



CEO Report (2022-2023)

ASDC AGM 2023: Thursday 28th September 2023

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.



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 28th September 2023, ASDC has a strong and growing membership of 47 organisations, 5 national partners and 10 associate members.

New members (2022-2023) include:

- Aero Space Kinross
- Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
- Trust for Sustainable Living / Living Rainforest (rejoined)

Two members did not renew ASDC membership in 2023:

- National Museums Liverpool
- National Coal Mining Museum

ASDC Staff

ASDC has an office in central Bristol. Between April 2021 and July 2023, the staff structure remained as follows with some changes in job roles taking place following the appointment of Shaaron Leverment as Chief Executive on 01 April 2022.

- Shaaron Leverment, Chief Executive: 0.6 FTE (appointed from Acting CEO, April 2022)
- Cait Campbell, Project Manager: 1.0 FTE
- Kierann Shah, Project Director: 0.4 FTE (promoted from Project Manager, April 2022)
- Rachael Tapping, Head of Communications: 0.8 FTE
- Vicky Hull, Business Manager 0.8 FTE (promoted from Office and Projects admin, August 2022)

Kierann Shah resigned as Project Director on 28th July. We would like to send our thanks to Kierann for the past 2 years with us and hope to continue working with her in a freelance capacity over the coming years. ASDC has also worked with freelance staff at times of high capacity, e.g. Craig Smith, freelance project manager (January 2023 – April 2023).



Performance 2022-2023

From 2022-2023, 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 following CPD and networking events took place for members in 2022-2023:

- Management Course (from perfection to progress) for emerging leaders
- Monthly specialist members-only forum meeting (on a variety of topics for professionals working at different levels and departments within the membership)
- Additional online networking and seasonal events, e.g. CEO and Ambassador meet-ups, content-focussed calls (e.g. Webb science, Spaceport Cornwall launch etc)
- Regular decarbonisation group meetings [scheduled from January 2023](#)

The following networking events took place that reached beyond current members in 2022-2023:

- The ASDC national conference (Glasgow, September 2022)
- Support for new and emerging science and discovery centres (January 2023)
- Community Engagement Skills Academy (Xplore! Science Discovery Centre, March 2023)

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](#)
- [Twitter](#),
- [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 2022 National Conference** was hosted by Glasgow Science Centre on 28th and 29th September 2022. The theme was 'Inspiring a new culture of science' The conference included in-depth workshops, activities, the AGM 2022, a networking dinner and two full days of inspiring keynotes, discussion tables, lightning talks and workshops. It was our largest conference to date attracting:

- 165 delegates
- 85 organisations
- 3 keynote speakers
- 79 wider speakers and session leaders
- 47 workshops, talking and presentations

Advocacy

During 2022-2023 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:
 - Ben Spencer MP (previous advocate for the sector)
 - Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and BEIS
 - Department for Education (DfE)
 - Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA)

Many conversations took place around the three-month review period that identified business and organisations at risk from higher energy costs (and therefore still requiring support after 31st March 2023).

Instruments most valuable for advocacy include project impact reports (such as [Valuing Inclusion report](#)), evaluations and data across our charitable sector that highlight the equitable work of the sector within local communities, career connections, and support we provide for school teachers and science education and skills in schools at this time of perma-crisis.



Diversification of the ASDC Board

At the 2022 AGM, the membership voted to accept changes to the ASDC constitution to bring wording up-to-date and allow for individuals beyond our membership to stand as directors on the ASDC Board of Trustees. Following submission of the accepted articles, external recruitment took place in November 2022.

Following formal interviews, three individuals were recommended for the membership vote taking place at the EMG Wednesday 7th December. This year we are delighted to welcome Hassan Joudi (Chartered Engineer, WSP), Savita Wilmott (Chief Executive of the Natural History Consortium) and Sheila Kanani (Outreach and Diversity Officer, Royal Astronomical Society) to the [ASDC Board of Trustees](#).

