



YEA 2026 REPORT



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Funded by the Circular Economy Fund

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YOUNG ENVIRONMENTALIST AWARDS 2026

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.

This year in 2025-2026, YEA supported 340 groups of young people from 29 counties across the island 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 work helped raise awareness, create positive change in their communities and inspire others.

Since its inception, YEA has engaged and empowered over 75,000 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

— ” —

The scale of involvement speaks to the commitment, organisation and determination of the young participants. It reflects a generation that understands the urgency of climate action and has bravely responded to it.

President Catherine Connolly



— ” —



Taking part in YEA has had a really positive impact on all of us. Planning and running our Pre-Loved Fashion Show showed us that young people can make a big difference when we work together. Thanks to YEA, we now feel confident, inspired and ready to keep taking action to protect our planet.

YEA Team Screen Fast Fashion

— ” —

Guiding this group was both rewarding and inspiring. One of the most surprising lessons was seeing how quickly the young people took ownership of the project once they realised their ideas were being taken seriously.

Mentor from CityWise



— ” —



YEA helped us understand environmental issues in a more practical and hands on way. By repairing and reusing bicycles we could see how small actions reduce waste and save resources. This made environmental problems feel more connected to everyday life and showed that taking action matters.

YEA Team Waste Not Want Not

— ” —

By taking part in YEA, we have become much more aware of not only the issues that we as people face relating to the environment but also how we can help reduce these problems and make the world a better place. We will use this knowledge further in life when dealing with climate-related situations and we are much more prepared to continue to help the planet in any way that we can.

YEA Team The Green Lesson



IMPACT

OF YEA 2026



872,706
INDIRECTLY IMPACTED*



106,684
DIRECTLY IMPACTED*



29
COUNTIES REPRESENTED



7,012
YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATED



28
AWARDS



340
REGISTERED PROJECTS

**Numbers based on figures self-reported by YEA participants. Directly impacted include people who were immediately included in and affected by the project, while indirectly impacted include people who were not directly involved but still experience effects of the project through secondary means.*

