

# ECO-UNESCO

Ireland's Leading Environmental Education Youth Organisation



ECO-UNESCO's  
**Young  
Environmentalist  
Awards**

## YEA REPORT 2025

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# YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST AWARDS 2025

ECO-UNESCO's Young Environmentalist Awards (YEA) is an all-Ireland environmental awards programme that celebrates and rewards young people for their efforts in raising environmental awareness and improving the environment. Established in 1999, YEA takes a youth-led approach by giving young people a platform to choose and engage with environmental issues that matter to them. In doing so, young people involved in YEA not only contribute to protecting and conserving the environment locally and globally, but also experience personal growth, develop key skills such as confidence and teamwork, and gain a valuable opportunity for their voices to be heard.

In 2024-2025, YEA supported over 330 groups of young people from 30 counties across Ireland in taking meaningful environmental action. Through a wide variety of local projects, groups addressed key environmental issues such as biodiversity loss, waste reduction, climate change and pollution. Their efforts not only raised awareness within their communities, but also inspired others to get involved.

Since its inception, YEA has engaged and empowered over 70,000 young people. The programme has extended its reach to 32 counties across Ireland, has supported over 6,000 youth-led environmental action projects, and proudly celebrated young people's achievements with more than 600 awards.



# WHAT PEOPLE SAY



It is greatly encouraging to know that we have, in this country, so many young citizens who strive to develop new visions for our shared future. As President of Ireland I am very proud of those citizens.

*Michael D. Higgins*



YEA had a greatly positive influence on each one of us. Instead of feeling helpless when hearing about problems with the environment and global warming, this project allowed us to realise our ability to make a positive difference in the world.

*YEA Team Young Cultivators*



Well done to you all on your organising of the YEA event. It was a wonderful experience for all. I was particularly impressed with the judges and all the time that they gave to the finalists. It was wonderful that they all got a chance to have their say and that their work and efforts were so appreciated and respected.

*Mentor Susan Rennick from Rockbrook 50/50 tree planting*



We confidently view YEA as a tool that has helped us open our eyes to a bigger picture. A lot of our environment's problems are rooted from what we take for granted. Taking part in this initiative has helped us see this first hand. The biggest thing we can do is spread the word and get people also seeing this bigger picture.

*YEA Team Food Consumption in our School*



What stood out most on the day was the atmosphere - one of genuine encouragement, enthusiasm, and hope. The feedback from the judges left our students inspired and more motivated than ever to continue their environmental journey. They felt seen, heard, and deeply valued, and for that, we are sincerely grateful. Thank you for creating a platform that elevates young voices and for reminding us all just how powerful youth action can be.

