



CEO Report (2023-2024)

ASDC AGM 2024: Wednesday 18th September 2024

The UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres (ASDC) exists to support and serve the ASDC membership by fostering learning, engagement and innovation within the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics for the public benefit.

ASDC is the largest network of informal science learning in the UK, reaching across all 4 nations with a diverse and impactful network of place-based organisations. Together ASDC members engage over 25 million people each year with STEM and its role within UK culture.

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ASDC Vision, Mission, Values

- Our Vision is of a society where science is accessible, inclusive and valued by all as a fundamental part of everyday life.
- Our Mission is to champion our members, bringing them together to achieve collective impact and reach through connection, advocacy and insight.
- Our Values provide a lens through which we evaluate our work and working practices. They define who we are, how we work, what we believe in and stand for: For more detail on our values of Inclusion - Connection - Collaboration – Evidenced-based – Sustainability, please visit our [Vision, Mission, Values](#) online.



ASDC Mission Goals

Connection:

- Maintain a flourishing network with a valuable offer for all sizes and contexts
- Valuable membership for professionals at all levels
- Year-round networking opportunities to share inspiring practice, facilitate collaboration and innovation, to be collectively brave and reflect on practice
- Sustain current and identify new partnerships to improve the quality and collaborative power of our programming and membership

Advocacy:

- Raise awareness and increase visibility of the impact, value and diversity of the network, through digital channels and working directly with government, funders and higher stakeholders
- Collate and celebrate case studies, regional and national datasets that evidence our impact with a priority focus on our work towards greater equity, diversity and inclusion in STEM, alongside our priority areas of action.*

Insight:

- Maintain a clear understanding of the diverse models and priorities of the sector to serve their needs
- Co-produce a charter / framework for EDI work to measure, prove and improve practice
- Maintain a future-focussed, open, outward-facing culture with connections and collaborations that drive innovation.
- Share sector insights and inspiring practice with a focus on our members' priority areas of action*:
 - Equity, diversity, inclusion & access
 - Environmental sustainability
 - Supporting a flourishing practitioner network
 - Funding opportunities that align with our values

Membership

The ASDC membership comprises our [core members](#), [national partners](#) and [associate members](#). Core membership includes the largest publicly accessible engagement centres across the UK, including science and discovery centres, museums and eco-attractions. As of 18th September 2024, ASDC has a strong and growing membership of 47 organisations, 8 national partners and 11 associate members.



New members (2023-2024) include:

- Aerospace Kinross
- SAMS' Ocean Explorer Centre
- Science Made Simple (* joined for 2024-2025)
- The Deep (rejoined)
- Explorer Dome (* joined for 2024-2025)
- The Institute of Physics (National Partners)
- The Royal Academy of Engineering (National Partners)

Following the 2023-2024 membership year, one member did not renew membership (April 2024):

- Oriel Science, Swansea

ASDC Staff

ASDC has an office in central Bristol. Kierann Shah resigned as Project Director on 28th July. The ASDC continued at 3.2 FTE during this financial year with 4 members of staff at 3.2 FTE for the remainder of the financial year, utilising freelance staff at times of high capacity:

- Shaaron Leverment, Chief Executive: 0.6 FTE
- Cait Campbell, Project Manager: 1.0 FTE
- Rachael Tapping, Head of Communications: 0.8 FTE
- Vicky Hull, Business Manager 0.8 FTE

Performance 2023-2024

From 2023-2024, ASDC has focussed activity that progresses our strategic goals and is led by our values. This includes creating and delivering a number of regular opportunities for knowledge exchange and professional development, leading national STEM projects and events to support sustainability and evidence-informed practice, and facilitating ongoing opportunities for collaboration, connection and innovation via a number of digital platforms. Through our activities, together we aim to raise the profile of our sector, champion the impact of the ASDC national membership and to promote a culture of accessible science for all.