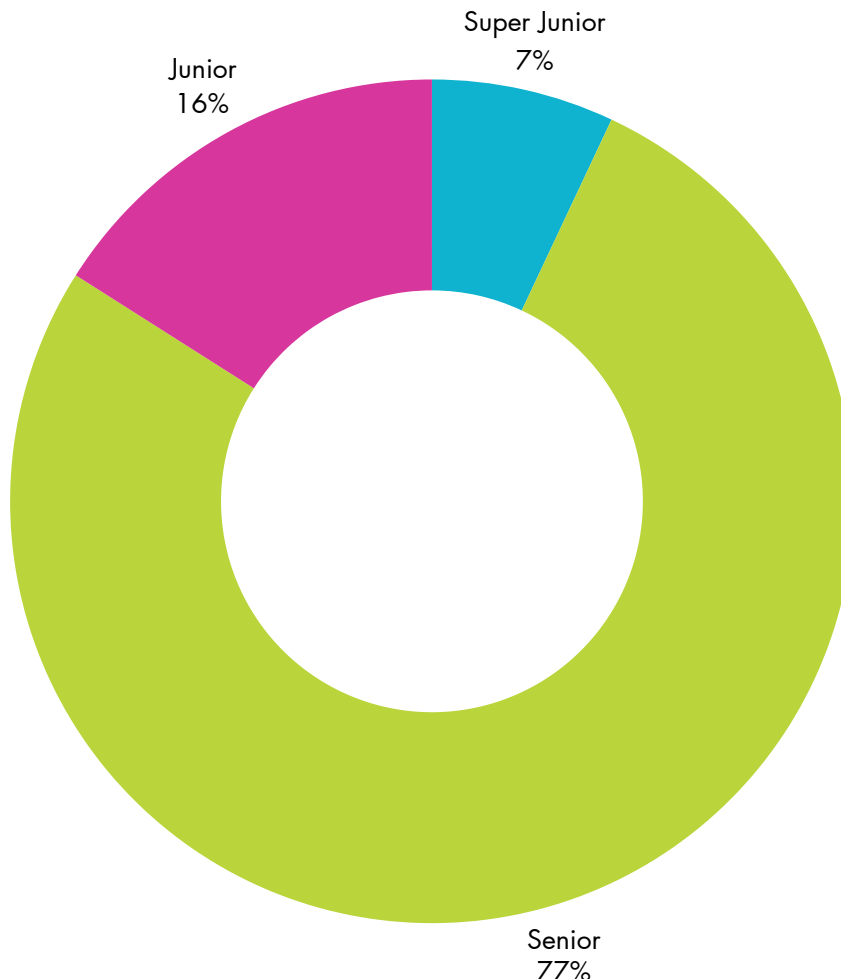
PROJECT BREAKDOWN

In total, 340 groups of young people registered for the Young Environmentalist Awards 2026 and carried out environmental action projects. This marks an increase from 2025 and reflects a continued upward growth in registrations.

Projects were entered into different age categories (Super Junior, Junior and Senior) and award categories, with Biodiversity and Waste being the most popular. There was representation across the island, with projects submitted from 29 counties from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

By Age Group

The majority of projects (77%) were registered in the Senior category (ages 15-18), with a total of 261 projects. This was largely driven by strong participation from young people in Transition Year across the Republic of Ireland. The Junior category (ages 12-15) accounted for 16% of projects, with 56 entries, while the Super Junior category (ages 10-12) represented 7%, with 23 projects. This pattern is consistent with previous years, with the Senior category accounting for the largest share of participation, followed by Junior and Super Junior categories.



