DRAFTING THE NATURE RESTORATION PLAN: REPORT FROM THE EDUCATION LEADERS' FORUM

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Contents

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Quality Matters
INNOVATION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Outline of the Education for Nature Restoration Leaders' Forum

This report provides a summary of the discussions of the second Leaders' Forum meeting, held as part of the stakeholder engagement informing the drafting of Ireland's Nature Restoration Plan. The meeting was held on the 23rd of June 2025 in The Ashling Hotel Dublin with over 80 attendees. Given the scale and long-term nature of the plan and the fundamental role education plays in Irish society, this meeting was held in order to consider how our education system, from early years to third level and beyond, can support the protection and restoration of nature for the benefit of all in society.

Attendees were seated at 11 tables, with a mix of stakeholder backgrounds at each table. Presentations and panel discussions prompted conversations at tables, and each table had a facilitator and note-taker recording the discussions of participants. These detailed records form the basis of this report. The report includes all points that were raised by at least two tables. The sections within this report correspond to the four sessions of the day and contain composite statements developed from a synthesis of the 11 table notes. Information is provided on the table numbers that contributed content to each point. Also provided is a count to allow readers to assess the prioritisation of issues, all commentary is ordered from the most raised to the least.

Figure 1 Education Leaders' Forum at the Ashling Hotel

Following the opening presentations, described below, attendees introduced one another at their tables and engaged in discussions. Attendees were invited to share their input with colleagues at their tables over three main sessions throughout the day:

- The role of education in relation to caring for nature, including factors that hinder and help this role
- Foundations for nature education - exploring what needs to happen to make ecological literacy a core pillar of our education system
- Identifying Innovation - developing forward-thinking visions for enhanced ecological literacy and their implications for Ireland's nature restoration plan to 2050

Alongside the NPWS and Chair of the Independent Advisory Committee on Nature Restoration, Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin, the forum was organised in conjunction with colleagues working across all levels in nature education including:

- Dr Natalie O'Neill, Dublin City University
- Dr Patrick Kirwan, Ardscoil na Mara and Irish School Sustainability Network
- Dr Yvonne Naughton, Marino Institute of Education
- Dr Majella Dempsey, Maynooth University
- Dr Karen Kerr, Queen's University Belfast and
- Prof. Jennifer McElwaine, Trinity College Dublin

Their expertise brought further insight to the planning of the forum and informed the invitation list to ensure a mix of policymakers, practitioners, teachers and students were included. In addition, their knowledge of education at varying levels from across the island of Ireland provided valuable insight to the organisation and design of the day.

Session 1: Introduction and the Role of Education in Relation to Nature

Chair of the Independent Advisory Committee on Nature Restoration, Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin, facilitated the forum and welcomed attendees. She presented on the context of the EU Nature Restoration Law, including the processes underway in drafting Ireland's Nature Restoration Plan to ensure Ireland meets its legally binding obligations for 2030, 2040 and 2050.

Figure 2 Professor Jane stout, Vice President for Biodiversity & Climate Action at Trinity College Dublin

This opening presentation was followed by a keynote from Professor Jane Stout, Vice President for Biodiversity & Climate Action at Trinity College Dublin. She emphasised the importance of insects and pollinators to the health of nature. She gave an overview of global biodiversity loss, outlining that an eighth of species are threatened with extinction and that 75% of land has been "very significantly altered", which has very negative consequences for wildlife. She summarised the most recent data on biodiversity loss in Ireland, noting the poor state of our protected habitats and species. She emphasised the importance of diversity in our ecosystems to give resilience to our systems. Prof. Stout highlighted the vital role of education at all levels, in order for the consequences of biodiversity loss to be understood, appreciated and acted on. She noted the absence of plants and insects in current Leaving Certificate Biology textbooks and suggested that education of nature could be improved for all. She concluded by saying that a 'whole of society' approach to restoring nature was possible, but it was necessary to help people to get on board in supporting and protecting nature.


Figure 3 Table Discussions

Following the introductory talks, attendees were asked:

- What is the role of education in relation to caring for nature?
- What are the factors that hinder and help this role?

- How can we make caring for the health of nature a core part of the lives of our young people's education at all levels? (Short, medium and long term)

A number of tables fed back a summary of their discussions in a plenary, concluding session 1.

Session 2: The Foundations for Nature Education

Three short presentations explored how nature is presented across primary, post-primary and third level education and these are summarised below.

Dr Karen Bacon University of Galway

Dr Bacon outlined to attendees how plants are the foundation of life. She noted, however, that 'plant blindness' is and unseen but pervasive. There is little plant content in formal curricula compared to animal content, and what is there is uninspiring for learners. Botany is becoming less popular as a university subject, where fewer courses are offered across the country, possibly as an outcome of a lack of focus on this topic at secondary level. She outlined the work of Stroud et al. (2022) who explicate that the reduction of plant-focused education leads to a fall of plant awareness which, in turn, contributes to the crisis of biodiversity loss and reduces the capacity of nature systems to regenerate. By limiting the teaching of plant biology at school we exacerbate the biodiversity crisis since decision makers lack experts to ask and lack the knowledge themselves to make the necessary decisions. Dr Bacon called for an increase of the offerings of botany and plant science in schools and universities.

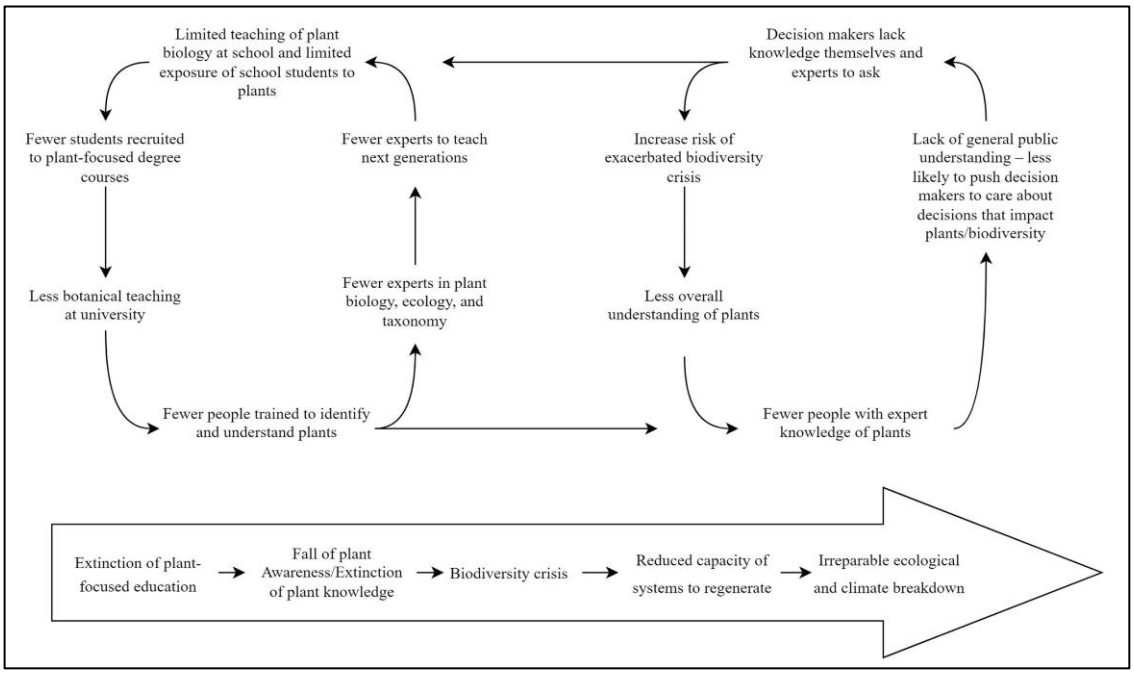

Figure 4 from Stroud et al. (2022)