The following (online) communities of practice for networking now exist:

- The Ambassadors Network
- Volunteers Network
- Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion advocate network
- Decarbonisation Group



- Education Network
- Marketing Network
- The Space Engagement community of practice

The following CPD and networking events took place for members in 2023-2024:

- Management Course (from perfection to progress) for emerging leaders within the sector, continuing into April 2023
- Monthly specialist members-only forum meeting (on a variety of topics for professionals working at different levels and departments within the membership)
- Regular decarbonisation group meetings
- The CEO Awayday (Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum)
- Our World From Space Training Academy (National Space Centre, Leicester)
- Valuing Inclusion Training Academy 'Evaluation 101' (Wellcome Trust, London)

The following networking events took place that reached beyond current members in 2023-2024:

- The ASDC national conference (Belfast, September 2023)
- Space community calls (Quarterly 2023-2025)

ASDC commits to regular communications and opportunities to celebrate and share ideas, practice and impact across the sector through the following digital platforms:

- [ASDC newsletter](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- The [ASDC Website](#): Our main broadcast platform for events, projects, news, resources
- [Accessibility Hub](#): "Small changes, big impact"
- [The Inclusion Portal](#): Shared learning on equitable and inclusive practice
- [The Climate Hub](#): shared resources, carbon-cutting measures, and external events on climate action for a collective approach
- The [Diversci collective](#): a pan-European collective, resource hub and associated bi-monthly informal/drop-in [Community of Practice](#)

The ASDC 2023 National Conference was hosted by W5 in Belfast on 28th and 29th September 2023. The theme was "The Power in Purpose" Exploring the Who, What, Where, When and Why of science engagement. The conference included in-depth workshops, activities, the AGM 2023, a networking dinner and two full days of inspiring keynotes, discussion tables, lightning talks and workshops. It was our largest conference to date attracting:

- 167 delegates
- 4 sponsors



- 5 keynote speakers
- 5 exhibitors
- 43 workshops, lightning talks and sessions

Advocacy

During 2023-2024 advocacy involved:

- Aligning our strategic communications on impact and value of the science and discovery centres sector with funders, national partners and aligned networks
- Opportunities at main events to engage with devolved Government and local MPs
- In person and online connections with Government departments and ministers including:
 - Chi Onwurah MP (shadow science minister)
 - Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and BEIS
 - Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA)

Instruments most valuable for advocacy include project impact reports, national evaluations and data collected across our charitable sector (e.g. the February 2024 sector survey) that highlight the equitable and inclusive work of the sector to open up pathways and STEM opportunities for children and adults who are disengaged with science. This includes our work within local communities, career connections, and support we provide for schoolteachers and for practical science education and skills in schools.

The ASDC Board

At the 2023 AGM, Linda Conlon and Scot Owen stepped down from the ASDC Board of Trustees. The membership voted to accept three new trustees onto the Board, bringing balance in terms of museum, small science centres and national membership representation:

- Laurence Butler, Museum Manager, Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum
- Gareth McTiffin, Head of Commercial Development, Techniquist
- John Bull, CEO of Cambridge Science Centre

At the AGM 2024, we will be saying farewell to three more trustees who rotate off the Board. We are forever grateful for their time and guidance, hard work and dedication over the years:

- Chas Bishop, CEO of the National Space Centre and former Chair of ASDC
- Jenni Chambers, Head of Public Engagement and Skills, STFC (part of UKRI)
- Dr Hermione Cockburn, former Scientific Director at Dynamic Earth and Secretary of ASDC



National STEM Programmes

ASDC continues to run National Programmes that align with our vision, mission and values. Projects enable us to deliver sector-wide support, share knowledge, bring together communities of practice, and contribute to the sustainability of the charity:

Explore Your Universe – Phase 4 - LEGACY

- **Funded by:** STFC
- **Timeline:** 01 July 2022 – 30 June 2023
- **Delivery partners:** Aberdeen Science Centre – Cambridge Science Centre - Dynamic Earth – Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre – Science Oxford - Techniquest – W5 - Xplore! Science Discovery Centre
- **Summary:** Focussed on shared learning, advocacy and providing professional development opportunities grown from EYU4, this programme will also build assets and a professional network that supports the skills and understanding of inspiring practice that works across STFC science and community engagement with 'Wonder' audiences.
- **Key deliverables:**
 - A 2-day in-depth [training academy](#) for professional practice in community engagement
 - A UK cohort/community of practice focussing on inclusive science engagement
 - A simple framework to support the measurement of inspiring EDI practice
 - Shareable engagement assets to share practice and learning (including a [sequence of animations](#) and a Journal article submitted)
 - Final report (including ongoing work with EYU4 community partnerships)