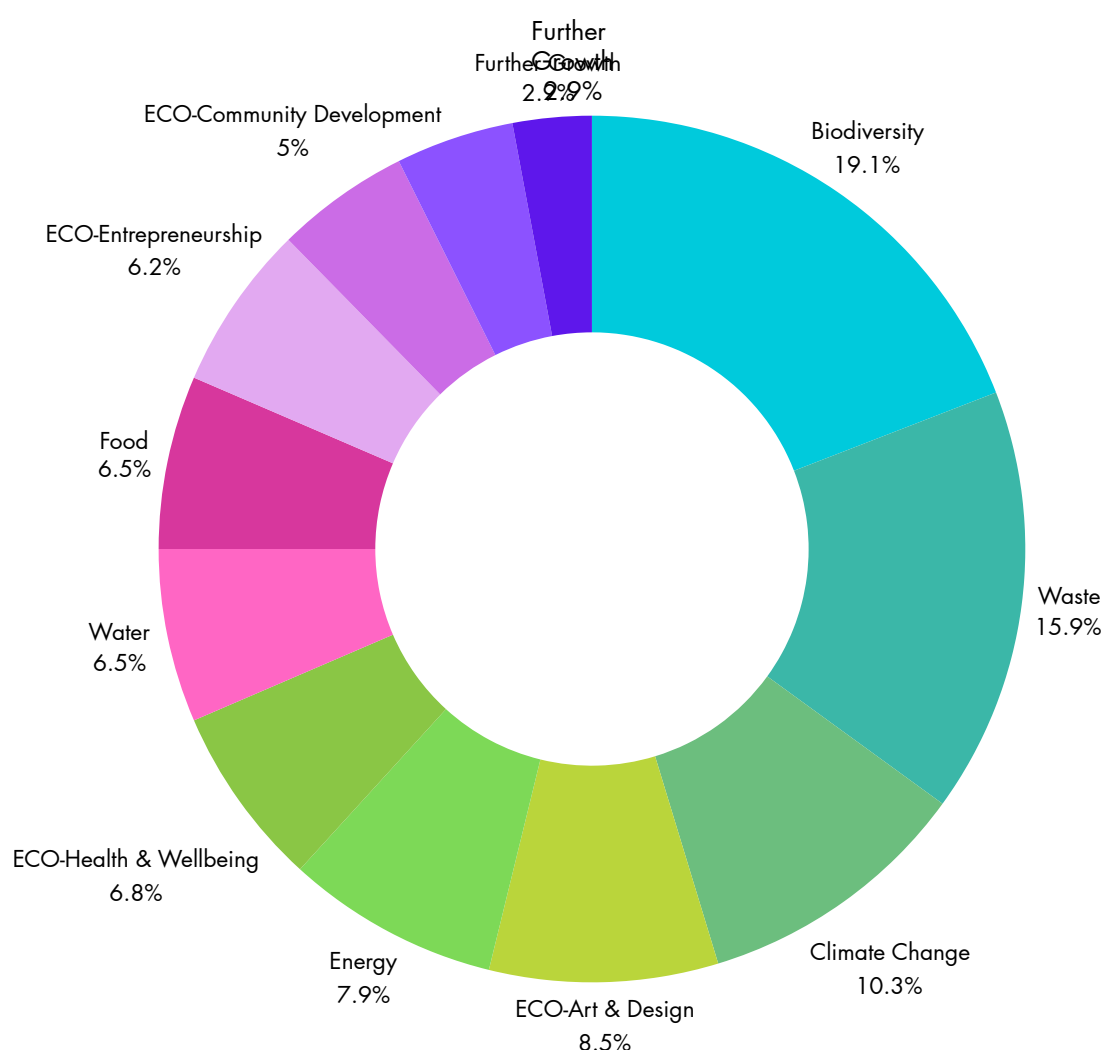
PROJECT BREAKDOWN

By Award Category

Biodiversity and Waste remained the most popular award categories, continuing a trend seen in previous years. However, while Waste has been the leading project category for the past two years, Biodiversity moved into first place this year. Biodiversity projects accounted for 19% of all projects, compared with 16% for Waste.

Waste projects commonly included swap shops, upcycling activities and raising awareness of the Deposit Return Scheme. Biodiversity projects, meanwhile, were largely centred on creating and improving green spaces to support biodiversity, as well as protecting species in decline, such as the Ringed Plover and the Barn Owl.

Several categories experienced notable growth in the number of entered projects compared with last year. The number of projects in the ECO-Entrepreneurship category increased by 110%, while Energy projects grew by more than 60% and Climate Change projects increased by over 30%.

