.
4. Support and funding

- The Education for Sustainable Development Forum (ESD Forum) is the main networking organisation within Northern Ireland for groups providing environment and sustainable development education to a range of target audiences.

This year continued the dedicated education stream to the NGO Challenge Fund. 39 schools were awarded funding. This was not only rewarding for the schools concerned but it also brought the Forum into direct contact with the projects, providing the opportunities for creating new contacts and learning about the work on the ground.

I visited many of the school projects and the enthusiasm of the teachers was great but nothing in comparison to the enthusiasm of the pupils. Some of the ideas for the projects were fantastic. I know it's wrong to single out projects but one school in Magherafelt and one in Dugannon in particular in my opinion were absolutely outstanding. Unfortunately the DOE have taken the Challenge Fund back in house so that valuable contact is lost.

My colleague Sean Kelly from NIEL a farmer at heart came up with the idea to apply to the Challenge Fund in partnership with ESDF to run an Environmental Hub at this year's Balmoral Show. This turned out to be a fantastic project, the marquee was used for positive environmental messaging and the opportunity for members to publicise their work to a wide audience (footfall at the show was approximately 100,000 people over the three days). As well as exhibition space for 26 member organisations, (most of which were forum members) a dedicated seminar area was used by NIEL to brief the Assembly Environment Committee on the review of the Birds and Habitats Directives (REFIT) and our proposals for the design of a Land Use Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Member organisations also utilised the display area and seminar space to promote their work to the public. Overall the dedicated environmental marquee was an overwhelming success and helped to bring awareness of the natural and built heritage to a new audience. Plans are already underway to see how we can replicate and build upon this success at next year's show.

Unfortunately due to funding cuts we have lost some members this year but again this will be brought to the next management meeting.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Craig for allowing me to continue with the work of the Forum.

I also want to thank the Management Committee for their support during the past year you definitely make my job easier and I particularly want to thank Alyn and Catherine, their support has been invaluable.