*Mentor Kevin Sexton from Celbridge Youth Environmental Action Group*



# IMPACT OF YEA 2025



**453,655**  
INDIRECTLY  
IMPACTED\*



**75,037**  
DIRECTLY  
IMPACTED\*



**30**  
COUNTIES  
REPRESENTED



**5,291**  
YOUNG PEOPLE  
PARTICIPATED



**28**  
AWARDS



**334**  
REGISTERED  
PROJECTS

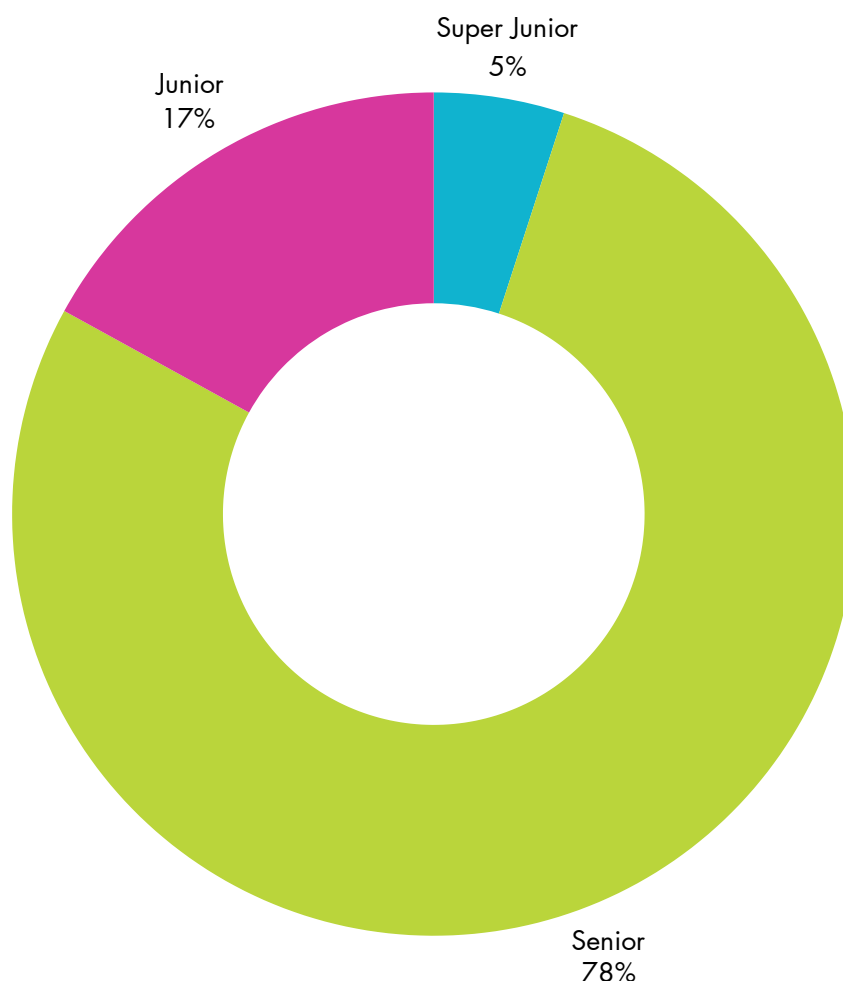
# PROJECT BREAKDOWN

A total of 334 projects registered for the Young Environmentalist Awards 2025, representing participants across all age categories; Super Junior, Junior and Senior. This marks an increase from 271 projects in 2024 and reflects a continued upward trend post-Covid in registrations.

Projects were diverse in nature, with most registering to the Biodiversity and Waste categories. This year saw strong geographic representation, with projects submitted from 30 counties across both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

## By Age Group

Most projects were registered as Senior groups (15-18) with a total of 259 projects. This is a noticeable increase from 178 in 2024. Participation in the Junior Category (12-15) represented 17% of all of the projects, while Super Junior (ages 10-12) participation represented 5%. This distribution is consistent with previous years, with the Senior category representing the majority of projects, followed by Junior and then Super Junior groups.