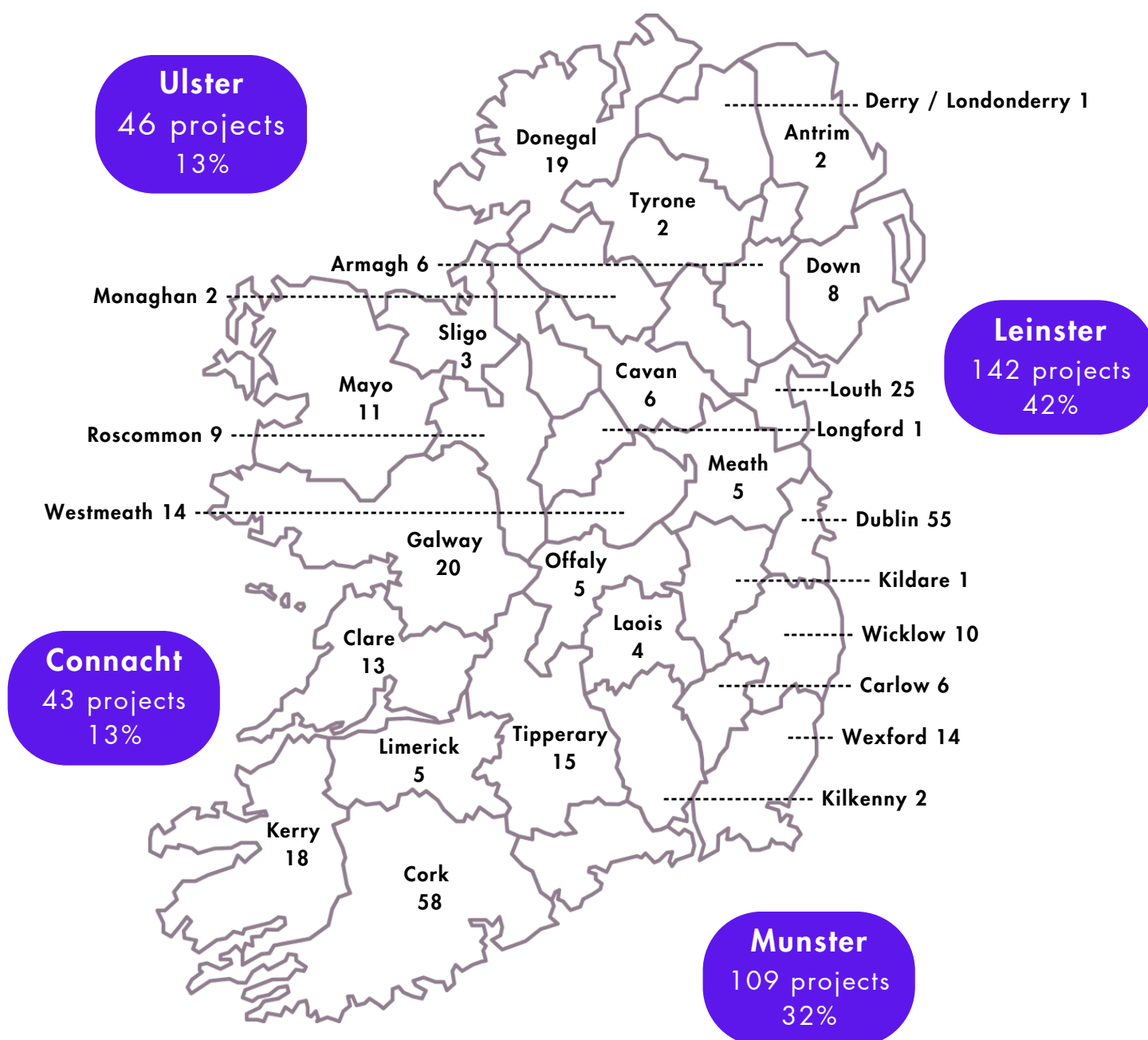


PROJECT BREAKDOWN

By County

This year, projects were submitted from 29 counties across the island, compared to 30 counties last year. As in previous years, Cork and Dublin recorded the highest number of entries, accounting for 17% and 16% of all submissions respectively. While the year-to-year fluctuations in entries across counties were evident, Louth saw the most significant increase, rising from 5 projects in 2025 to 25 in 2026.

At the provincial level, Leinster and Munster continued to contribute the largest shares of projects, accounting for 42% and 32% of entries respectively. Compared with last year, entries from Ulster increased by more than 90%, while entries from Northern Ireland specifically grew by over 200%. This strong growth reflects the increased outreach and engagement efforts undertaken across these regions during the academic year.



ECO-WEEK

ECO-Week 2025 was held in celebration of Sustainable Development Goals Week, from Monday 15th to Friday 19th September. ECO-Week is a series of free, online sustainability sessions designed to educate and inspire young people about the environment, the SDGs and environmental action.

A key focus of the week was bridging the gap between learning and action by encouraging participants to develop their own environmental action projects. Each session was linked to a specific SDG and a corresponding YEA project category, providing practical ideas and inspiration for projects that young people could take in their organisations or communities.

The programme was delivered through two age-specific strands: one for young people aged 8-12 and another for those aged 13-18. Over the course of the week, 20 themed sessions were delivered, engaging 4,726 young people from 220 organisations. Recordings of all sessions are available on ECO-UNESCO's [YouTube channel](#).

20

ECO-Week Sessions

11,660

Registrations for ECO-Week Sessions

4,726

Attendees across ECO-Week

220

Organisations attended ECO-Week Sessions



TRAINING & SUPPORT

In addition to ECO Week, a range of training and support opportunities were provided throughout YEA 2026. Ongoing informal support was available through phone calls, emails and one-to-one guidance, while formal learning opportunities included the 6-Steps to Success online course, mentor training and support sessions, and YEA project support clinics.

6-Steps to Success Course

The online YEA 6-Steps to Success Course is offered to all YEA groups to support them on their journey of carrying out an environmental action project. The self-guided course is hosted on the ECO-Academy [here](#) and consists of easily digestible videos that guide 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. YEA 2026 saw 151 course registrations, with 56 participants completing the course in full.

Mentor Training & Support Sessions

For mentors, monthly online support sessions were held throughout the year. While each session focused on a particular topic, they were informal and discussion-based, encouraging mentors to bring their own questions, ideas and challenges to the group. In total, six sessions were held between September and February. Alongside these online sessions, mentor training workshops on supporting youth environmental action were delivered in several locations as part of YEA 2026. These took place at An Creagán Co. Tyrone in October, The Playhouse Co. Derry in December and at Queen's University Belfast in January.



