

Eco-Congregation Scotland

Assessing Award Applications

(revised award system 2017)

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 congregations applying for an award and assessors judging applications, so that all parties may understand each other's role and responsibilities. Where a party should initiate action, it is highlighted.

Step 1 – Pre-assessment check of application

When a congregation applies for an award, its application is read by Eco-Congregation Scotland staff to verify that the application is complete, and ready to be assessed.

If it is judged that the application is incomplete, or lacking sufficient information, Eco-Congregation Scotland will inform the congregation, indicate why the application is being deferred, and invite it to submit a revised application at a later date.

Otherwise, Eco-Congregation Scotland will appoint assessors who will contact the congregation to arrange an assessment visit.

Step 2 – Appointing assessors

Normally, two assessors are 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.

Step 3 – Arranging the assessment visit

Once they have been appointed, Eco-Congregation Scotland will send the assessors:

1. the congregation's award application form and any supporting information submitted;
2. the identity and contact details of the colleague assessor;
3. an expenses claim form.

The assessors will liaise with the congregation to arrange a mutually agreeable date for the assessment visit. Once the date has been confirmed, the assessors should notify Eco-congregation Scotland.

The assessors should then contact each other, and then the congregation, to:

1. explain the aims, pattern and tone of the visit, and the possible outcomes;
2. discuss who the congregation proposes to bring to the visit;
3. address any issues that the congregation may wish to raise.

Ultimately, it is for the **congregation** 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 congregation 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 congregation's senior office-bearers (e.g. minister, session clerk or equivalent, treasurer).

Step 4 – Conduct of the assessment visit

The **assessors** make the final judgment upon the application and their decision is binding. They will conduct the assessment in a searching but non-confrontational manner.

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 **congregation** believes that some aspect of its application requires different examination, it should inform the assessors, who will discuss with the congregation 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 congregation before the business of the visit begins.

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 should 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.

An aside – What **assessors should look for**

Not perfection – that's impossible!

Assessors should satisfy themselves from the application form and the assessment discussion that the congregation has demonstrated environmentally focussed effort

across all the criteria, either fully achieving all criteria or having made substantial progress towards doing so.

Assessors should establish that the congregation has tried to analyse and think about its work, as well as listing events. What are our strengths? And weaknesses? What have we yet to attempt? How do we judge success and effectiveness? And occasional failure? A congregation should be given credit for identifying weaknesses as well as strengths, and criticised constructively if it does not do so.

Ensure that the congregation is committed to continuing its work and has a robust forward plan.

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.

Step 5 – Making the award

The award is made in one of three ways.

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,

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

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.

Normally, congregations will meet the conditions set and the award will be made. However, if a congregation does not, the award will be withheld and the congregation 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 “for assessor use only” sections of the application form within one week of the assessment visit, recording their decision, including any commendations, recommendations or conditions, and any suggestions or comments that they wish to be conveyed to the congregation. 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 coordinator@ecocongregationscotland.org along with their expenses claim form, if required.

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

Appeals

A **congregation** 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.

2/6/17