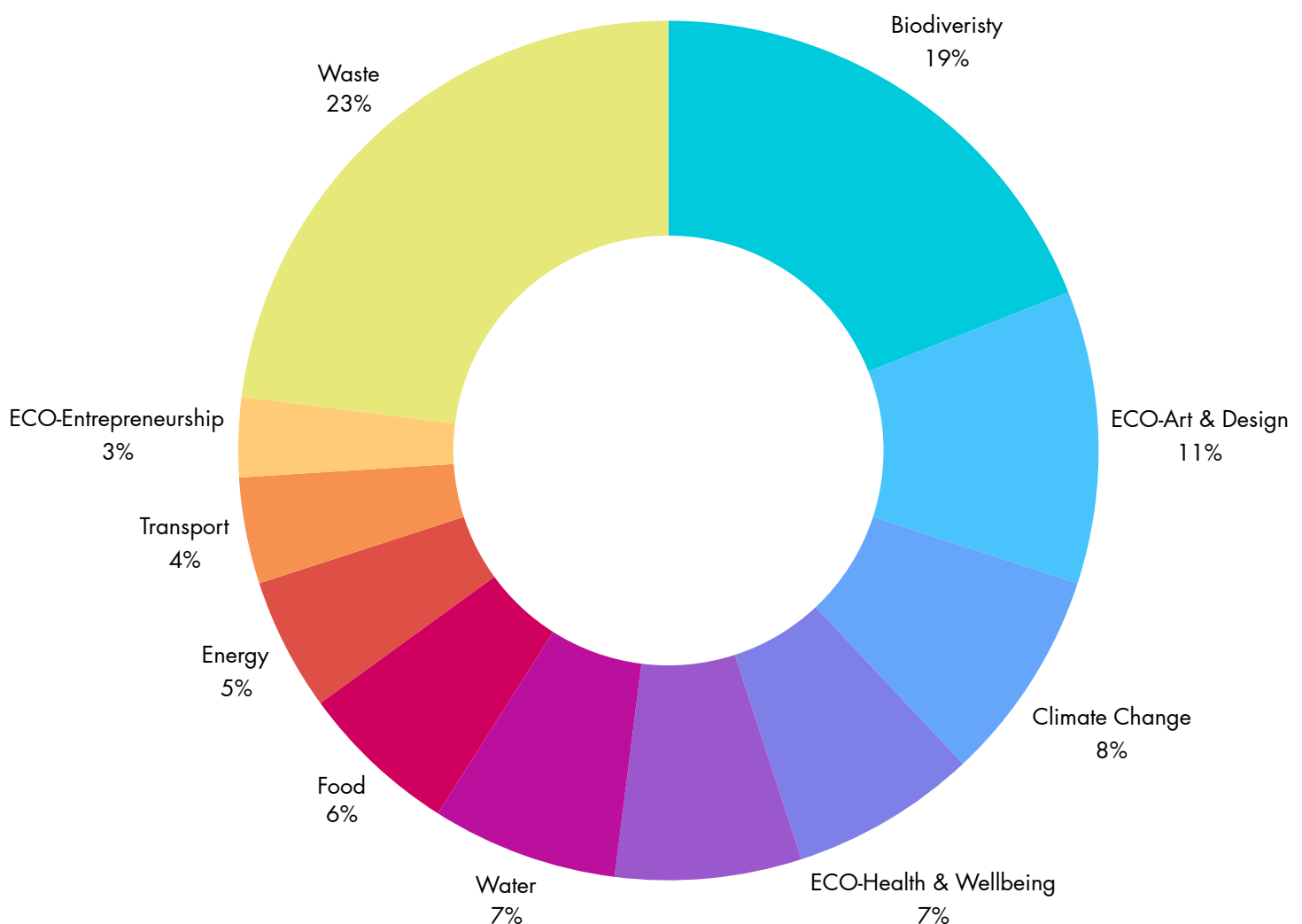
# PROJECT BREAKDOWN

## By Award Category

This year Waste and Biodiversity were the most popular award categories, with 23% and 19% projects submitted, respectively. Over the years, these themes have consistently attracted high levels of interest from young people engaging in the programme.

Many Waste-related projects focused on the newly introduced deposit and return scheme as well as the increasing visibility of e-waste, with particular concern around batteries and vapes. In the Biodiversity category, projects explored topics such as invasive species, community gardens and the importance of pollinators.

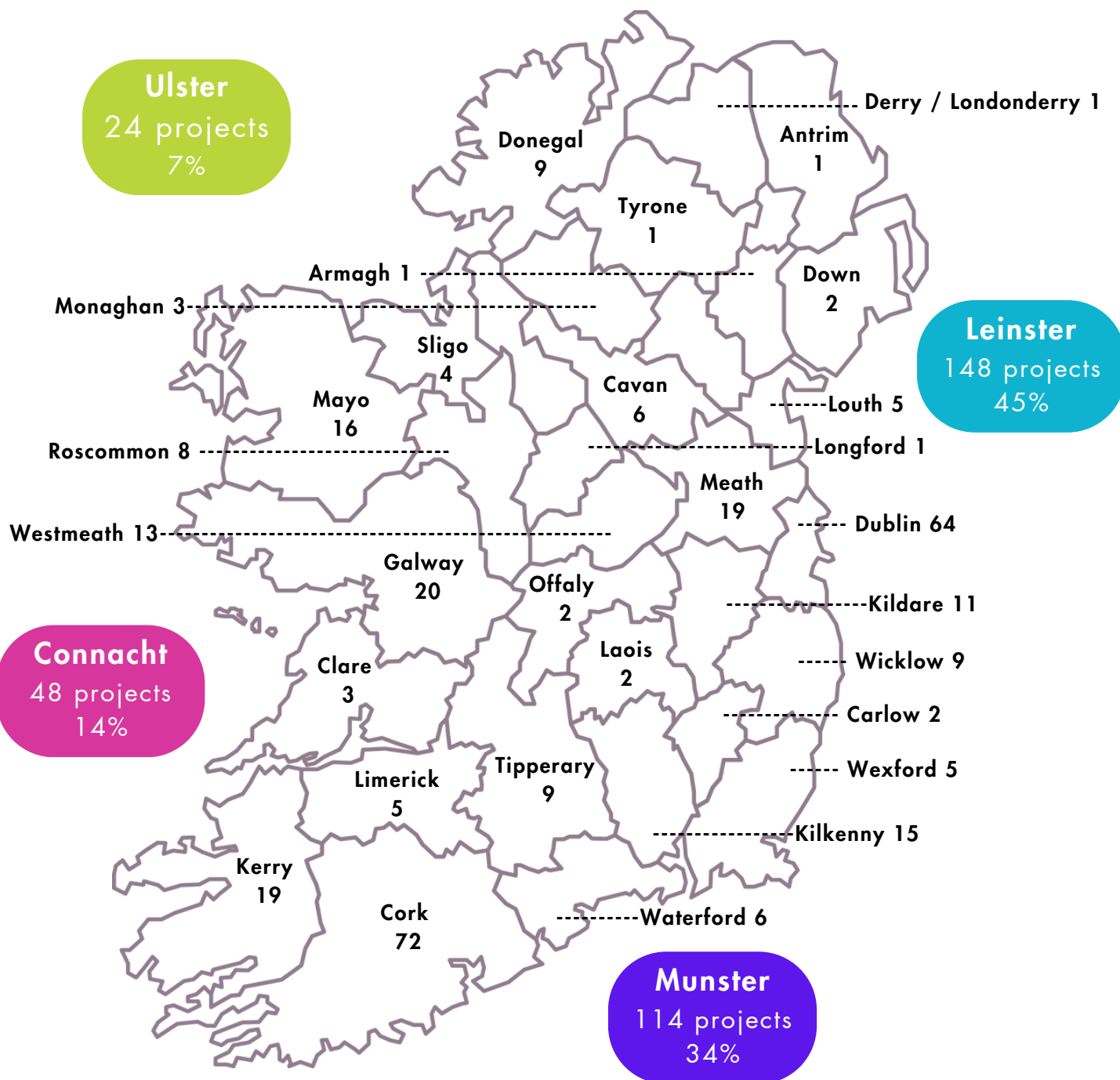
This year, ECO-Art & Design saw one of the most significant increases in participation, with entries more than doubling from 17 in 2024 to 37 in 2025. This reflects a growing trend among young people within the programme to use creative expression as a tool for environmental storytelling, awareness and advocacy.