TRAINING & SUPPORT

YEA Group Support Clinics

Following a successful pilot in 2025, the team introduced online check-ins, or support clinics, to provide direct support to YEA groups. These sessions could be booked at a time that suited each group, offering an opportunity to connect with a member of the team to explore ideas, troubleshoot any challenges and get advice on their projects. In total, 133 young people and mentors took part in these sessions.

151

6-Steps to Success Online Course
Registrations

56

Successfully Completed 6-Steps to
Success Online Course

131

Attended YEA Group Support
Clinics

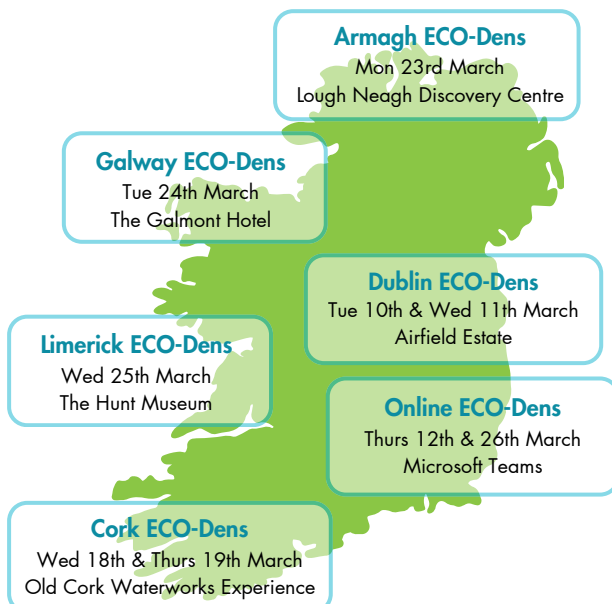
75

Attended Mentor Support Sessions &
Trainings



ECO-DENS

In March 2026, ECO-UNESCO held its ECO-Dens Semi-Finals, bringing together young people from across the island to present their environmental action projects. The semi-finals took place over nine days in six locations, including the introduction of a new regional event in Limerick. A total of 186 projects were shortlisted, with 804 young people from 101 organisations participating. At each ECO-Den, groups presented their projects to a panel of judges, receiving constructive feedback and recognition. The judging panels were made up of 51 representatives from a wide range of sectors, including academia, government departments, local authorities, environmental organisations and youth services. Participating organisations included the Department of Education, the Department of the Environment, Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland (SEAI), Ulster Wildlife and the University of Limerick.



186

Projects shortlisted

804

Young People attended ECO-Dens 2026

9

Days of ECO-Dens in 6 different locations

101

Organisations took part in ECO-Dens



*Based on feedback received from attending groups

SHOWCASE & AWARDS CEREMONY

On Tuesday 12th May 2026, we held our YEA Final Showcase and Awards Ceremony at the Concert Hall, RDS. The event brought together YEA groups, their mentors, friends from environmental and youth organisations, as well as members of the public, to learn about the young environmentalist's work and celebrate their achievements.

Throughout the morning, participants showcased their projects at interactive stands, giving guests the chance to learn more about what they achieved. The programme also featured guest speakers, including Peter Moulton and Adam Prokopiak Casey from last year's Junior overall winning group Celbridge Youth Environmental Action Group, Sarah Hourigan from Mental Health Ireland, ecologist and nature educator Soil Boy, and UN Climate Youth Delegate Seán Dillon. A panel of 25 judges engaged directly with participants, exploring their ideas and impact. In the afternoon, everyone came together for the awards ceremony, hosted by Clara Murray and attended by Councillor Gayle Ralph on behalf of the Lord Mayor of Dublin. A full summary of the day and all finalist projects is available in our Finalist Booklet [here](#).