Dr Natalie O'Neill & Dr Karen Kerr Dublin City University & Queens University Belfast

Dr O'Neill and Dr Kerry presented on their research of the Junior Science curriculum, sharing their findings that plant-focused content has reduced over four iterations of junior cycle science curricula. Alongside this curriculum reform, teachers report that students cannot relate to plants and consider them "boring". While there is a new Leaving Cert subject of Climate Action and Sustainable Development, there is little focus on biodiversity in this specification. They argued that the erosion of botany and reduction of emphasis on plants over time is connected to the growing problem of plant blindness and suggest that education needs to have a place at the policy-making table, particularly in the context of the drafting of the national Nature Restoration Plan.

Dr Orla Kelly (DCU) Dublin City University

Dr Kelly shared her research connecting childhood experiences with adults' environmental attitudes and actions. She emphasised how nurturing children's connections with nature through school is important. The new primary curriculum, set to begin in September 2025, highlights biodiversity and sets clear learning outcomes that talk about connecting with nature. She highlighted that pedagogies that best support students' learning are through fieldwork and place-based learning. However, school grounds lack the variety of habitats necessary for meaningful engagement. She also highlighted research highlighting the need of meaningful teacher learning or continuous professional developed in order to support teachers in these approaches. She concluded by highlighting that more emphasis is needed in initial teacher education to develop student teachers' connection to nature and to develop their pedagogical content knowledge around biodiversity. Sufficient support and resourcing for professional learning is needed to enact the new curriculum as envisaged.

Following these presentations, attendees were asked to consider:

- What needs to happen to make ecological literacy a core pillar of our education system?
- What would help this happen (what supports and resources are needed)?

Summaries of the table discussions following these presentations are shared below.

Figure 5 Table discussions underway

Session 3: Identifying Innovation

Session 3 began with a panel discussion considering some of the innovations already underway in the education system that support nature education. Participating in the panel were:

- Laura Mowlds & Anabel O'Harra from the Children & Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss
- Dr Patrick Kirwan, teacher at Ardscoil na Mara and Irish School Sustainability Network
- Rachel Geary representing the LEAF programme from An Taisce
- Clare Bromley Education Officer with the National Parks & Wildlife Service

Throughout the discussion it was highlighted how student experiences of biodiversity at school reinforce the challenge of educating for an exam versus educating for life. Students Laura and Anabel emphasised how the core curriculum does not highlight the importance of plants and is lacking in initiatives that empower students with knowledge and skills. The need for teachers to learn about biodiversity in a nature setting was highlighted by Clare Bromley, noting that there is high demand for the accredited teacher training programmes in Glenveagh National Park but there are not sufficient resources to meet this demand. There could be opportunity to roll out teacher programmes in all national parks, based on the model currently underway at Glenveagh, since giving teachers the skills and confidence to teach about nature has a ripple effect across schools. Rachel Geary noted that other programmes such as LEAF and Green Schools help teachers to see school grounds with fresh eyes and create new habitats to learn from, even in otherwise barren, concrete spaces. She detailed how teachers can pass an interest and excitement in nature to their students if they have opportunity to experience that themselves. Patrick Kirwan asked 'What does quality nature education look like?' and shared his experience of teaching at Ardscoil na Mara, where sharing an ethos of caring for biodiversity crosses over with student and teacher wellbeing. He emphasised the role of partnerships on developing this in schools and outlined how it correlated with schools enacting the sustainable development goals. He also emphasised the need to cease use of pesticides in schools, both for health and nature benefits. He concluded by suggesting that we should support the teacher champions who are already working within our education system and help them facilitate place-based training to win hearts and minds in our young people and local communities across the country. The panel shared the sentiment that nature knows no boundaries and that the Nature Restoration Law also provides schools with developing cross-border programmes and school engagement.

Session 4: Visions for the Future – Practice and Policy

In this final session, each table was tasked with coming up with a vision for education in 2050. Dr Yvonne Naughton, Marino Institute of Education, facilitated each table presenting their innovative and creative pitches on their visions for education in 2050.

Figure 6 Presentations of each tables' vision for education in 2050

Following these presentations, Dr Majella Dempsey, Maynooth University, facilitated a panel discussion with policymakers on their reflections and responses to the discussions at the forum. This panel included Mark Bohan from the Department of Education & Youth, Derek Grant from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and Sandra Irwin Gowran from the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

The panel noted the major strides already underway across schools in supporting nature education. Derek Grant recognised this as a hugely exciting time in curriculum development, emphasising the need for a pedagogy of hope in both biodiversity and climate education. He highlighted the need for funding and resourcing to support teachers enacting curriculum reforms. This was echoed by Mark Bohan who outlined a need for further funding of projects like outdoor classrooms, school gardens etc., where benefits could be gleaned for student health and wellbeing, as well as developing knowledge and skills across other subjects. He noted the new, free online biodiversity course for school groundskeepers and the potential for the next STEM Education Policy to incorporate the Nature Restoration Plan. Sandra Irwin Gowran emphasised the importance of communicating the work already underway across the country, particularly under the Education for Sustainable Development Policy. She noted the need for biodiversity and sustainability to be included in conversations around STEM.

Closing Remarks

Professor Anne Looney, Dean of the Institute of Education at Dublin City University, gave the closing remarks for the day and commented on the positivity and energy in the room. Professor Looney reminded attendees of the Creative Ireland initiative, with schools availing of annual grants to work in creative clusters to promote and support the arts and suggested this might be an avenue to mirror when considering how schools might be supported to engage the community to look after nature. She reminded the audience that education excels at focusing on the future and that we can look at the Nature Restoration Law as an opportunity to rethink how we educate our young people for an altered world.

The Role of Education in Nature Restoration

Tables outlined that our formal education system has the potential to inspire meaningful connections, reflecting a broad and deep understanding, to nature for all learners. They noted that schools should have integrated climate and nature focus across the curriculum, shaping the knowledge, skills and agency of future generations to become active citizens equipped for environmental stewardship. Discussions highlighted the need for make funding available to schools to support work to allow school grounds to be a haven for nature and provide young people with access to high-quality nature spaces, while also providing schools with opportunities to conduct outdoor learning. Pollinators and insects were outlined as key elements of nature that could thrive in and be a focus of learning in schools. The need for quality professional development for teachers was identified, particularly to increase the knowledge around botany and ecology for all science teachers and especially in making the links with industries such as pharmaceuticals, medicine, design etc.