# PROJECT BREAKDOWN

## By County

This year, 334 projects were submitted from 30 counties, up from the 271 projects submitted last year. While most counties followed the overall upward trend, Cork and Dublin stood out with the highest number of entries, rising by 36% and 25% respectively. Meath in particular recorded a significant rise in entries, growing from 4 projects last year to 19 this year. Provincially, as in previous years, the highest number of projects came from Leinster (45%) and Munster (34%). Ulster contributed 7% of total projects, highlighting opportunities for continued outreach and engagement in the region.



# ECO-WEEK

This year, the ECO-Week was held during Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Week, from Monday the 23rd to Friday the 27th of September 2024. ECO-Week is a series of free, short, and engaging online sustainability sessions designed to educate and inspire young people about the environment, the SDGs and environmental action. All workshops were tailored to align with the 11 YEA project categories, helping to spark ideas and build knowledge that could inform future projects in their schools or communities.

In a new approach this year, ECO-Week sessions were split into two distinct age groups: 8-12 and 13-18. This allowed us to expand our reach and provide age-appropriate content, enhancing both engagement and learning outcomes. Across the week, 20 themed workshops were delivered, with 3,946 young people from 205 organisations taking part. Recordings of all sessions are available on ECO-UNESCO's [YouTube channel](#).

## 20

ECO-Week Sessions

## 9,656

Registrations for ECO-Week Sessions

## 3,946

Attendees across ECO-Week

## 205

Organisations attended ECO-Week Sessions

### ECO-Week with ECO-UNESCO

ECO-Week is a free, online series of short, snappy sustainability sessions for young people across Ireland running alongside Sustainable Development Goals Week. Join us to learn more about the SDGs!

**Ages 8-12**  
September 23rd - 27th

	MONDAY 23RD	TUESDAY 24TH	WEDNESDAY 25TH	THURSDAY 26TH	FRIDAY 27TH
10:00 - 10:45	 Introduction to the SDGs with ECO-UNESCO	 Climate Change 101 with ECO-UNESCO	 Building Sustainable Communities with Cloughjordan	 Youth Voice at the UN with Mohammad Naeem	 Nature for Wellbeing with ECO-UNESCO
13:30 - 14:15	 Sustainable Lessons from Living on Mars! with Niamh Shaw	 Biodiversity and our Forests with Caillie	 Ireland's Energy Transition with SEAI	 Clean Coasts with An Taisce	 Giving Waste New Life with Rediscovery Centre

### ECO-Week with ECO-UNESCO

ECO-Week is a free, online series of short, snappy sustainability sessions for young people across Ireland running alongside Sustainable Development Goals Week. Join us to learn more about the SDGs!