110

YEA Finalist Groups



908+

Guests attended the Showcase and Awards Ceremony

28

Awards presented to young people



WINNERS' PROJECT PROFILES

Super Junior Winner 2026

Tackling Waste in Citywise, Jobstown, Tallaght.....the WORLD! from CityWise Education, Co. Dublin are a group of 25 young people who set out to tackle waste disposal practices within Citywise and the wider local community. The young people identified incorrect recycling and the absence of a brown bin in the café as key issues affecting their centre. Their overall goal was to reduce landfill waste, improve recycling habits, and increase awareness about responsible waste management. They carried out research on recycling guidelines and bin costs, met with the CEO to advocate for a brown bin and organised a litter pick at Cheeverstown Luas stop, with another planned for Jobstown Park. The group also designed educational posters, spoke to other clubs, and shared their work with the Echo newspaper to raise awareness beyond their centre.



Junior Winner 2026

Wear Your Values from St Catherine's College, Co. Armagh are a group of 15 girls that tackled the immense environmental and social harm of fast fashion by challenging the "weat it once" mentality within their school. Their goal was to raise awareness and empower students to adopt sustainable and ethical style alternatives to purchasing new clothes. The central action of their campaign, 'Wear Your Values,' was a whole-school fashion show. They worked to upcycle old garments, source unique finds from charity shops and hold clothing swaps. They raised awareness through workshops detailing textile waste statistics and promoting conscious consumerism. The project provided practical skills and shifts in mindsets to their fellow students, and showed them that a greener wardrobe is achievable and desirable for everyone.



WINNERS' PROJECT PROFILES

Senior Winner 2026

Go Wild from Meán Scoil Nua an Leith Triúigh, Co. Kerry is a dynamic campaign led by 6 Transition Year students, focused on raising awareness about the importance of the Ringed Plover, a species on the Amber List of BirdWatch Ireland. The group created a learning programme and an interactive workbook to support workshops, guided walks and talks that inform and engage people. The project supports Sustainable Development Goals such as Life on Land and Climate Action. They worked with Maharees Conservation Association to help protect these birds and improve understanding in their community. They also visit local primary schools to deliver fun, interactive sessions for younger students. Through this work, the group helped to raise awareness of the Ringed Plover and the importance of protecting local habitats within their community.