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 - Techniquist – 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)



Destination Space INTERIM

- **Funded by:** UK Space Agency
- **Timeline:** 01 October 2022 – 31 March 2023
- **Delivery partners:** Dynamic Earth - Glasgow Science Centre - National Space Centre - W5 - Xplore!
- **Summary:** Application forms have been sent out to 5 centres that have delivered both Destination Space and Operation Earth previously. The aim of this interim phase is to keep momentum going on the themes of space and climate in these centres and gather baseline data and understanding on the way in which these two programmes overlap and enhance each other in preparation for Destination Earth.
- **Key Deliverables:**
 - Delivery taking place December 2022 to March 2023
 - Small grants to participating centres
 - Interim evaluation report March 2023

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
- **Summary:** Capacity building grants of £10,000-£25,000 across our science and discovery centre network. The aim of these grants is 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:**
- **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 - Technquest - The Observatory Science Centre - Thinktank - Wonderseekers - W5 - Xplore! Science Discovery Centre
- **Summary:** NERC funding allowed for the research and development phase of the programme and the UK Space Agency funding commenced April 2023. A theme of the value of space for the sustainability of planet earth, this project offers a modular approach for 22 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' projects supported by the UK Space Agency.
- **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

“Valuing Inclusion”

- **Funded by:** STFC
- **Timeline:** 01 December 2022 – 31 March 2023
- **Delivery partners:** Aberdeen Science Centre – Cambridge Science Centre - Dundee Science Centre - Dynamic Earth – Exeter Science Centre - Glasgow Science Centre - Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre – Life Science Centre – National Space Centre – Royal Museums Greenwich - Science Oxford - Techniquet – W5 – We The Curious – Wonderseekers /Winchester Science Centre - Xplore! Science Discovery Centre
- **Summary:** ASDC submitted a proposal for funds to enable community engagement programmes to continue activity that build on establishing best practice within the sector.
- **Key Deliverables:**
 - Short turnaround project with extended legacy
 - ~15 x £10,000 grants available for organisations working across STFC science engagement and represented within the DEIA advocacy group
 - Social media assets, news articles and visual highlights report delivered
 - Professional evaluation and [visual report](#) and impact report: [Valuing Inclusion: Learning about science my way](#)

Future priorities

To realign our goals and membership strategy, ASDC intends to regain a full understanding of the current membership including current opportunities and challenges faced. The last listening project of the full membership took place in Summer 2021. Future priorities therefore include launching a survey with all members in order to:

- Provide greater understanding of the structure and funding models of our membership
- Share insights with members e.g. initiatives that are working well, opportunity to benchmark, challenges or trends across the sector within audiences, workforce and our wider operating environment
- Uncover members’ fundraising needs and direction for ASDC goalsetting
- Gather evidence to support ASDC advocacy and collective voice for the sector



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

In 2023-2024, ASDC will continue to provide:

- 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.
- A central connection point for quick access to the network for matters of sector importance.
- Delivery of national projects that align with our goals, addressing equity, inclusion and sustainability.
- Development of a shared language that supports and celebrates the impact of science and discovery centres and museums, enabling members to measure, prove and improve their inclusive STEM engagement practice.
- Raising the awareness and increase the visibility of the impact, value and diversity of the ASDC network through digital channels and working directly with government funders and higher stakeholders.

Over the past 2 years, there has been a shift in the balance between project and core funding, enabling the team to deliver a great deal more for the sector beyond project partners. However, we must continue to push opportunities to increase the core funding into ASDC. Opportunities include:

1. Ongoing growth of the ASDC membership, in particular through increasing associate membership and national partnership.
2. Diversification of the ASDC core membership, potentially to include outreach organisations, university museum departments, etc.
3. Increased investment in developing funding proposals to organisations offering core support for charities
4. Event sponsorship and increases in commercial funding streams as sources of core funding

In addition, closer collaborations with sister networks such as the Museums Association enable ASDC to explore opportunities to deliver to our strategic goals, with increased benefits to the membership, while working in partnership with organisations that share our values.