**Ages 13-18**  
September 23rd - 27th

	MONDAY 23RD	TUESDAY 24TH	WEDNESDAY 25TH	THURSDAY 26TH	FRIDAY 27TH
10:00 - 10:45	 Sustainable Lessons from Living on Mars! with Niamh Shaw	 Biodiversity and our Forests with Caillie	 Ireland's Energy Transition with SEAI	 Clean Coasts with An Taisce	 Giving Waste New Life with Rediscovery Centre
13:30 - 14:15	 Introduction to the SDGs with ECO-UNESCO	 Climate Change 101 with ECO-UNESCO	 Building Sustainable Communities with Cloughjordan	 Youth Voice at the UN with Mohammad Naeem	 Nature for Wellbeing with ECO-UNESCO

# TRAINING

In addition to ECO Week, other training opportunities were offered as part of YEA 2025. These included the 6-Steps to Success Online Course for both mentors and young people, as well as online mentor sessions.

## 6-Steps to Success Course

Throughout the year YEA teams were encouraged to complete ECO-UNESCO's 6-Steps to Success Training which can be found online [here](#). This training consists of easily digestible videos, which guides learners through the 6-Steps Framework used in YEA; Getting a Team together, Choosing and Researching an Environmental Issue, Creating an Action Plan, Taking Action, Raising Awareness and finally Reflection.

49

Completed 6-Steps to Success Course

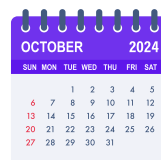


## Online Mentor Sessions

In addition to the course, live online mentor sessions were held at various points in the year.



Getting started with YEA  
25th September 2024



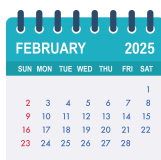
Choosing Your Topic &  
Research Tips  
16th October 2024



Developing & Carrying  
out an Action Plan  
20th November 2024



Communication &  
Awareness Raising  
11th December 2024



Reflecting on your Project  
15th January 2025



The Submission Process  
5th February 2025

6

Online Mentor Support Sessions held

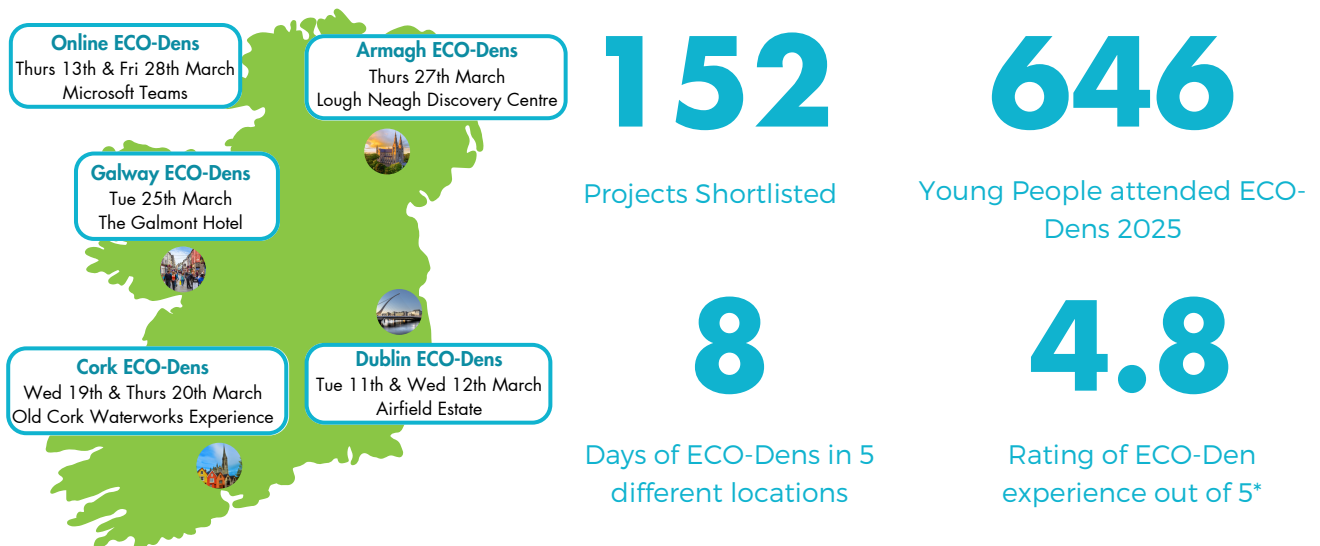
43

Attended, or viewed the Online  
Mentor Support Sessions

# ECO-DENS

ECO-UNESCO hosted its ECO-Dens Semi-Finals in March 2025, with regional “Dragon’s Den” style events held over eight days in five locations. Semi-finalist groups pitched their environmental action projects to expert judging panels, gaining valuable feedback and a sense of empowerment. Panels included 34 judges from diverse backgrounds such as academia, government departments, local authorities, and youth organisations, including the Department of Education, Department of Environment, Irish Girl Guides, Dublin City Council and BiOrbic.