Role of education in nature restoration and factors that may hinder this	**Tables**	**Number of tables**
Experiential learning and outdoor education: Outdoor education is an essential tool in empowering individuals and driving behaviour change toward nature conservation, providing a platform to actively engage students with nature and helping them acquire skills and knowledge based on climate change realities while having fun and creating memorable experiences. Learning should happen in nature, with nature as a "co-teacher" and experiential learning central to education. This involves bringing young people into nature and nature into the classroom, helping them realise they are constantly surrounded by and in nature. Outdoor learning activities: Encourage school gardens and green teaching spaces, bringing back nature walks and nature tables while getting rid of "keep off the grass" signs. More field trips and "no screen" time are needed, with minimum three-hour slots for outdoor learning activities, ideally half a day, bringing benefits to both students and teachers. Repeat visits to nature sites four times a year help learn about seasonality and inspire learning by getting children outdoors more often. Examples include Scotland's bill mandating students aged 12-15 in state schools spend 4 nights and 5 days in outdoor education centres. Creating nature spaces: Schools should have opportunities to grow their own food and develop school sites as havens for nature. This involves creating physical environments that connect children to nature. Nothing beats actually spending time in nature - the sensory experience is essential, achieved by maximising space for nature in all settings, whether urban or rural, though there is	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	11

a lack of physical space in many schools to create outdoor classrooms. Children need to be familiar with nature with access from a young age continuing for lifelong education. Practical implementation includes stopping spraying pesticides in school grounds and leading on this nationally, having every Higher Education Campuses grow their own food and making higher education institutions beacons of nature through pollinator plans or other nature positive initiatives.		
Fostering connection, care, and respect for nature: The fundamental principle is "you can't protect what you don't love" - inspiring awe, care, respect, and love of all things in nature, from the smallest to the biggest, is key. Education should encourage connections between people and place - opening students' curiosity to the natural world around them. This involves creating kinship with nature, being empathetic to the needs of animal and plant life and giving students room to love nature before asking them to fix it through positive nature experiences. This may include some re-education to counter social conditioning and instil wonder. <u>Building understanding and belonging:</u> Create a sense of belonging to develop responsibility and ownership over nature, promoting connection and awareness to the local environment. Teaching should focus on our place in nature - not at the top of a hierarchy but as part of nature - explaining how things are interlinked. This includes explaining consequences of not taking care of nature and how that affects us. <u>Practical connection strategies:</u> For children without direct access to nature, citizen science is an excellent starting point. Building ownership through knowing names of plants and animals provides fosters connection that is essential for mental health. This involves creating wonder, influencing people of all ages to understand how nature makes them feel, and connecting science and data to spiritual/wider meaning.	1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	10
Empowering future generations for action: Support students in making informed decisions with nature at the centre. Education should teach young people to be protectors of nature, promote understanding on the role of citizen action with empowerment and understanding of how change can happen. The goal of education should be to empower learners to become advocates for change and create "future changemakers".	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	10
Public perception and misinformation: Counter-messaging about environmental issues creates confusion among the public and students, with misinformation driven largely by social media, students need analytical media skills. Fear based messaging is not helpful, yet teachers	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	9

may sugarcoat environmental issues instead of being transparent about their importance. There is misinformation about previous dominant management practices of habitat and their role in managing land. Some principals are explicitly told that environmental education is not important, and there are perceived conflicts with community wellbeing and taboo topics (farming). Nature can also be seen as uncool. Horticulture in school has a stigma attached as it is seen as an alternative to more academic subjects.		
Teacher skills and confidence: Teachers are often positively disposed towards nature; however, they need confidence and education to teach about and bring students into nature. Not all teachers need to be experts - they need basic knowledge and can learn with pupils, making mistakes along the way. Nature education shouldn't rely solely on the personal interest of individual teachers which impacts implementation. There is a lack of awareness among teachers of the flexibility of curricula and how to integrate nature into other subjects. Teachers need confidence in adopting creative approaches for rich learning experiences. Training and professional development: Educating the educators is critical, as policymakers and teachers often lack adequate training in environmental education. Training needs crucial status rather than being opt-in. professional development should be provided for teachers at all levels. If courses are online, professional development teachers will not get the same benefit of being outside in nature. Implementation challenges: There's a disconnect between knowledge creators and those implementing education, with funding not always targeting real issues. With evolving primary curricula, it is uncertain whether teachers are adequately prepared to implement changes. There is a lack of connectivity between different levels of education. Teachers need confidence by breaking down barriers and increasing accessibility, with examples like difficult Latin names, Special Areas of Protection (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) mentioned as teaching challenges.	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11	8
Competing demands and giving nature equal importance: "If something is not assessed it's forgotten" by both teachers and students. There is a need to make nature education as important as assessed subjects without actually assessing it. There are competing demands on policy, curriculum and resources within schools, with time and value given to other more "useful" subjects. It will be a challenge to set aside time to teach children about nature when there are competing subjects and when the Department of Education has a major focus on literacy and numeracy. Nature should be treated as a core	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11	7

subject in education and taught alongside maths, Irish, and English. External societal forces create additional demands, with children's focus on instant gratification while nature takes time, and changes in society resulting in less time spent outdoors and more time on screens.		
Funding and time: Systemic funding is needed to facilitate changes in implementation and structure, as the current system is underfunded. Optional or project funding is hard to access for educators and the process for drawing down funding needs to be streamlined; currently too much paperwork is involved. Teachers need time and substitute days to train and access funding. Lack of funding and time constraints all hinder the creation of nature-focused spaces and curriculum integration, specifically lack of funding for: access to outdoor spaces, trips, resources, and research in biodiversity education.	1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11	6
Bidirectional relationship between humans and nature: Highlight the bidirectional relationship between humans and nature and how they can be mutually beneficial, fostering understanding of the relationship between society and ecological impacts. Students should be taught why they have a personal stake in protecting nature, including understanding the motivations of groups that harm the environment such as economic gain. This involves emphasizing the protection of nature and how much we rely upon it. Benefits to human wellbeing: Encourage and recognise the heart and mind connection through education that uncovers the various roles and contributions of nature to humans; economic, spiritual and ecosystem services and considering the importance of wellbeing and nature's role in contributing to fulfilled living.	2, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11	6
Developing future expertise: There is a shortage of ecologists, requiring training of future ecologists starting earlier in primary and secondary level rather than just at third level. Students need to understand that nature can lead to rewarding careers, as there is a lack of awareness which impacts the number of people engaged in third level courses. There is a challenge in convincing young people that there are career opportunities in the environmental sector, as many only associate viable jobs with industries like pharma.	1, 4, 6, 8, 11	5
Leadership and management: School leadership including principals and heads must support nature-focused education, but there is a lack of senior people championing this at all levels. Principals are often overburdened, and this is not a priority.	1, 2, 7, 9, 11	5