Bold Futures

- **Funded by:** Wellcome
- **Partners:** The Museums Association, The Liminal Space
- **Timeline:** 30 June 2022 – 30 September 2023
- **Delivery partners:** Armagh Observatory and Planetarium - Cambridge Science Centre - Centre for Alternative Technology - Dynamic Earth - Kielder Observatory - Science Oxford – Wonderseekers, Winchester Science Centre & Planetarium
- **Summary:** Capacity building grants of £10,000-£25,000 across our science and discovery centre network to support values-led work that involves underrepresented audiences and explores how this can affect future purpose and financial sustainability. Led by the Museums Association with ASDC as a partner.



- **Key Deliverables:**
 - Cross-sector workshops delivered by the Liminal Space
 - A cohort of science centre active champions working for community representation and engagement in the context of future financial sustainability
 - End of project evaluation that enhances the development of the framework (EYU4), brings the MA and ASDC together in aligning evaluation toolkits (e.g. socially engaged practice, power to the people framework) for cross sector relevance, informing the evaluation strategy for Mindsets + Missions
 - [Dissemination of the seven projects](#)

Mindsets + Missions

- **Funded by:** UKRI
- **Partners:** The Museums Association, The Liminal Space
- **Timeline:** 01 September 2022 – 30 September 2024
- **Learning programme cohort and delivery partners:** Announcement of the successful grant awardees including ASDC members Dynamic Earth - Kielder Observatory - Wonderseekers, Winchester Science Centre – Xplore! Science Discovery Centre
- **Summary:** A key part of UKRI's mission to break down the barriers between research, innovation and society. UKRI have provided grants to support twelve museums and science centres for this work.
- **Key Deliverables (ASDC role):**
 - Learning Programme delivered by the Liminal Space
 - Ongoing evaluation consultation with Cornish & Grey
 - Panel selection committee, dissemination and participation on the steering group
 - Scoping project to outline the approach of Mindsets + Mission #2

Our World From Space

- **Funded by:** NERC and UK Space Agency
- **Timeline:** 01 December 2022 – 31 March 2025
- **Delivery partners:** Aberdeen Science Centre - Aero Space Kinross - Armagh Observatory & Planetarium - Cambridge Science Centre - Dynamic Earth - Dundee Science Centre - Exeter Science Centre - Glasgow Science Centre - Life Science Centre - Living Rainforest - National Space Centre - Oxford University Museums of Natural History - Royal Museums Greenwich - Science Oxford - Science Skills Academy - STEM Discovery Centre - Techniquist - The Observatory Science Centre - Thinktank - Wonderseekers - W5 - Xplore! Science Discovery Centre
- **Summary:** A theme of the value of space for the sustainability of planet earth, this project



offers a modular approach for 22 (moving to 25) participating science centres and museums across the UK, with £8000 delivery grants, £1500 of equipment (bespoke as requested per centre), in depth and bespoke evaluation support and a high-level evaluation and communication strategy across the wider 'Space to Learn' & 'Space to Inspire' projects.

- **Key Deliverables:**
 - Two year project (delivery flexible, playing to strengths of individual partners)
 - £8000 delivery grants for up to 23 science and discovery centres and museums playing to individual strengths
 - Content areas include Climate, Biodiversity, Clean Air and Oceans with a 'From global to Local' narrative
 - Content charrette during research and development
 - A new suite of equipment and training resources with a budget of £1500 per centre
 - A 2-day national training academy (3rd & 4th July, National Space Centre)
 - Delivery period Summer 2023 – Winter 2024
 - Large scale evaluation programme