This year, 152 projects were shortlisted for the ECO-Dens, with 646 young people from 78 organisations across Ireland taking part. The events offered a platform for young people to showcase their work, exchange ideas and be recognised for their efforts in environmental action.



\*Based on feedback received from attending groups

# SHOWCASE AND AWARDS CEREMONY

The YEA Final Showcase and Awards Ceremony took place on Thursday, 8th May at the Convention Centre Dublin, celebrating the incredible achievements of this year's young environmentalists. Up to 1,000 guests attended the event, including representatives from 104 finalist projects and special guests such as Lord Mayor Emma Blain.

The day opened with a vibrant project showcase, where finalists presented their work at interactive display stands alongside inspiring talks and activities. Guest speakers included Mohammad Naeem, former United Nations Youth Delegate for Ireland; Lisa Fingleton, artist, filmmaker, writer and grower; and Dr Brian Donlon from the EPA. A panel of 16 judges engaged directly with participants, exploring their innovative ideas and commitment to environmental action. In the afternoon, MC Clara Murray led the awards ceremony, recognising the dedication and creativity of all participants and announcing the winners of YEA 2025. A full summary of the day and all finalist projects is available in our Finalist Booklet [here](#).

104

YEA Finalist Groups



926+

Guests attended the Showcase and Awards Ceremony

28

Awards presented to Young People



# WINNERS' PROJECT PROFILES

## Overall Super Junior Award 2025

**What can Athlone learn? Ardnagrath's Green Team returns!**

**Ard Na gCraith N.S., Co. Westmeath**

A group of 19 young people from 5th and 6th class set out to tackle the issue of littering in their hometown of Athlone. What began as a concern quickly grew into a determined campaign for change. They met with local councillors to highlight litter blackspots and discuss the number and placement of public waste bins, ensuring that their community's needs were heard. Inspired by waste

management practices in other cities and the Re-turn Scheme, the group combined their creativity, engineering skills, and problem-solving abilities to design and build a prototype bin that uses sensors to detect and separate recyclable and non-recyclable waste. Their efforts went far beyond the technical, they launched petitions, delivered presentations, and maintained a strong dialogue with the local council, determined to make a lasting impact. Their mentor, Siobhán, was proud to see the students' voices amplified and impressed by their passion and maturity in leading real environmental change in their community.



## Overall Junior Award 2025

**Celbridge Youth Environmental Action Group**

**Salesian College, Co. Kildare**

A group of 10 young people from Celbridge took on the challenge of tackling climate change at a local level through a project that assessed the sustainability practices of local businesses. Their goal was to encourage greener habits in the community by awarding "Climate Friendly" window stickers to businesses that met their eco-criteria. This simple but effective initiative aimed to both

promote sustainable practices and guide customers toward environmentally responsible choices. The group carried out research, engaged directly with business owners, and led the entire process themselves, from setting the standards to designing the stickers. Their approach empowered the local community to think more consciously about their environmental impact and helped raise awareness of how small changes can make a big difference. Believing that local actions can lead to global impact, the group showed leadership, teamwork and a strong commitment to climate action and created visible, positive change in their town.



# WINNERS' PROJECT PROFILES

## Overall Senior Award 2025

### Marine Litter Project

#### Errigal College, Co. Donegal

"Bottle Back" is a dynamic campaign led by 25 Transition Year students from Errigal College in Letterkenny, focused on tackling plastic waste and encouraging their community to "take it to the bins." The group set out to raise awareness of SDGs 6, 11, 13 and 14, reduce single-use plastics in their school, and increase reusable bottle use by 20% by the end of the 2024/25 school year. To spread their message, they launched social media campaigns, wrote for local newspapers, and ran school assemblies. A standout moment was the release of their original "Bottle Back" song and music video, which reached over 5,000 views online. Their creative approach, combined with strong advocacy and practical action, helped them engage peers and the wider community. As Green Schools Marine Ambassadors, they're also set to share their campaign internationally in Greece through an Erasmus programme proving that local action can reach far beyond borders.