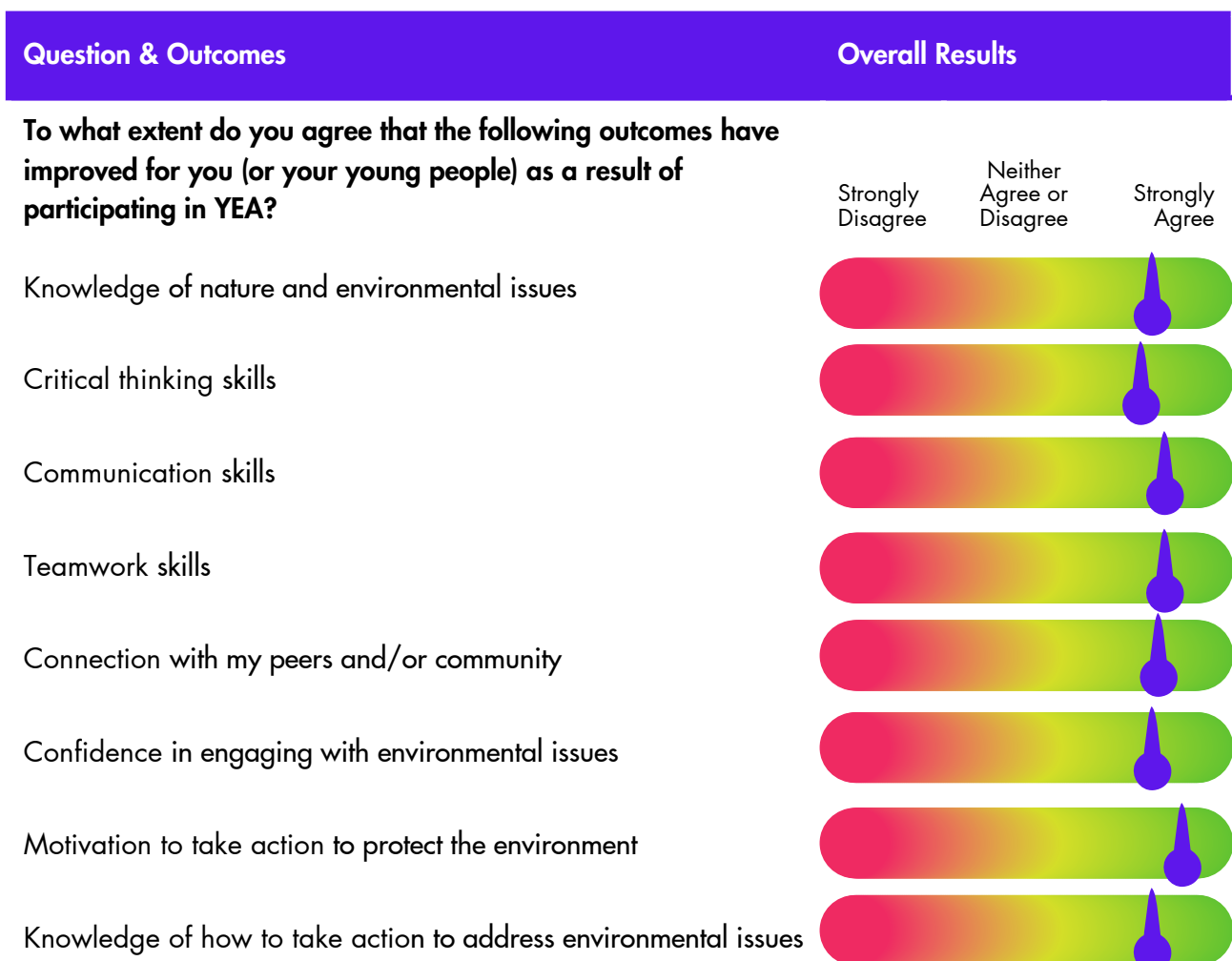
FEEDBACK

As part of YEA 2026, 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

85%

Respondents felt more motivated to take environmental action

89%

Respondents reported increased confidence to engage with environmental issues

85%

Respondents felt they had more knowledge of nature and sustainability

ECO-Dens Feedback

93%

Would recommend ECO-Dens to a friend

“

Students felt a massive sense of pride after speaking with the judges

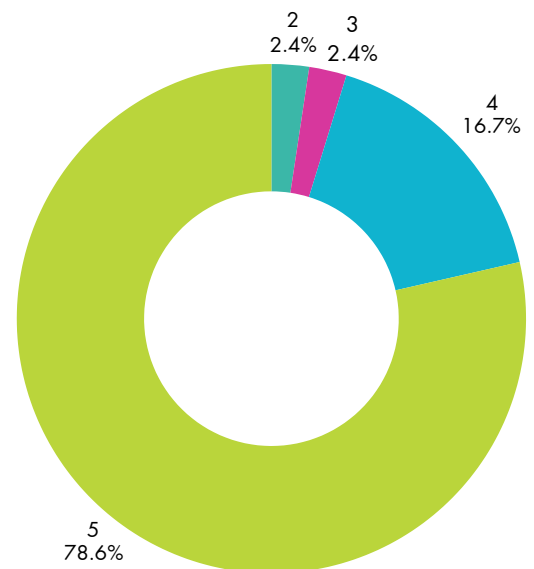
Being able to share my idea and get feedback

The volunteer coaching process was the most enjoyable as it allowed us to shake off our nerves and relish the judging

Friendliness by everyone there and how that made it such a positive experience for me and my group

”

What young people & mentors 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

89%

Were inspired by the event to take further environmental action

YEA COMMUNICATIONS

Online Media Coverage

719,901

Post Impressions on all ECO-UNESCO
social media channels

16,427

Followers on all ECO-UNESCO
social media channels

58,689

Visitors to the ECO-UNESCO Website

30,918

Reached through the ECO-UNESCO Newsletter

Local and National Media Coverage

During the 2025-2026 academic year, YEA received great national and regional media attention. Coverage spanned a range of audiences across the island through print, radio and online platforms, and highlighted the young people involved in the programme and their environmental action projects through the various stages. See below for some highlights, including some links to the individual pieces.

