**Eco-congregation Scotland**

**Revised Award System 2017**

**FAQs**

**Who can apply for an eco-award?**

Our eco-awards are open to any registered eco-congregation.

**How do we apply for an eco-award?**

To apply for an award, you should complete the appropriate application form and send it with any relevant supporting evidence (by email, if possible) to Eco-congregation Scotland. You may submit information on projects undertaken both prior to and since registering as an Eco-Congregation, but must clearly show that there is ongoing current work at an appropriate level to obtain an award.

**Where can I find the application forms and information about the awards?**

All the forms, and information about how to apply can be downloaded from <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/award/>

**What is the difference between bronze, silver and gold awards?**

The bronze award is an entry-level award, recognising that a congregation is doing all the basics that we would expect from every eco-congregation across the three broad areas of spiritual living, practical giving and global living. There are 11 criteria, covering these three broad areas and some general aspects (such as planning, and communication), and a congregation must show that it has achieved, or made substantial progress toward achieving, all of these 11 criteria. We would expect most eco-congregations to be able to achieve a bronze award within a year or two of registering.

The criteria for the silver award cover the same 11 topics as the bronze award, but set a more demanding standard, requiring (for example) active participation by members, care for creation reflected regularly in worship and involvement in local network events. A silver award should be achievable by any eco-congregation which is taking its responsibility to care for creation seriously.

The gold award is the most challenging, and recognises congregations which have developed a long-term commitment to promoting environmental issues as an integral part of their congregational life. We hope this will provide extra stimulus and motivation for our most active congregations.

Note that the awards assess the quality and depth, rather than the amount of relevant action being taken, so all 3 levels should be equally accessible to all congregations, whether large or small.

**We have renovated our church building and made it very energy efficient. Will that gain us an award?**

Improving the energy efficiency of your building is highly creditable. However, on its own, it will not be enough to gain you an eco-award. There are 11 criteria for each award, covering the three broad areas – spiritual living, practical living and global living - and some general aspects (such as planning, and communication). To achieve an award, a congregation must show that it has achieved, or made substantial progress toward achieving, all of these 11 criteria.

However, we also give awards for outstanding achievement in three categories: spiritual living, practical living and global living. Your work on the church building may be recognised by one of these awards. Nominations for these awards are to be received by 31st December each year and will be judged by the Board. The awards will be presented at the following AGM.

**How are the awards assessed?**

On receipt of an application form, the application will be reviewed by an Eco-congregation Scotland member of staff. Once satisfied that the application is complete and appropriate, two assessors will be appointed. These assessors will arrange to visit the congregation at a mutually agreeable time to discuss the application.

After the visit, the assessors will submit a report to Eco-congregation Scotland indicating whether the award should be made and at what level. The report will also identify particular areas for commendation, and recommendations for ongoing action. The outcome of the assessment will then be communicated to the congregation. Depending on the evidence presented, assessors may recommend an award at a different level than the one applied for.

**We already have an award. Is it still valid?**

All awards under the previous award system were technically valid for 3 years. After 3 years, you were encouraged to apply for another award. However, we don’t come and take the award plaque back at the end of that time! Your previous awards will still be shown on our website map and recorded in our records.

**We already have a valid award from the old system. Can we automatically replace it with one of the new awards?**

The criteria for the new awards are different, so there is no automatic replacement. However, if you apply for one of the new awards within the first 6 months (up to end of January 2018), we will assess your application based on the application form and supporting evidence only – there will be no need for an assessment visit.

**How do we know which level of award to apply for?**

If you are considering applying for an award, we recommend that you start with the self-assessment checklist, which will allow you to judge how well you currently meet the criteria for each level. This document also contains some useful notes that will give you ideas for how you might meet the criteria at your chosen level.

You should also read the revised award system August 2017 document, which describes in full the awards, the criteria and the assessment process.

These two documents can be downloaded from <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/award/>

**I think we meet the criteria for a silver award. Do we need to get a bronze award first?**

Under the new award system, you may apply for an award at any time, and applications can be made at any level – bronze, silver or gold. There is no need to apply for a bronze award first if the congregation already meets the criteria for a silver or gold award.

**Do we need to submit supporting evidence with our application?**

Supporting evidence isn’t required. However, feel free to send us anything that is relevant, and which will help the assessors to understand your application. You can include links in your application to on-line resources (eg information on your church website or media reports). Remember that, at your assessment visit, you will be able to show the assessors examples of what you have done.

**Are the new awards only valid for 3 years?**

The new awards are valid indefinitely, but you are encouraged to re-apply when you feel you have met the criteria for a higher level award, and to progress towards the gold award over time.

**How do we submit our application form?**

We prefer you to download the Word version of the application form, complete it electronically, then submit it to us by e-mail with the application form attached. This saves paper and postage, and allows it to be forwarded to your assessors, who can then ad their comments in the “for assessor use only” sections. Any supporting evidence should be scanned (if it is not already in electronic format) and sent as additional attachments. Please avoid sending very large files if possible.

If you are unable to use the Word format version, you can download and print off the pdf version, and send it to us by post. However, we definitely prefer it in electronic form!

**Can we include information about things we have done several years ago?**

Yes, you can submit information about past events and activities, especially major upgrades and actions. However, the assessors will be looking to see what it is you are doing now, and you plans for the future.

**Who will assess our application?**

On receipt of an application form, the application will be reviewed by an Eco-congregation Scotland member of staff. Once satisfied that the application is complete and appropriate, two assessors will be appointed. One will normally be associated with a congregation that already holds an Eco-Congregation Scotland award. 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.

**Are there special transitional arrangements for the changeover to the new award system?**

Applications for awards under the revised award scheme criteria will be accepted from 1st August 2017.

Applications for awards under the previous award scheme will continue to be accepted until 30th September 2017.

During the first 6 months of the new award scheme, all existing and previous award holders will be invited to apply for one of the new awards, by submitting an application form and supporting evidence. The application will be assessed by a team of assessors, and a bronze, silver or gold award will be made as appropriate. There will be *no assessment visit*. This concession will apply only for existing award holders during the transitional period (until 31st Jan 2018).

After this transitional period, all applications, including those from holders of previous awards, will be assessed in the usual way, based on an application form, evidence and assessment visit.

**What happens at the assessment visit?**

When the assessors arrive, the congregation 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 congregation should provide a guided tour of relevant premises, including church, grounds, hall and any ancillary buildings. This will enable the congregation to show what has been done in respect of church buildings, 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 introduce themselves, explain their role, describe how they will conduct the discussion, and answer any questions the congregation may have. Everyone should understand the process and possible outcomes before discussions begin.

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

After the discussion, the congregation should afford the assessors a second private meeting to discuss their findings and reach a decision. Normally, assessors will announce their decision at the end of the visit.

**What happens if the assessors decide we have not met the criteria for an award?**

The award is made in one of three ways.

1. Outright award at level applied for

The congregation has achieved or made substantial progress towards meeting all of the criteria for the level applied for; its work is on-going and has a clear direction and purpose; the assessors find it worthy of commendation. The congregation is encouraged to continue and extend its excellent work. Assessors will make recommendation on further actions that could be taken,

1. Outright award at different level

On reflection, the assessors may judge that the congregations either:

(a) has not met all the criteria for the level applied for, but has achieved the criteria for the level below; if the congregation does not already have an award at the level below, an award at this lower level may be offered. The congregation may then accept that lower award, or prefer to withdraw their application and re-apply at alater date.

(b) has met all the criteria for a higher level award; the congregation would then be awarded the higher level award.

3. Award deferred with conditions

The congregation has met some, but not all the criteria. The assessors will discuss where further work is required and suggest a development programme which they believe may help the congregation to attain award standard. The congregation is invited to address these conditions within a declared time-scale (normally, three to six months) and to report to Eco-Congregation Scotland. On receipt of that report, a member of Eco-Congregation Scotland staff and at least one of the original assessors will re-assess the congregation’s work. A further visit may be required.