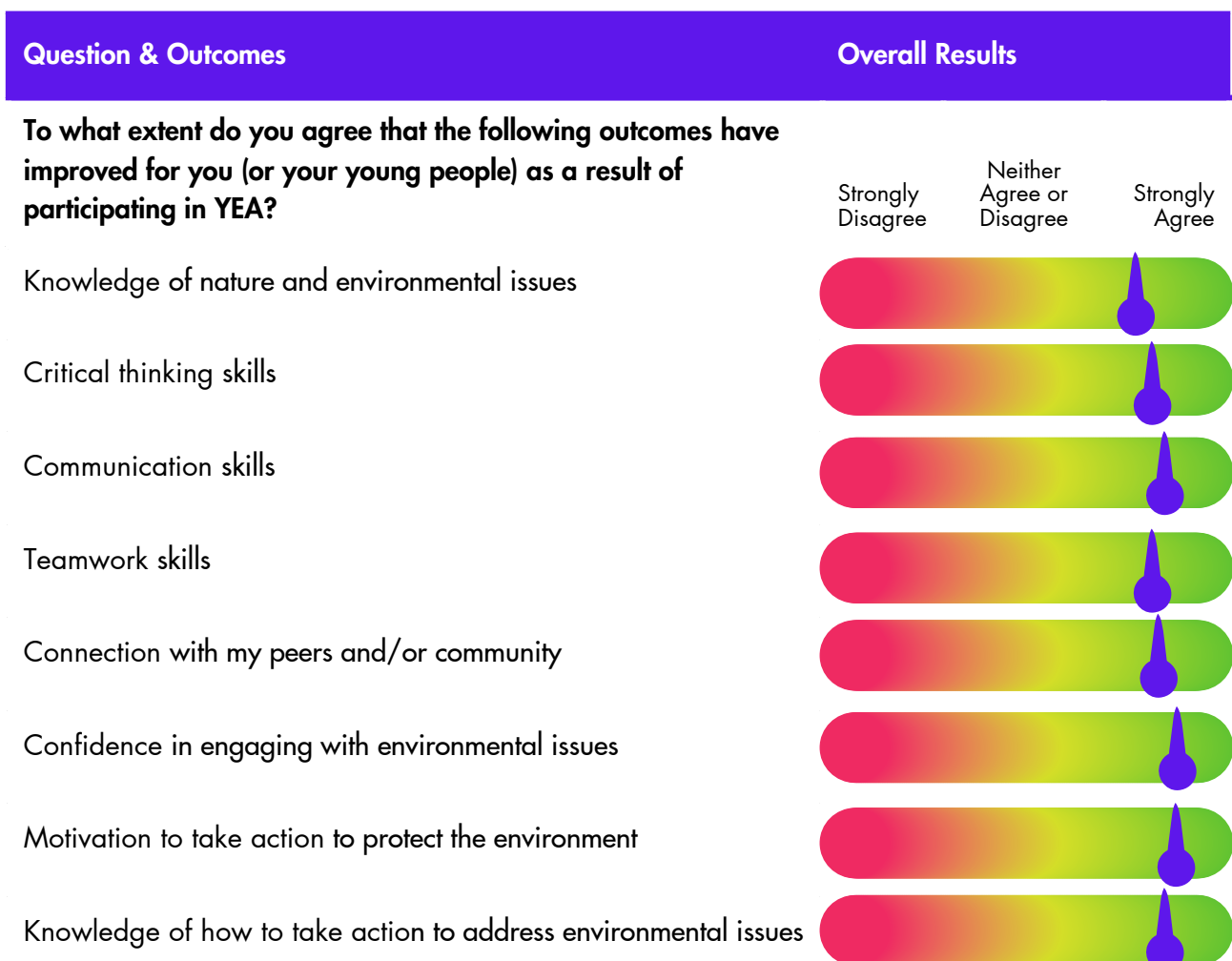
# FEEDBACK

This year, feedback was gathered from participating young people and mentors at four points throughout the year; after ECO-Week in September, after ECO-Dens in March, at the Showcase in May, and finally overall feedback.

## Overall YEA Feedback

Overall programme feedback was gathered using ECO-UNESCO's outcomes framework to assess the impact of the programme. Young people were asked to rate the extent to which their participation in YEA led to changes on these outcomes, while mentors responded on behalf of their young people. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from -3 (Strongly Disagree) to +3 (Strongly Agree).