- Connaught Telegraph
- Galway Bay FM
- Irish Examiner
- [Irish Farmer's Journal](#)
- [Irish Independent](#)
- Kerry's Eye
- [Laois Today](#)
- Leinster Express
- Meath Chronicle
- News2Day
- Northside People
- [RTÉ.ie](#)
- Sunshine 106.8
- [The Echo](#)
- The Kilkenny Observer
- The Southern Star
- Tipperary Star
- [Westmeath Independent](#)

4.5 Million

Reach through 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 2026



**An Roinn Aeráide,
Fuinnimh agus Comhshaoil**
Department of Climate,
Energy and the Environment

Supported by the Circular Economy Fund



**An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige**
Department of Education
and Youth



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ECO-UNESCO is a registered charity in the Republic of Ireland Charity Regulatory Authority Number:

20015145 Revenue Number: CHY 7225 Company Number: 106860

FEEDBACK

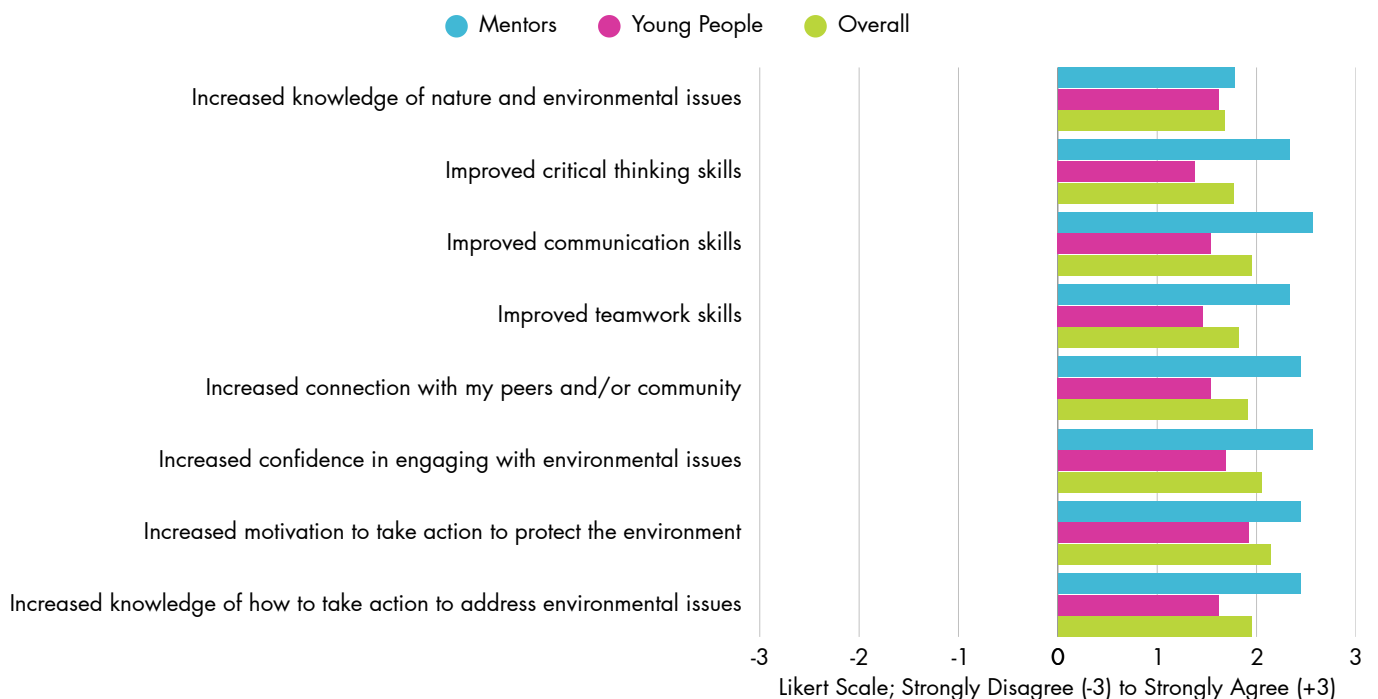
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Participating in YEA resulted in my/young peoples'....



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Question & Outcomes		Results				
How much have the following outcomes improved for you (or your young people) due to taking part in YEA?		Young People	Mentors	Overall		
Knowledge of nature and environmental issues						
Critical thinking skills						
Communication skills						
Teamwork skills						
Connection with my peers and/or community						
Confidence in engaging with environmental issues						
Motivation to take action to protect the environment						
Knowledge of how to take action to address environmental issues						
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree