

# ECO-CONGREGATION SCOTLAND

## ASSESSING AWARD APPLICATIONS Guidelines for applicants and assessors



### Introduction

These guidelines explain how applications for an Eco-Congregation Scotland award are assessed. They apply to all levels of award. They are addressed to churches applying for an award and assessors judging applications, so that all parties may understand each other's role and responsibilities.

### Step 1 – Pre-assessment check of application

When a church applies for an award, its application is read by Eco-Congregation Scotland staff to verify that work has progressed as specified in the awards criteria.

If it is judged that significant work is required to raise the application to potential award level, Eco-Congregation Scotland will inform the church and invite it to submit a revised application at a later date.

### Step 2 – Appointing assessors

Two assessors are appointed. One will normally be associated with a congregation that holds an Eco-Congregation Scotland award and so, familiar with the eco-congregation movement and church life. The other will normally have a background in environmental science and/or experience of work in that field. Occasionally, Eco-Congregation Scotland staff may participate in the assessment visit.

Eco-Congregation Scotland staff's preview of the application notwithstanding, the assessors make the final judgment upon the application and their decision is binding. Their aim is to enable applicants to present their case in the best light, rather than to find fault. They will conduct the assessment against criteria in an informal and encouraging manner.

### Step 3 – Arranging the assessment visit

When they are appointed, Eco-Congregation Scotland will send the assessors:

1. The church's award application form and any supporting information submitted;

2. An award assessment form: this states the award criteria, and serves as a record of what the church achieved and what the assessors thought;
3. The identity and contact details of the colleague assessor;
4. An expenses claim form;
5. If the application is for a second, third or continuing award, a copy of the previous award letter.

Eco-Congregation Scotland will liaise with the assessors and the church to arrange a suitable date for the assessment visit. Once the date has been confirmed, the assessors may contact each other, and then the church, in order to discuss the assessment visit.

It can be difficult to bring people together, so Eco-Congregation Scotland will work co-operatively with the church to arrange dates and times. Some assessment visits take place after Sunday service; if this pattern is adopted, note that the service is not part of the assessment and that some assessors may prefer not to attend.

Ultimately, it is for the church to decide who represents it at the assessment visit, but it should recognise that assessors need to meet a cross-section of people to enable them to establish how eco-activity relates to and is supported by the church as a whole. The group they meet should normally include: the team that compiled the application; people involved with worship; people engaged in such work as recycling and Fair Trade; the property convenor or equivalent; and some of the church's senior office-bearers (e.g. minister, session clerk or equivalent, treasurer).

#### Step 4 – Conduct of the assessment visit

Normally, an assessment visit lasts about two hours and follows the pattern described below. This has been designed to ensure that applicants can present their case in its best light, that assessors may explore that case with members of the congregation, and that all assessments follow a broadly similar pattern, in the interests of fairness and consistency.

If a church believes that some aspect of its application requires different examination, it should inform the assessors, who will discuss with the church how the pattern may be amended to address this. The assessors may also suggest changes to the standard pattern; if so, they will discuss this with the church before the business of the visit begins.

When the assessors arrive, the church should give them opportunity for a short private meeting to plan their approach. This is necessary because, although the assessors will have been in communication before the visit, they may not have met.

Next, the church should provide a guided tour of its premises, including church, grounds, hall and any ancillary buildings. This will enable the church to show what has been done and allow the assessors to ask questions informally.

Third, the assessment meeting, in which assessors discuss the application with members of the congregation. One of the assessors will chair it and it should normally be conducted in some round-table format. The assessors will first explain their role, describe how they will conduct the discussion, and answer any questions the church may have. Everyone should understand the process and possible outcomes before discussions begin.

Assessors should ensure that the tone of the meeting is that of a discussion between parties with a common interest, not an interrogation. The event should be an enjoyable and encouraging learning experience for applicants and assessors alike. If the assessors do not address issues that the church feels are important, the church should raise them and ask that they be considered.

After the discussion, the church should afford the assessors a second private meeting to discuss their findings and reach a decision. If the assessors have reached a decision, they will announce it at the end of their visit – if not, the church will be notified of the decision within a fortnight of the award visit.

#### Step 5 – Making the award

The award is made in one of three ways.

##### *Outright award*

The church has a very good record of achievement in caring for the environment; its work is on-going and has a clear direction and purpose; the assessors find it worthy of commendation and have no recommendations for improvement. The church is encouraged to continue and extend its excellent work.

##### *Award with recommendations*

The church has a good record of achievement in several areas of the programme, which the assessors find worthy of commendation. However, the assessors also identify areas for improvement and make recommendations for future work. The church will be expected to address these and to demonstrate progress in any future award application it may make.

##### *Award deferred with conditions*

The church has met the criteria in some areas of the programme, but the assessors find it weak in others, which they specify. The assessor set conditions for future work and prescribe a development programme which they believe may help the church to attain award standard. The church is invited to address these conditions within an agreed time-scale (normally, three to six months) and to report to Eco-Congregation

Scotland. On receipt of that report, a member Eco-Congregation Scotland staff and at least one of the original assessors will visit the church to re-assess its work.

Normally, churches will meet the conditions set and the award will be made. However, if a church does not, the award will be withheld and the church offered advice about enhancing its work and submitting a revised application, which it may do after a minimum of six months. It will be offered the services of a peer mentor to assist it during this period.

#### Step 6 – After the assessment visit

Assessors should normally complete the assessment form within one week of the assessment visit, recording their decision, any commendations, recommendations or conditions, and the suggestions or comments that they wish to be conveyed to the church. It will be helpful if they suggest a way forward for the church, as well as commenting on what has been done already. They may add any remarks that they wish to make about the application, how it was presented and how the assessment proceeded.

Assessors should send the completed assessment form to Eco-Congregation Scotland, email [manager@ecocongregationscotland.org](mailto:manager@ecocongregationscotland.org) along with their expenses claim form, if desired.

#### Receiving the Award

Normally, Eco-Congregation Scotland will provide the church with written confirmation of the assessors' decision, comments and recommendations, within two to three weeks of the assessment visit. Churches gaining an award will receive a plaque confirming their achievement.

It is up to each congregation to decide if they wish to have an award ceremony and to arrange the event. Many choose to invite people from outside the congregation who have been instrumental in receiving the award, and assessors are also often invited. We love to share information and photos on our website and newsletter and will happily advertise open invitations.

#### Appeals

A church that is dissatisfied with the assessment of its application may appeal to the Board of Eco-congregation Scotland. In such case, it must show that the assessment process described here was not followed properly and/or that matters that it stated were important to its application were not considered. There can be no appeal against the assessors' judgment. The appeals procedure, which must be followed by appellants and by Eco-Congregation Scotland, is set out in a separate document.