There is overreliance on lecturers to drive caring for nature in universities, with little support from higher-level administrators/leaders.		
Diversity and complexity of nature: Nature should be taught as a complex science, not just as a "fluffy" concept or the end of a news segment. Society wants everything to be tidy, which does not align with nature goals.	3, 4, 6, 7, 9	5
Ecological literacy and place-based learning: <u>Local biodiversity and cultural heritage:</u> Ensure classroom information covers local Irish biodiversity, allowing tailored interpretation of habitats near schools and towns. Teaching students their local environment while connecting place names with the Irish language - teaching place, animal and plant names in Irish and English, focusing on heritage and descriptive properties. Indigenous stories support environmental education; fairy trees weren't cut down not only because of folklore but because they provided resources and shelter for animals. The Irish language supports environmental education and cultural understanding, with books like Braiding Sweetgrass weaving together science, storytelling, and traditional ecological knowledge. <u>Developing ecological vocabulary and communication:</u> Teaching nature names (plants, animals) in Irish and other languages enables children to participate in ecological learning. Give children language to express curiosity and discuss nature learning, creating knowledge without diluting science or dumbing it down. Make bio-literacy a key competency alongside wellbeing and digital skills, developing understanding of species and ecosystems like hedgerows as nature corridors. Teaching about all life forms - plants, insects, microbiology - not just humans, as nature and bio-literacy remain undervalued in education programmes.	1, 2, 7, 9, 11	5
Nature across the curriculum: Nature needs to be evident across all curriculums, with systems thinking about ecology and biodiversity integrated across various disciplines such as geography (for example incorporating education on soil health), health and economics. A cross-curricular approach is needed, particularly in third level contexts. Building multidisciplinary approaches into third level institutions, such as combining chemistry and engineering. Biodiversity needs to be embedded in subjects at all levels.	1, 3, 4, 9	4

Curriculum and system barriers: The curriculum is overloaded and crowded, limiting time for students to experience nature and teachers to teach about it. A narrow curriculum restricts teacher capabilities, with nature subjects absent from primary and secondary curriculums. Nature-based aspects have been removed over years, including zoology and insect functioning. Difficulty exists in introducing mandatory cross-curricular sustainability modules at third level. Overreliance on textbooks restricts teacher creativity and provides only one perspective. Primary class sizes are too large, and teachers are overloaded across all levels with time management issues. Learning outcomes are often vague, creating interpretation difficulties for teachers. Timetabling is overly restrictive, while better third-level course opportunities exist in the UK. Travel costs present additional barriers.	1, 6, 8, 9	4
Assessment challenges: Schools are overly focused on assessments, points and grades, with secondary schools facing barriers from hyperfocus on exams. Flexibility will be needed for nature education as assessments do not work for experiential learning, and there is a risk of it being seen as less important because of this. Standard assessments will also be needed for teacher's ecological literacy.	1, 4, 7, 8	4
Economic focus over environmental values: The emphasis in curriculums is often economic rather than knowledge based, with schools tending to focus on preparing students for the workforce rather than developing them into advocates for the natural world. Subjects like chemistry are often favoured because of their connection to high-paying industries like pharmaceuticals, with over-emphasis on career instead of focusing on life skills. There is a current global focus on economics over science, with too much focus on productivity and a lack understanding that our economy is actually embedded in nature. There is a socio-economic focus on the profitability of learning, when there needs to be a change in focus from becoming students as employees to students as citizens. Teaching students to make not just a living but a life.	7, 8, 9, 11	4
Accessibility and diversity: Nature experiences must be accessible to all, including people from different social demographics and those with disabilities. Nature should be open to all with equal and equitable access to learning opportunities, showing that nature is accessible to all in spite of learning abilities. Greater diversity, equity, and inclusion are needed among educators, as representation matters - "If you can't see it, you can't be it" - with many children not seeing themselves reflected in	3, 7, 9, 11	4

their lecturers. This includes addressing cultural biases and gender issues by making sure caring for nature is not a gendered issue.		
Evidence-based education: Provide information that is data-backed and scientifically based, with third-level education being well-informed when developing programmes and biodiversity-related modules reflecting the real needs of the sector. This means not allowing vested interests to alter or control the way things are taught and learnt.	2, 3, 7, 11	4
Physical and educational space: Schools need to be flexible in providing suitable environments to support nature-based learning, providing appropriate spaces such as geodomes which provide shelter from rain. Raised beds with quality soil are needed for school gardens, and students need more practical clothing to comfortably engage with nature rather than white runners. There is a lack of appropriate outdoor spaces on or near school grounds, with space needed within schools physically. City and town councils need to ensure there are natural spaces available in both rural and urban environments.	1, 7, 9	3
Lack of access to natural environments: Some children have less access to nature depending on their upbringing and where they live, such as students in urban areas and certain age groups. Not all schools have easy access to natural environments such as meadows or wetlands. There is a need to use the potential in urban as well as rural environments because we are in this together.	4, 5, 9	3
Policy support: There is no policy around ecological literacy teaching, so it depends on the personality of leadership, principals and teachers. Policy is focused on natural emissions targets only, with Department of Education policies on development of school buildings and grounds being restrictive. Children and young people should be included in decision-making.	1, 7, 9	3
Collaboration beyond education: There is a need for more inter-agency work and collaboration across sectors to integrate nature education into schools, with leadership, parents, principals, and policymakers needing to be onboard to facilitate successful integration of nature into education. There's a disconnect between knowledge creators and the actual delivery of education, with a lack of collaboration, diversity, partnerships and resources to support teachers. Schools should become microcosms of the community and society in the areas where they are located, with engagement in	3, 7, 10	3

community-based projects and community nature programmes, particularly at second level. There needs to be a point of contact for the home and community.		
Risk aversion and safety concerns: Modern society is too risk averse, with burdening concerns over falls and scrapes acting as barriers to nature education. Risk assessments can prevent access to certain environments such as those with ponds, with the view of "nature is danger" being an obstacle to learning. Insurance barriers and considerations lead to a lack of risk taking, with risk assessment and child protection concerns alongside the rigidity of classroom structures limiting how flexible education can be.	3, 4, 6	3
Learning from past practices for future management: Realise how previous management practices and 'mistakes' impacted biodiversity, and how we can change our practices such as no mowing, cutting hedgerows, and turf cutting to protect biodiversity and nature. This involves providing information regarding current characteristics of nature to cultivate thinking regarding future management practices. This includes learning about what we have lost in the past and the inappropriateness of some biodiversity and sustainability initiatives, with critical evaluation of these such as when seeds are given out or trees are planted but the species are not native.	2, 4, 7	3
Trust and constructive dialogue: There is anxiety that livelihoods may suffer with large scale changes to protect nature, and this drip feeds into classrooms which can create anxiety. The challenge of constructive dialogue without emotive arguments is complex, as different children come from different backgrounds with different relations to nature and perhaps land management practices such as farming backgrounds. It is important to create a learning space which recognises this and ensures the classroom is a safe space for young people to have difficult conversations. There are conflicts with predominant cultural or socio-economic forces, such as perceived conflict with community wellbeing when teaching the climate impacts of farming to a school in a rural farming community. Co-creation of programmes is lacking.	2, 7, 9	3
Lifelong and continuous learning: There is potential to inform and influence the importance of nature from a young age across both formal and informal settings. Continuity from early learning and to third level should develop and deepen an understanding-based approach.	7, 8, 11	3
Nature cycles and interconnectedness:	7, 9	2

Promote understanding of nature's cycles by developing an understanding of lifecycles and how all of nature is connected through the ecological web. This involves teaching the interconnectedness and systems-thinking at micro and macro levels, helping children see the relationships in nature such as symbiosis.		

Incorporating Ecological Literacy in Education

Participants outlined the need for eco-literacy and ocean-literacy across all of society. This included in formal curricula, in communicating to the public and in a plan for life-long learning. Emphasising the need for nature education in initial teacher education and for in-service teachers, participants also noted the opportunity for cross-border initiatives through our national parks and highlighted the potential of having education officers from the NPWS associated with all national parks. Schools were highlighted as having the potential to be community hubs, where connections with local community groups, sports clubs and local authorities could thrive. Schools have the potential to contribute to local biodiversity, which provides students with the opportunity to become community leaders.

Foundations and solutions	**Tables**	**No.**
Curriculum integration: Room must be made for biodiversity education through effective teaching methods and appropriate curriculum frameworks. Biodiversity should be included in more subjects than biology, with nature thoroughly specified in policy/curricula linking ecological literacy to all disciplines, literacy, and art and business and engineering — rather than in a single-discipline relegation. Nature should also be woven throughout primary and secondary subjects. Eco literacy needs to become key competency with more biology study in science curriculum.	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	9
Teacher Professional Development: Teacher professional development should include fieldwork and be embedded and continuous for teachers including biodiversity and plants. This leadership needs to be supported from above. Training days for nature education should connect teachers with experts. Inspectors enforcing professional development uptake aligns with the National Biodiversity Plan. Link with NPWS teacher education courses.	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10	8
Training standards & accreditation: Recognised nature education standards need to exist at local, regional, national, and from a cross-border perspective. A coordinated and standardised training approach should include micro credentials for teachers and enhanced initial teacher education. Teachers should take compulsory biodiversity courses like civil servants take climate courses, with mandatory training for education department workers. Proper biodiversity and ecological literacy definitions are needed at third level. SSE and Inspectorates should list biodiversity as priority. National Committee should support foundation teacher training ensuring primary degrees support teaching and valuing nature. Teacher qualifications and regulation requirements needed.	2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	8

School design: School buildings should serve as biodiversity spaces through student displays, projects, art, woodwork, and roof gardens introducing biodiversity to urban schools. School designs must better support natural engagement with appropriately designed environments despite varied perceptions of acceptable grounds. Current landscapes are poorly designed for nature—schools should create local features like trees and ponds, plant native species, grow food, and engage in landscape planning. Schools need outdoor spaces functioning as living museums with nature spaces and outdoor classrooms containing wild and cultivated areas. Planned nature routes would enhance campuses, requiring ecological architects for proper functionality. Wildlife areas should enhance accessibility and teaching opportunities through outdoor learning centres. School grounds should be biodiverse learning spaces with native trees, hedgerows, and exciting nature-rich areas attracting teachers and students outdoors. Grounds would need less mowing and more nature curation.	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9	7
Collaboration: Interlinking NPWS and Department of Education would unlock opportunities for organisations contributing to the nature agenda, including Birdwatch Ireland and Irish Heritage Council. NPWS education remit has expanded with new education centres going to schools, which should be formalized. Arts, heritage, and cultural organisations should be engaged in projects to promote biodiversity knowledge. County council biodiversity officers should support education, with signposting and support for teachers accessing field-based educational resources and facilitators. Inter-agency collaboration should establish links between third-level institutions, schools, zoos, and community creating broader biodiversity education networks. County and city councils' local biodiversity action plans should consider schools as action opportunities. Cohesion is needed around national plans on education, environment, biodiversity, nature restoration, pollination. OIDE should have extended reach through new designated teams coordinating partnerships with public bodies, local communities and activities twinning schools with local nature experts and activists bridging policy-practice gaps. Local authorities partner with schools fostering connections. All-of-government engagement and strategic action approach needed with intergovernmental connection.	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10	7
Policy and Strategic Framework / Leadership: Policy agendas should prioritise biodiversity within an ESD framework, to support Department of Ed. and Department of Further and Higher Education support. A comprehensive whole school approach crucial, including principals supporting teachers taking children outdoors and fostering nature connections - this requires greater leadership from school leaders. Economic education approach doesn't support nature,	1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11	7

requiring examination of education's role in society. School policies should consider environment at all levels, exemplified by Firhouse ETSS's "people, planet and process" approach. Tensions exist between long-term plans focusing on curriculum change and short-term plans providing current support. Nature isn't always priority as educators focus on urgent challenges like supporting low-income students or English language learners. Biodiversity should be included in capital development plans, with nature education and ESD linked to 2030 SSE processes.		
Community involvement Community involvement could increase through speakers, improving nature access where school space is limited, with "biodiversity champions" identified from communities. Communities could utilize reciprocal learning opportunities with schools and higher education through shared spaces, particularly after hours - with local authority support. Since eco-literacy lack is societal, holistic training must happen beyond schools, with communities playing valuable long-term care roles like polytunnel maintenance. Students to work with communities to restore and protect nature, developing schools into community hubs linking teachers, parents, groundskeepers, and volunteers rather than shutting gates at 3pm and summers. Schools should become public teaching areas with permeable boundaries benefiting all society, incorporating school gardens growing food cooked on-site, citizen science, volunteering, solar panels, and wind turbines. Integration between horticulture programmes and school food should occur.	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9	6
Ringfenced flexible funding: Schools need grants ringfenced for green spaces, nature education and infrastructure, similar to IT grants, with automatic funding rather than application processes. Schools require budget flexibility and funding access to support nature education programmes, prioritising co-creation of nature spaces as infrastructural goals.	3, 4, 6, 7, 10	5
Increased funding: Crucial need for increased funding and access for schools to develop onsite biodiversity and support teachers, including funding to integrate sustainability into existing curriculum.	1, 3, 4, 8, 9	5
Topics to teach: Ecological literacy must become a core competency for all educators through professional development, allowing specialization and teaching multiple classes (as discussed above). Ecological literacy should provide tools explaining nature concepts and enable critical assessment of corporate greenwashing. Students should understand food origins, emphasising culture links as nature is part of who we are.	1, 2, 5, 9, 11	5
Experiences in nature:	1, 2, 4, 8, 9	5

Teachers need nature experiences to confidently teach about nature. Place-based training should occur on nature grounds for teachers, students, and policymakers. Immersive nature experiences and outdoor training days help teachers see nature education value and encourage similar student engagement. Outdoor experiences co-educate teachers without botanical backgrounds, changing preconceptions. Support needed for outdoor teacher training and empowering teachers to use available outdoor spaces.		
Core pillar of curriculum: Nature must be recognised as core pillar of Department of Education's curriculum framework, with ecological education formally included rather than treated as optional. Nature topics should move from extra-curricular to main curriculum. Plant science, often excluded, needs priority for several years to restore science education balance. Biology curriculum should be revised, with past curricula reintroducing priority areas like evolution. Nature education also should also be woven into SSE curriculum.	1, 2, 6, 8, 11	5
Time: More time needed for biodiversity in biology curriculum and nature within geography/biology teacher degrees through mandatory standalone modules (currently only two modules address this). Mandatory out-of-class nature time is needed.	4, 7, 8, 9, 10	5
Access and Equity to Nature Spaces: Nature is often not within walking distance of schools, making equity of access a concern. Priority should be given to those "furthest behind," like urban students with least nature access. Provision and funding needed for schools to provide trips to local nature reserves, prioritising schools without easy nature access. Local access should be provided for communities surrounding biodiverse areas to these nature reserves. Each school should be connected to three or four local nature places (ponds, fields, woods). Rural Development Plan should incorporate nature walks and pathways so children can travel safely and experience nature on school commutes, including non-road-based rights of way accessible to public and schools. Coillte and others engaged with reforestation should prioritise having forests within easy school access.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6	5
Ease and clarity for funding process: Increased awareness and simplified application processes needed for community groups, local organisations, and schools. Current applications are long and arduous, especially for EU funding. Schools need assistance with applications.	1, 5, 6, 9	4
Biodiversity education champions: Schools need dedicated, paid biodiversity officers or ecology champions managing nature spaces, educating students, connecting schools to community groups and NGOs,	1, 4, 6, 9	4

and supporting teachers rather than adding work to existing staff. Ambassadors/officers could cover 4-5 schools and be master horticulturalists. Could be based on university ESD officer and local authority biodiversity officer models.		
Funding for outdoor experiences: Funding needed for children to access outdoor experiences and trips to local nature reserves, particularly to cover high transport costs. Priority should go to schools without easy nature access. Existing NPWS shuttle buses and Department of Transport grants could facilitate access through centralized school bus systems.	2, 4, 5, 6	4
Financial relevance and long-term value: Essential to highlight ecological education's financial relevance and long-term value to gain traction equal to economically linked subjects. This requires quantifying savings from sustainable choices and conducting cost-benefit analyses of actions like mowing, and solar panel use. Ecological communication should work alongside business interests. What gets measured gets valued, what gets valued gets funded.	4, 6, 7, 11	4
National messaging and marketing: Mainstreaming nature and biodiversity language requires targeted marketing and PR to shift perceptions. Social media campaigns should meet young people where they are, raising awareness about nature's importance and addressing sustainability's "uncool" perception. Narrative shaping should be optimistic, using creative solutions integrating arts, heritage, and culture.	4, 5, 8, 10	4
Local expert networks: Creating awareness of local experts and knowledge holders enables better guidance and initiative coordination. A directory of guest speakers from third-level institutions, community groups, and organisations should be compiled, with guest teachers invited for variety. Sustained funding needed for external support networks teaching biodiversity, following models like 'Heritage in Schools' and Global Citizenship educators.	1, 2, 7, 9	4
Financial sources: A variety of funding sources should be considered including business taxation. Dept of Ed requires additional funding. A new government agency should handle climate matters including education. Biodiversity needs to be included in capital development plans. Current funding distribution favours webinars over face-to-face training despite students benefiting more from face-to-face learning.	1, 4, 9, 10	4
Training beyond teachers: Training on nature and biodiversity should extend to school boards of management, groundkeepers, caretakers, and other staff. Training should be available for community members interested in nature who want to provide educational services for schools.	6, 8, 9, 10	4

Outdoor as key principle: Outdoor education should be embraced as key principle for sustainable development awareness. Move from structured outdoor classrooms to immersive nature experiences like field trips and forest visits.	4, 5, 8, 9	4
Own subject: Nature should be stand-alone subject with nature-based education options. Biodiversity should be introduced into junior cycle and leaving certificate curricula, particularly within SPHE or CSPE. Eco literacy needs addition to standardised DISA tests.	3, 4, 6, 8	4
Career pathways: Career pathways connected to ecology and biodiversity should be emphasised, with schools engaging external stakeholders to build connections. Make visible school links to companies employing ecologists through "SEE IT, BE IT" approaches. Career guidance teachers should highlight attractive, well-paid nature career opportunities addressing skills shortages. Guidance counsellors should include careers like ecologist and environmental scientist for interested students.	5, 6, 9, 11	4
Make it interesting: Appeal to teenagers through gamification, technology and interesting sources. Identify what pupils like in group-specific ways—success stories, local ecological stories—and tailor delivery. Encourage "wildness" in students and find creative ways teaching nature and biodiversity through arts. Use all senses—feel, touch, sight, smell—and use accessible technology like species identification apps.	1, 2, 8, 9	4
Implementation and Action Planning: There is a clear national vision and action plan needed, with staged roadmaps developed for schools for nature education. Schools and educational institutions should be shown how to implement ecological literacy.	2, 8, 9, 11	4
Resources: Schools need comprehensive educational resources including textbooks, media, videos, gamification technology, and interactive events and activity packs to support outdoor education as well as real-world case studies. All resources should continually be updated and available through integrated apps or websites with multimedia content. Resources must be appropriate to urban and rural settings, with SSE policy and diverse subject integration.	6, 8, 9	3
New-build schools:	6, 7, 10	3

New-build schools should include higher proportions of green spaces with native species focus and funded nature spaces. New and existing buildings need incorporated nature spaces and outdoor classrooms containing wild and cultivated areas.		
Engaging local resources: Adjacent and local landowners should be engaged to provide learning spaces. Nature features in schools should be maintained by students and community. Specialist knowledge would enrich learning and enable plant signposting.	1, 3, 9	3
Parents: Parents are the primary educators in Ireland and should be leveraged. Engage with and create more robust incentivisation for parents to promote biodiversity with their children and connect with national goals. Parents associations to be given ecological literacy. "You'll never educate a generation of parents if you don't start at school".	1, 9, 10	3
Sharing: Share resources between schools. Shared spaces should be established for existing schools with limited green space. Shared insurance schemes - removing insurance barriers around insurance for biodiversity additions to schools or initiatives.	7, 8, 10	3
Institutional Support Infrastructure: OIDE should have extended roles establishing teacher supports for nature education, including connecting schools and teachers to community resources, actions, experts and nature sites while providing teacher resources. Educational centres should provide outdoor space and nature education exemplars, with evidence-based teaching spaces integrating nature spaces. Education centres should serve as biodiversity "hubs" supported by cluster systems like those available for arts.	6, 7, 9	3
Communication and Public Engagement: Language should be suitable, no jargon, and tailored to different groups, ages. Need to identify why current nature and biodiversity education is considered inaccessible to mitigate barriers. Large-scale events like Italia 90, Riverdance and Young Scientist should be created generating hope and excitement around nature restoration.	2, 3, 10	3
Green Schools: Green Schools initiative needs deployment across secondary schools, with biodiversity established as element of green schools' programmes. Practical measures like "No Mow May"—leaving school green spaces un-mowed for May or summer—should be implemented.	4, 7, 9	3
Incentives:	6, 7	2

Establish national award or incentivisation schemes helping schools run sustainably, capturing and sharing good practice through case studies.		
Ongoing support: Ongoing support for teachers - not just once off training to ensure that it is embedded in their knowledge. Supports for all teachers not just specialist roles.	4, 8	2
Passion based teaching/guest teachers: Invite guest teachers for variety and passion-based teaching. Shared biodiversity/nature teachers in schools could be game changers. Use groundskeepers for local education.	1, 2	2
Confidence and competence: Teachers need support gaining confidence and competence. Upskilling needed for teachers and outdoor teaching ability. All teachers can learn and upskill.	1, 4	2
Regular immersive nature: Nature education should not be confined to classrooms but happen in community spaces, and outdoor environments. Immersive, regular nature visits are essential.	1, 11	2
Assessment and Recognition Systems: Curriculum focus shift needed from exams to value-based education. No rankings exist for nature literacy but are needed—ranking systems for nature agenda similar to world university rankings and PISA should be developed. More award programmes needed in schools identifying core skills like videography, public speaking and research, with "Young environmentalist awards" as successful template for nature context deployment.	4, 6	2
Student Programs and Pathways: All students should be involved in ESD initiative, with TY students encouraged to participate in nature-based volunteering complementing current social volunteering programmes. Students teaching students through TY programmes should be expanded.	4, 6	2

The Future of Education for Nature Restoration

Phrases within Vision Statements	Tables	Number of tables
VALUES AND VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE		
Passion for nature: A passion for nature is nurtured throughout education, fostering lifelong love and conservation of the natural world. Nature is celebrated as home for all, seen as a close family member or friend and as essential to wellbeing. Education inspires a joyful and meaningful connection with nature, dismantling the misconception that plants are boring and making nature engagement something cool. This connection fosters ownership, respect, and understanding of the interconnectedness and flourishing of all life.	1, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11	6
Accessibility and inclusion: Biodiversity education is accessible for all. No student is excluded from outdoor learning. Simple solutions should address practical barriers (i.e. wearing coats rather than cancelling outdoor time). Every student, regardless of education level, should leave school with broad, deep biodiversity understanding, using approaches that convince less enthusiastic students of its importance.	3, 4, 8, 10, 11	5
Values for a future of environmental stewardship: Schools in 2035 will have integrated and focused climate education and values systems, shaping future policy makers of tomorrow. Future generations grow up with the knowledge, skills, and agency to participate in ecosystem restoration efforts, with students taking an active role in nature. Both educated students and educators are actively involved in nature restoration, creating a generation equipped for environmental stewardship.	6, 8, 9, 10	4
Restoration and custodians of the land: Nature restoration education is well integrated throughout education, with students helping to environments restore and rehabilitate sites. Learning from successful restoration projects demonstrates how biodiversity and farming can coexist, positioning Ireland as a leader in nature restoration and stewardship practices.	1, 5, 6, 11	4
Schools as champions and catalysts: Schools champion biodiversity conservation and act as the roots and soil from which something beautiful can grow. Outdoor learning is normalised and becomes a	2, 8, 10	3

common way to learn. The approach is grounded in hope rather than despair, with education leaders using both head and heart. A diversity of voices is included in shaping this cultural shift.		
Empowerment and agency: Students are empowered to take meaningful action with real impact. Youth are seen as part of the solution, with children and young people becoming moral leaders and advocates for biodiversity. Activism is encouraged, the status quo is challenged, and creative solutions are found by looking to nature.	2, 10, 11	3
Young people's careers: Young people see clear paths into sustainability and nature restoration careers. They understand how their career choices impact nature and biodiversity and look forward to working in ecology and related fields. Education supports awareness of job opportunities, fostering hope and practical engagement with the sector.	2, 6, 10	3
ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES		
Funding: Flexible funding is available to schools to support this work.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9	7
Knowledgeable teachers: Knowledgeable, trained and mentored teachers are confident to teach nature across subjects. There are improved qualifications for teaching biology in depth.	2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11	7
Policy framework and governance: Sustainable policy frameworks incorporate eco-literacy and are developed through national conversations/assemblies. This requires Inter-departmental communication to ensure all government policies acknowledge environmental impact and adopt nature restoration approaches, with dedicated funding from relevant departments. Government strategic plans should realize these goals, requiring boards and school leaders to address nature and report restoration actions, with greater Education department involvement in policymaking on nature in education.	2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10	7
Resources infrastructure: Comprehensive educational resources and infrastructure are in place, including; identification keys for plants and insects, gamified activity packs and resources, accessible transport to wild spaces, county-based education hubs for biodiversity training, a pool of biodiversity educators across specialities and funding for research in this area.	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9	6

Nature roles: Roles exist across schools, such as a dedicated horticulture specialists or sustainability leaders or regional biodiversity officers.	2, 3, 4, 6, 9	5
Training for all: Comprehensive training programmes for all stakeholder groups: biodiversity education for teachers, farmers, and community members, nature induction courses for new teachers, mentoring and buddy schemes to foster teacher engagement, nature restoration training for principals and school staff, natural space management development for caretakers, and paid professional development	2, 3, 8, 9, 10	5
Sources of support: Sources for resources could include EU funding or the leveraging of existing resources like public parks, tidy towns projects, and farming communities.	5, 11	2
Incentivisation: Comprehensive incentivisation and recognition frameworks are introduced, such as award programmes similar to Green Flag and Young Environmentalist Awards, School reward systems for measurable positive environmental changes, and league tables based on sustainability and biodiversity efforts.	4, 7	2
Accountability: Mandatory enforcement mechanisms and accountability systems, such as compulsory participation requirements with both enforcement and encouragement approaches, and SMART targets to ensure measurable accountability and progress.	4, 11	2
EDUCATIONAL APPROACHES & PEDAGOGY		
Outdoor learning: Outdoor, place-based, experiential learning is normal practice.	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11	8
Additional learning methodologies and approaches: Practical hands-on activities, using local knowledge, student-led education, free play in nature, peer teaching where students instruct younger students, design and making opportunities, integration of technology and virtual reality tools, and approaches that address biases in ecological education while communicating the benefits of nature engagement.	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11	7

Curriculum integration: Biodiversity and nature education is embedded across all curriculum streams and subjects (made straightforward and practical), by learning subjects through nature. Incorporating sustainability principles across sectors at third level including accountancy, chemistry, and engineering, and ensuring engineers/designers learn about nature and biodiversity to incorporate housing for nature in all their designs.	2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11	6
What to include: Practical biodiversity to include nature restoration modules, optional environmental service years, mandatory nature-based work experience, exploration of how plants create pharmaceuticals and nature influences physics and design, annual school biodiversity challenges such as meadow creation and pollinator areas, restoration and reintroduction projects, regular engagement with local nature reserves.	2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11	6
Across all settings: Coherent biodiversity education across all educational settings and levels, from preschool through tertiary education including mainstream and alternative education pathways.	2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11	6
Assessment and accountability systems: Biodiversity is a priority in school assessment plans through School Improvement Plans (SIP), School Self-Evaluation (SSE), and School Inspections, with the Inspectorate integrating these requirements into formal evaluation processes. Assessment frameworks for both student learning outcomes and curriculum effectiveness.	3, 4, 8, 9	4
Learning for life Educational approaches grounded in learning for life rather than exams, emphasising critical thinking over rote learning, with a values-based rather than points-based curriculum.	5, 6, 7	3
Stand-alone subject: Dedicated biodiversity education as a core, stand-alone subject similar to SPHE that is mandatory for Junior Cert and Transition Year while optional for Leaving Cert, or incorporation into a new sustainability and environment subject.	4, 8, 11	3
Time considerations: Dedicated nature time within school timetables, minimum weekly time in nature requirements.	2, 4, 8	3
Engagement strategies:	3, 4	2

Making participation fun and active for students and having recognition and celebration systems to ensure buy-in.		
Rollout successful initiatives and programmes: Forest Schools with transportation for students, alongside attention-capturing approaches like The Hedge School. The Hare's Corner initiative by The Burren Beo Trust, which started with the EU Life Project, involves outreach to schools and re-orientating school grounds to increase biodiversity. Students engage in restoration projects such as bog restoration as part of third-level entry portfolios, demonstrating practical conservation outcomes.	5, 6	2
SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE & SETTINGS		
School's infrastructure: Schools are models for wider society, with classrooms, grounds, and surrounds managed as biodiversity sanctuaries filled with native plants. Schools are retrofitted to become nature sanctuaries/havens, with no spraying, bird boxes, and habitats for pollinators and wildlife. Students manage and plan green spaces, from wildflower patches and bee hotels to vegetable gardens and tree planting. Schools are built around nature and become living natural museums. Each class has a garden in the classroom and a door to the outside, alongside a community orchard and microgreens business. Plants and green spaces are present in classrooms and school buildings, with functional habitats such as forests, ponds, and vegetable patches. Schools themselves are built with natural materials (e.g., fewer plastic lunchboxes, chairs, tables, etc.)	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11	9
Access to nature: Schools have outdoor space and access to nature, with wild spaces, outdoor classrooms, and gardens as part of everyday learning. Schools are linked with places of nature, and students have access to a range of habitat types within a reasonable distance. Sensitive areas are protected from disturbance, while other parts of nature are used for education. Nature reserves are designed with education at the core. A significant percentage of all school grounds dedicated to nature (more than 30%), and growing vegetables for school meals.	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11	7
COMMUNITY & SOCIAL INTEGRATION		

Key players and leadership: Decision makers, planners, politicians, and community leaders work alongside community biodiversity champions, students as community leaders, and nature restoration specialists who liaise with communities. Link officers connect schools and communities, while citizen's and youth assemblies regularly inform policy. A whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach creates shared goals and common ethos between formal education and farmers/landowners, moving from "us and them" to "we're in this together." School leadership is supported, champions take action, and everybody comes to the table.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11	9
Sharing effort and responsibility: Responsibility is distributed across the broader community to reduce pressure on teachers and principals, with principals opening doors while community and local councils initiate and maintain involvement. Schools contribute to local biodiversity upkeep through collaborative approaches.	2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11	6
Local action & place-based engagement: Local engagement with conservation areas reflects place-based approaches (midland schools focusing on peat conservation, coastal schools on marine conservation), with nature valued locally. Vibrant community hubs connect schools to farmers, landowners, and experts (beekeepers, ecologists, horticulturists) shared between schools. Cross-collaborative sustainability networks break down silos. Schools connect to each other, supported by national conversations on education's role in biodiversity, policy shifts, inter-agency collaboration, and community celebration of wins.	2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 11	6
Community education and lifelong learning: An ecologically literate population develops through inclusive educational experiences, with parents confident enough to teach and biodiversity skills. Society-wide benefits emerge, with baseline biodiversity knowledge mandatory for civil servants.	5, 6, 7, 9, 10	5
Sharing resources and spaces: Outside spaces are co-managed by schools and local authorities, maintained by students. Mutual use of facilities promotes schools using community assets and vice versa (vegetable patches, sports halls, GAA spaces), creating "Air BnB" for schools with after-hours learning hubs, clubs, libraries, and communal gardens. An open-schools approach enables community use of school spaces during out-of-hours' time to explore biodiversity, ecological literacy, and other social responsibilities.	3, 4, 7, 11	4

Attendees

An Taisce * 4: Green Schools, LEAF Ireland
Biodiversity in Schools
Biodiversity Ireland, National Biodiversity Data Centre
Biodiversity Officers: Kildare, Waterford
Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland
Business for Biodiversity Ireland
Children & Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss representatives * 2
Dalkey School Project Forest Schools
Department of Climate, Energy & the Environment
Department of Education & Youth * 3
Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science
Dublin Zoo * 2
Ecological / Environmental / Climate Scientists (10): *Dublin City University, Maynooth University * 2, Trinity College Dublin * 3, TU Dublin, University College Dublin * 2 (Independent Advisory Committee member), University of Galway*
Edmund Rice Schools Trust
Educate Together
Education & Training Board Ireland (ETBI) * 2
Education for Sustainability
Education Support Centres, Ireland Climate Action and Nature Committee
Farming for Nature Ambassador & Member of the Independent Advisory Committee
Glenveagh National Park Ranger, Co. Donegal, National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)
Heritage Council * 2
Higher Education Authority
Initial Teacher Educator (4): *Dublin City University * 2, Marino Institute of Education, Maynooth University*
Irish Environmental Network & Member of the Independent Advisory Committee
Irish Peatland Conservation Council
Irish School Sustainability Network (3 members counted among primary/post-primary teachers)
National Botanic Gardens, Office of Public Works (OPW)
National Council for Curriculum & Assessment (NCCA) * 3
National Museum of Ireland * 3
National Parks & Wildlife Service * 3
Nephin National Park Ranger, Co. Mayo, National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)
Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children
Oide * 2
Post-primary Teachers * 5
Primary Teachers * 5
SOLAS
Teagasc * 2
Waterford Education Support Centre