Explore Your Universe: Valuing Inclusion

- **Funded by:** STFC
- **Timeline:** December 2023 – July 2024
- **Development partners:** British Science Association, UCL (Emily Dawson, Louise Archer, Jen DeWitt), National partners including Engineering UK, the IOP, and wider networks.
- **Delivery partners:** [Aberdeen Science Centre](#) – [Armagh Observatory & Planetarium](#) - [Cambridge Science Centre](#) – [Catalyst Science Centre](#) – [Dundee Science Centre](#) - [Dynamic Earth](#) – [Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre](#) – [National Space Centre](#) – [Royal Astronomical Society](#) - [Science Oxford](#) - [Techniquet](#) – [W5 - Xplore! Science Discovery Centre](#) – [We The Curious](#).
- **Summary:** The project aim is to promote equity and inclusion as the key to unlocking more diverse participation in STEM research, development, industry and innovation for the future.
- **Key deliverables:**
 - Recruitment of 12 projects devoting time, staff expertise and partnerships to provide evidence that supports (or challenges) the assumptions of the Logic Model.
 - Delivery of an 'evaluation 101' training academy for science centres and their community partners to align measures of inclusive practice.
 - Delivery of a Logic model/framework that adheres to the aim of the programme (see above). This Logic model will have a strong, research-informed approach that engages with wider networks, funders and pulls evidence from practitioners.
 - Supporting the UK cohort/community of practice focussing on inclusive science engagement
 - Final evaluation report and publication of the developed Logic Model.



Future priorities

In 2023-2024, ASDC will continue to provide core services through online and in-person events and programmes that promote connection, collaboration, professional development and the wellbeing of our membership workforce. This includes commitment to maintain year-round, accessible opportunities for staff to connect with peers from various levels and different departments within our member organisations. ASDC also remains a central connection point for quick access to the network for matters of sector importance. Membership growth is enabled through our enhanced membership offer and expanding membership towards national partnership and organisations that align with our values and achieve their mission without a centralised publicly accessible venue.

ASDC will continue to seek opportunities to run national programmes of work that align with its vision, mission and values. These programmes deliver sector-wide inspiration, encourage shared practice, demonstrate collective impact and support professional development, while keeping ASDC sustainable. For example, 'Explore Your Universe: Valuing Inclusion' will deliver an evidence-based Theory of Change to support the placement of equity and inclusion in STEM engagement as a business essential for the future, alongside providing practitioners with measurable indicators of impact.

Due to the increasing difficulty in attaining project funding, ASDC will continue to seek suitable project and core funding opportunities as a priority, with new approaches to collaborations and partnerships moving forward. Current and/or future programming in collaboration with the MA also provides opportunities for partnership work and shared resources.

Two new core strands of work have emerged during 2023-2024 to be taken forward for future plans:

- The ASDC sector survey furthered insight and data for advocacy. The resource required to undertake this survey was extremely high but provided our members with a valuable tool. Members have opportunity to use data collected through an interactive dashboard, in order to benchmark, explore audience and workforce trends, and understand successful initiatives in areas of shared challenge. The survey has re-affirmed ASDC mission goals and the value held by members in the ASDC offer.
- The sector survey and 2023 & 2024 CEO discussions have influenced the priority areas within ASDC mission goals, highlighting the need for ASDC to convene collective action to acquire a capital fund that supports science and discovery centres' aging building and estates, aligning with membership targets towards net zero. This work is underway.



In summary, the ASDC mission is to champion our members, bringing them together to achieve collective impact and reach through connection, advocacy and insight.

ASDC will also deliver a National Conference for members and the wider sector. The 2024 ASDC conference will be held at the Royal Society in November, and plans are in place to host the 2025 conference with the National Science and Media Museum in Bradford UK City of Culture 2025.

ASDC will continue to raise the awareness and visibility of the impact, value and diversity of the ASDC network through digital channels and by working directly with government, funders and national partners. ASDC prioritises opportunities to increase the profile and evidence for the national impact of science and discovery centres and museums to reach diverse audiences and for wider participation with STEM, championing the cultural and social impact of the national ASDC membership.