Overall, feedback shows positive agreement across all outcome areas. In other words, both young people and mentors consistently reported improvements in environmental knowledge, communication and teamwork skills, and motivation to engage with environmental issues due to engaging in YEA. **This shows that YEA effectively supports young people in developing the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to take meaningful environmental action.**



# FEEDBACK

## ECO-Week Feedback

82%

Respondents reported a significant increase in environmental knowledge

4.8

Average rating of ECO-Week out of 5

56%

Respondents reported they were more likely to take environmental action due to attending ECO-Week

## ECO-Dens Feedback

93%

Would recommend ECO-Dens to a friend

“

Being able to learn about other projects and efforts from different schools

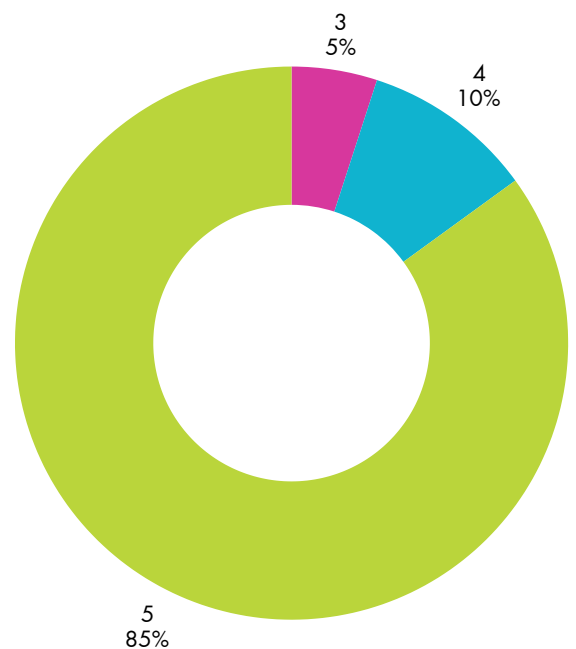
The helpful ECO-UNESCO team and the kind judges

The ways I was allowed to express my passion

The atmosphere was unbeatable

What young people liked most

”



Out of 5, how would you rate your ECO-Dens Experience?

## Showcase



Average rating of the Showcase Exhibition



Average rating of the Awards Ceremony

86%

Were inspired by the event to take further environmental action

# YEA COMMUNICATIONS

## Online Media Coverage

# 874,400+

Reached on all ECO-UNESCO social media channels

# 405,000

Impressions through the ECO-UNESCO Website

# 56,000

Reached through the ECO-UNESCO Newsletter

Number of engagements channel breakdown:



8,303



2,763



5,237

## Local and National Media Coverage

YEA 2025 received strong national and regional media attention, reaching audiences across the country through print, radio and online platforms. This broad coverage helped shine a spotlight on the creativity, commitment and achievements of young people taking environmental action. Their stories captured the public's interest and brought greater visibility to the issues they care about most. See below for some highlights.

- Connacht Tribune
- Corkman
- Donegal Daily
- Dundalk Democrat
- Enniscorthy Guardian
- Galway Advertiser
- Ireland - live
- Kerry's Eye
- Limerick Leader
- Meath Chronicle
- Northern Standard
- Nenagh Guardian
- Offaly Express
- Roscommon People
- The Anglo - Celt
- The Clare Echo
- The Echo
- Westmeath Independent

# 7.6 Million

Reach through online, national and regional media coverage

# ECO-UNESCO'S YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST AWARDS FUNDERS & SPONSORS

ECO-UNESCO would like to thank each of our funders and sponsors of the Young Environmentalist Awards 2025.



An Roinn Comhshaoil,  
Aeráide agus Cumarsáide  
Department of the Environment,  
Climate and Communications



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
Department of Foreign Affairs



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Oige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



pobal

government supporting communities

The Scheme to Support National  
Organisations is funded by the  
Government of Ireland through the  
Department of Rural and Community  
Development



epa

Environmental Protection Agency  
An Ghníomhaireacht um Chaomhnú Comhshaoil

IEN



Irish  
Environmental  
Network

seai

SUSTAINABLE  
ENERGY AUTHORITY  
OF IRELAND

Uisce  
Éireann  
Irish Water



Goodbody  
CLEARSTREAM



enrich

NEXSYS



UCD  
ENERGY  
INSTITUTE



Comhairle Cathrach  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City Council



CARO



comhairle chontae na mí  
meath county council



Comhairle Contae Mhaigh Eo  
Mayo County Council



COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR  
CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL

Wexford  
County Council

Comhairle Contae  
Átha Cliath Theas  
South Dublin County Council

dlr  
Comhairle Contae County Council



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe  
Galway County Council



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