

Primary Science Development Officers (PSDOs) from across Scotland spent two days in South Ayrshire exploring the intrinsic link between outdoor learning and STEM.

Raising Aspirations in Science Education (RAiSE), a programme of The Wood Foundation, Education Scotland, Scottish Government and participating local authorities, hosted the residential training event for its delivery team to develop relationships and share best practice in the creation and management of educational partnerships.

South Ayrshire PSDO Jenn McEwan RAiSE collaborated with the Culzean Country Park Ranger Service and South Ayrshire Council's Outdoor Learning Centre and Dolphin House's Outdoor Learning Instructors to form the two-day bespoke event. She said:



“The sessions were designed to inspire fellow PSDOs to consider how their local resources could be used to develop engaging and motivating STEM opportunities for practitioners in their regions. The collaborative nature of RAiSE practitioners working across local authority boundaries is a major strength of the programme. Having this opportunity to spend concentrated time together as a network was also invaluable for our professional growth.”

The PSDOs from North Lanarkshire, Angus, Fife, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire and Dumfries & Galloway made links with other curricular areas such as numeracy, literacy and social subjects through workshops involving the study of weather, astronomy, the rock cycle, sound maps, tree identification and pond health.

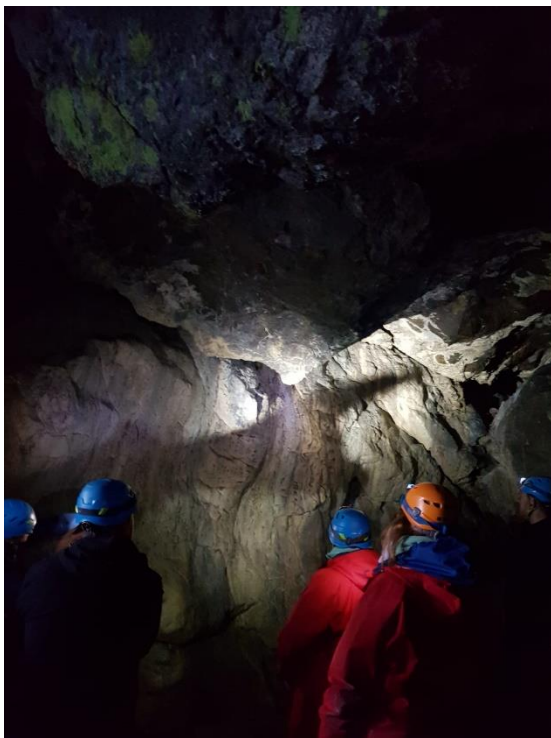
One of the sessions was focused around Culzean's education pond, a constructed feature which has been successfully reclaimed by nature. National Trust for Scotland Countryside Ranger, Karen Gardiner demonstrated how learners of different levels could study biodiversity, freshwater ecosystems and lifecycles on the site. She then explained that the pond is known for its Great Crested Newts which she said were an excellent indicator that the pond was pollution-free.

Karen Doherty, PSDO for Fife, said:

“Many teachers shy away from outdoor learning, even in summer months, so engaging during the winter may seem an uphill struggle. Despite the appearance of inactivity, the degree of biodiversity at the pond site was impressive – with one deft swipe of the net, we caught a thriving community of Common Newts and assorted invertebrates. I will be further encouraging the teachers who engage with this programme in Fife to make the most of our wonderful natural resources – it’s our responsibility and privilege to seek them out.”



The importance of high-quality, sustainable partnerships was discussed and South Ayrshire demonstrated its historic collaboration with community and industry to create meaningful and context-driven STEM opportunities for learners.



Neil Smith, Instructor at Dolphin House Outdoor Education Centre, South Ayrshire Council said,

“Quality taught science needs to link with other subjects. STEM brings different disciplines together, but I believe that outdoor learning has the power to link even more subject, as well as engage learners and contribute to raising attainment for all in schools.”

