

## Steve Cooper: we salute you!!

It's amazing what surprises we experience in life. I never expected to be writing to you from the position of Chairman, it just never crossed my mind. However at the first Management Board of the year my colleagues on the Board elected me to this very privileged position and I hope I can do it justice. I would like to thank Philip Thompson our outgoing Chairman for his leadership in the past year, although he has stood down from the Chair, Philip is continuing as a Member of the Board and we look forward to his continuing contribution. Some of you may know by now that Siobhan Toland has also stepped down from her position of the CIEH Trustee for Northern Ireland. Siobhan has made a magnificent contribution to CIEH at both regional and national level and she held the position of Chairman of Council in 2006. We both started as CIEH Trustees in 2001 and have maintained the NI contribution to the CIEH throughout that time, Siobhan with Policy Development and myself with Education. I can't remember a Centre Council or (now) Regional Management Board that Siobhan hasn't been a part of and we are going to miss her good humour and thoughtful contribution to our discussions. Siobhan is held in very high regard right through the CIEH family and further afield and I would thank her not only on your behalf but personally as well. An election will be called shortly to fill the Northern Ireland vacancy and I would be happy to talk to any interested members if you would like to give me a call.

On the 12 May Sam Knox (former Chairman) and Peter Kerr will both receive awards at a ceremony held by the CIEH in the Palace of Westminster, London. Sam will receive his Fellowship and Peter will be awarded the CIEH Graduate of the Year Silver Medal. Congratulations to both of them.

With this edition you will find the programme for 2009 and I hope many of you will be able to join us at our meetings. The first meeting of the year was held at Oxford Island and we were very pleased with the numbers attending, please keep it up. By now many of you will have noted the programme for the Joint Conference we hold each year with our colleagues in EHOA, this year's event will be on the 21/22 May in the Hodson Bay Hotel in Athlone. I hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend. Finally, don't forget to contact us if you have any suggestions for meeting topics or events that you feel we should be running for your benefit – we're always looking for good ideas.

S Cooper, Chair and Secretary, CIEH NIR

## FOG (fats, oils and grease) - cleaning up your act

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health along with Environmental Biotech has produced a one day course that brings the CIEH members right up to date with the operational problems and effective solutions to the core drainage concerns of all wastewater operations. This course qualifies for full CPD points and looks at dealing with problems caused by accumulations of fats, oils and grease from commercial and domestic premises and examines the problems caused by FOGs, control measures and solutions and considers how practitioners can work with producers to reduce or eliminate the problems. As building density increases and the use of buildings is changed the amounts of FOG entering the drainage system is increasing and reduced resources for the cleaning and maintenance of drainage and sewer systems means that FOGs can accumulate reducing capacity and flow problems along with complaints of smell, pest and nuisance problems. On this course you will look at traditional solutions and new and emerging technology to deal with these issues.

**Costs: Members £135.00 Non-members £180.00 Venue: Play Resource, North, 2 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GG**

**Date :14 September 2009—book your place now!!**

## Invitation to discuss the Food Standards Agency's proposed Strategic Plan for 2010 – 2015

The FSA is currently consulting on its new strategy for 2010 to 2015. It is available on the Agency's website [www.food.gov.uk/consultations/ukwideconsults/2009/proposedfsastrategy20102015](http://www.food.gov.uk/consultations/ukwideconsults/2009/proposedfsastrategy20102015). The plan describes the FSA's purpose of 'safe food and healthy eating for all' along with a set of proposed objectives, outcomes and priorities for the future. The proposed strategy is a result of considerable discussion with stakeholders, the food industry, public health and consumer organisations, local authorities, scientists and academics. The FSA is still at an early stage of the consultation process and is aiming to publish the new Strategic Plan early in 2010. As part of the consultation process, FSANI would like to invite you to a meeting at 12.30pm on Tuesday 19 May 2009, in the Mount Conference Centre, Belfast, to discuss the proposed new strategy. FSA's Chief Executive Tim Smith and the NI Director Gerry McCurdy will describe in some detail the rationale for the proposed way forward. Representatives from a wide range of organisations will be invited to provide their input, following which there will be considerable time for discussion. FSANI hopes that you will be able to join the discussion on 19 May for what will be a lively and constructive meeting. It would be appreciated if you could RSVP to [infosani@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:infosani@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk) asap, indicating your intention to attend and stating any dietary or other specific requirements.

## EHO to Chief Executive – A Learning Journey

Most Chief Executives come from legal or accountancy backgrounds. This makes sense given that the two main roles set out in any Chief Executive's job description are Chief Legal Officer and Chief Finance Officer. While financial and legal issues are extremely important Chief Executives however do not spend the bulk of their time on either matters.

A good Chief Executive must provide the link between the Councillors and the Council staff. He or she must have helped develop the Council's Vision and must have a strategy for turning it into action.

A good Chief Executive understands and is aware of the politics of the Council and how the Councillors collectively come to a decision. Sometimes this decision making process can take the 'scenic route' rather than the direct route and can be frustrating for staff keen to implement action.

Rather than being an expert in any one area of work a Chief Executive should be competent in all areas, not necessarily a 'whizz kid' but he or she should have a good understanding of all the issues involved. A good Chief Executive will contribute in all areas of Council activity some to a lesser degree than others but neglecting one area of work will soon be identified by staff.

Above all there must be an ambition to achieve both overall in terms of the Council Vision but also in each area of work.

I can say very clearly that EHO training and experience provides a very good foundation for a Director or Chief Executive's role pulling together the necessary strands of problem solving, diplomacy, legal knowledge and constant contact with the people that count – the ratepayers.

I am not aware of any of the other local government professions that involve dealing with the public from day one with an expectation that you are going to solve their problem.

I am not aware of any of the other local government professions that from day one throw you into a decision making role both from a technical and legal perspective and give you the experience of dealing with people who want you to do what they want.

The diplomacy and problem solving skills you gain as an EHO can serve you well in any career development. One of the other skills that most EHO's 'pick up' is consideration of the whole problem. EHOs learn quickly that just shifting a problem does not resolve it.

That 'whole problem awareness' skill will prove invaluable to any EHO who wants to develop a new or wider career.

When I first qualified as an EHO (in 1975!) the Environmental Health Department contained the most qualified officers of any Council Department. This fact set EHOs apart then but not anymore.

What sets EHOs apart now is that 'on the ground experience' – the people stuff – the emotional intelligence stuff. My advice is be aware of the quality of your experience, think about the skills you have gained (it is so easy to take them for granted) and think about how you can use them in other spheres.

Be aware of the role of other local government professionals and be willing to contribute to their goals and objectives as well as you can. One common failing of EHOs (in my opinion) is that they over-emphasise the importance of their profession and think that they are the only profession making a difference in health and environment issues because their job title is Environmental Health Officer.

You must gain an understanding of how your department and how you contribute to the Council vision. If you gain this understanding and coupled with the EHO experience every position and indeed every career opportunity is available to you.

My journey to Chief Executive was not planned but the EHO's skills I gained early on fell into place at the right time. I see my role as trying to ensure that ratepayer's Quality of Life is protected and enhanced – seems like I have always been on the same road!



John Briggs  
Chief Executive

Armagh City and District Council

To find out more about John and the work he and his colleagues do at Armagh City and District Council go to...  
[www.armagh.gov.uk](http://www.armagh.gov.uk)

## The Pennington Lesson

The Public Inquiry into the September 2005 E coli O157 outbreak in South Wales reported on 19 March 2009. A total of 157 cases were identified, of which 118 were identified as E coli O157. Of those 109 were of a strain unique to the outbreak. Most of the clinical cases were children in 44 schools across four local authority areas in the South Wales valleys. Of those 31 people were admitted to hospital and tragically Mason Jones, aged 5 years, died.

Those are the facts. In black and white they make sober enough reading. In real life, as any of the EHPs, members of the Outbreak Control Team, media and assorted others will tell you the outbreak had a life all of its own and carried all before it. For a period of three weeks it appeared in every local news bulletin, first of all as a suspicion, then as a mounting toll of victims, then as calls for an inquiry, justice and for the responsible person or persons to be identified. Responding to this concern the First Minister asked Professor Hugh Pennington to Chair a Public Inquiry to look into the causes of the outbreak. The specific terms of reference for the Inquiry were 'To enquire into the circumstances that led to the outbreak of E coli O157 in South Wales in September 2005 and into the handling of the outbreak; and to consider the implications for the future and to make recommendations accordingly'.

The progress of the inquiry was somewhat delayed by a criminal inquiry conducted by the police and the subsequent proceedings that followed it, but, as noted it reported in March 2009, after taking evidence for 8 months. The report makes 24 recommendations, considering amongst other things food safety practice, food hygiene inspections, procurement, lessons to be learned and further research. This is a matter of record – the report can be found on the Inquiry web site at [www.ecoliinquirywales.org](http://www.ecoliinquirywales.org). What perhaps is most important for EHPs is what can we learn from this outbreak and the investigation into it?

Professor Pennington was quite clear in his identification of the party who caused the outbreak, being the butcher who provided the contaminated meat to schools. He failed to ensure critical procedures, such as cleaning and separation of raw and cooked meats were carried out effectively. He falsified records and lied and misled EHPs. His HACCP plan was not valid, in some aspects being inaccurate and misleading. He had training, he knew what he was doing and he failed in his obligations. The pertinent question for the public however was 'How did he manage to get away with it and why wasn't he stopped?'

Chapter 7 of the report deals with the inspection of John Tudor and Sons by the local authority concerned, Bridgend CBC. It will make sobering readings for most EHPs. Officers were being asked to remember and justify why they had done or not done certain things, what omissions on forms meant and why they had acted in a particular way, why they believed what they had and actions they had or had not taken..

Had they checked what they were told and taken copies of documents? Let me be clear - I am not suggesting that any of these things were unreasonable or unfair and I do not suggest that the officers shouldn't have known the answers, but I also know just how difficult I would have found it had I been asked those questions about inspections I had done. It is always easy to question why someone acted as they did or believed what they did; it is particularly easy when events have proved that they were wrong to do so. But crucially, what can we learn from the report? The first and critical thing I think is that we should get proof. If you are told something get the proof and record it. If you are told someone has been trained get a copy of the certificate. If you are told a machine has been calibrated get a copy of the calibration certificate. If you are told that there are records but they are not available today ask why then make an appointment to get them tomorrow. However much you trust the person concerned, get the proof.

Secondly, if you have doubts, communicate them in a meaningful way. Don't make a note on the file – it may not be read by the next person to take up the file – have a system that flags up issues so that everyone knows what you think. If you have suspicions that records are being completed in batches do some spot checks to find out what the position actually is. You may be wrong, but critically you may be right. If you have suspicions prove them right or prove them wrong, but do so one way or the other.

Thirdly, deal with trends. If some one is stupid enough to let the same faults happen over and over and even though they may be dealt with on demand after an inspection the same faults have recurred at the time of the next inspection, deal with the trend – address the bigger issue. Instant remediation is not a long term solution – advise training and get the proof it has been done.

And critically – record everything. What you saw, said, thought, and did about it. Record it. One day you may have to remember and best guess may not serve you well. If there are boxes to be ticked tick them all, or explain why you haven't. If there is room for free flow write in it or explain why there is no need. Don't leave gaps – they can be filled by later speculation. I know most EHPs will say 'But I do that'. I also know most EHPs reading the report or listening to the evidence thought 'There but for the grace of God go I' or words to that effect. Some of the things I have believed or marked down to follow up on the next visit bring me out in a cold sweat when I consider them now. It may go against the grain for most of us to adopt as our mantra 'Believe nothing, trust no one, check everything, record everything' and it certainly doesn't help in building up trust and good working relationships, but ultimately it may literally and metaphorically be a lifesaver.

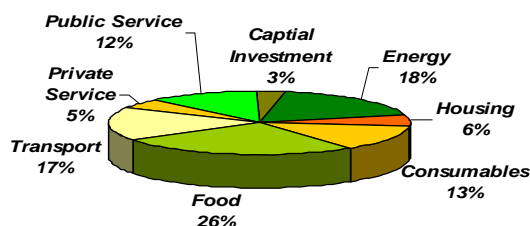


Julie Barratt  
Director CIEH Wales

To find out more about Julie and what she does go to...  
[www.cieh-cymruwales.org](http://www.cieh-cymruwales.org)

## Community Eco-Challenge Project

The Community Eco-Challenge is Northern Ireland's first community-based ecological footprint project. The two year project was funded by the DOE NI and was officially launched in September 2007, by the then Environment Minister, Arlene Foster. The project was managed by Southern Group Environmental Health Committee (SGEHC) in conjunction with WWF Northern Ireland and concluded on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009. Recent ecological footprinting figures released by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) indicate that Northern Ireland has an ecological footprint of 4.85 global hectares per person. That is well above the accepted "earthshare" of 1.8 global hectares and means that if everyone lived like we do in Northern Ireland then we would need three planets to sustain our lifestyle. The four big hitters of the NI ecological footprint are food, waste, transport and energy. The Community Eco-Challenge worked with 100 householders (6 communities) from across the 5 Councils within the Southern Group area. The project focused on the four big hitters to raise awareness of the impact each component had on their ecological footprint. It encouraged householders to make lifestyle changes, to reduce their consumption and to become more resource efficient. The project succeeded in reducing the ecological footprint of the 100 householders by up to 25% and the carbon footprint by up to 30%.



Stockholm Environment Institute, 2008

Ecological Footprint is a measure of our impact on the planet in terms of the amount of biologically productive land required to supply the resources we each consume and measured in 'global hectares' or 'gha'

### Project Outcomes and Potential Outcomes

**Food:** Householders reduced their food footprint by up to 15% saving householders £20 per week on food bills – that's over £1,000 per year. 92% of participants began to grow organic fruit and vegetables as a result of participation in the project. Through growing their own fruit and vegetables, householders reduced their packaging waste, food miles and energy associated with growing non-organic food and manufacturing processed foods. Householders have been encouraged to replace salt with the herbs they grow to reduce salt intake.

**Community Garden** Menaware & Cullaville District & Community Association set up a community garden. The community group was supported by the NIHE and Newry and Mourne District Council who identified and helped secure the land. The garden will provide young adults with mental health issues with an opportunity to work in the garden and benefit from the social and health advantages this will bring.



Chair of the Environment Committee Patsy McGlone with Laurence Moley of Menaware

**Energy:** Householders reduced their housing footprint (which includes energy) by up to 38% and made savings in their energy bills of almost £200 per year.

Through using energy efficient light bulbs, each household typically saved £50 per annum on their energy bill. By installing radiator foils and turning thermostats down by 1 degree each household typically saved £89 per annum on their home heating bill. Switching off standby resulted in the householders saving £37 per annum on their electricity. These 3 actions enabled each household to reduce their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 785Kg per year. If local authorities rolled out a similar project to even 50% of NI householders, it would deliver a combined saving of £59m on energy and save 267,000 tonne of CO<sub>2</sub>.

**Transport:** Householders reduced their transport footprint by up to 58%, saved money on fuel and enjoyed health and social benefits through cycling, walking and car sharing. The project promoted sustainable transport, encouraging householders to walk, cycle, car share and use public transport more. Where use of a car was a necessity, householders were made aware of the benefits of driving more efficiently.

## Community Eco-Challenge Project continued

**Sustainable Transport Scheme** Chrysalis Women's Centre in Craigavon established a community based cycle scheme. By cycling journeys under 2 miles, the women at the centre are reducing their CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, improving their health and saving money on fuel and taxi fares. Seeing this group of women using their bikes is having a spin-off effect with family and friends and is encouraging others to follow their lead.

**Waste:** Householders reduced their consumables footprint (which takes account of waste) by up to 26% diverting 17.5 tonne of waste per year from landfill. The waste reduction actions succeeded in diverting 7 wheelie bins per household per annum from landfill. If local authorities rolled out a similar project to even 50% of NI householders, it would divert 60,000 tonnes of waste from landfill, approximately 2.4 million wheelie bins.

**Cookery Book** The *Food for Thought* cook book was developed to reduce food waste in the home. It contains a range of recipes provided by all of the community groups and a number of celebrity chefs. The recipes focus on the use of local produce and 'leftover' ingredients. The book also includes food hygiene guidance as well as tips on how to be more energy efficient while cooking.

**Knitting Project** Magnet Women's Group based in Scarva initiated a knitting project that used wool waste. The ladies knit garments to send to a children's charity in Thailand. The group are committed to sustaining their work and have developed a collection scheme within their group to collect and share any old wool to knit into garments.



Magnet Women's Group with garments knitted from waste wool

**Community Composting Scheme: Willowbank** Resource and Community Centre in Dungannon are a resource centre for adults with physical difficulties and disabilities and incorporates a garden nursery which is open to the public. The group undertook a composting project and received a number of wormeries and rotating composters to make their own compost for use within the centre.

### Conclusion

The Community Eco-Challenge Project has demonstrated that targeted and tailored information, small scale incentives and the provision of support and mentoring by a dedicated team is highly effective in harnessing the power of communities and generating action at local level to complement the high level objectives and top-down campaigns of central and local government. A key output from the project was the development of an electronic toolkit for councils and community groups to adopt and provides a step by step guide for councils to help their communities reduce their ecological footprint. The project was supported by a number of organisations including the Southern Investing for Health Partnership, Actions Renewables, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Translink and has helped attract substantial funding for future initiatives the Community Groups plan to implement to ensure the achievements they have made are sustainable. The Community Eco-Challenge has been a huge success having succeeded in reducing the ecological footprint of 100 householders by up to 25% and the carbon footprint by up to 30%. On-going commitments made by the groups over the course of the next year will deliver a 33% reduction in their ecological footprint and a 40% reduction in their carbon footprint.

Below Eileen Campbell and her team celebrates winning the National Training Award To find out more about Eileen and her team go to...[www.communityecochallenge.com](http://www.communityecochallenge.com)



## A note from afar...

Are you thinking of working abroad? Graduates who are thinking of it and making a move from home may feel like its a step into the unknown. The CIEH NIR newsletter talks to David Cuthbert (EHO, Environmental Protection, Belfast CC) and a new addition to the CIEH NI Regional Board, about his thoughts on moving away from Northern Ireland.:

### David starts by telling us...

I wanted to work in an urban environment to gain experience of a wide range of EH issues. Socio economic deprivation accompanies many EH issues and looking back, working within the large conurbations of Liverpool and Greater Manchester certainly provided me with a wide range of experience. On a personal note, I had previously spent time with friends in Liverpool and it seemed like a friendly place, so I guess I gravitated towards somewhere I was familiar with and as a keen Manchester United fan I knew I'd be living within 30 minutes of Old Trafford!

### CIEH NIR asked: any advantages/disadvantages to working in England as opposed to here?

Yes there are minor differences in some of the functions undertaken by EH departments, but not a lot. Information sharing between sections and departments in a large unitary authority in England was certainly easier where several government departments and agencies may be involved and data protection and freedom of information concerns can sometimes make things more difficult. In dealing with the public a big advantage seemed to be the 'Norn Iron' accent! In Knowsley virtually all of the locals scourers" I met on a day to day basis told me they were related to someone from somewhere in Ireland so this certainly helped in developing working relationships with residents and businesses alike.

Within my work fields of environmental protection, housing and public health I gained experience of issues I might not have otherwise encountered. For example, undertaking PPC inspections of the new Jaguar X type spray painting operations at the Jaguar Halewood plant before photos of the model had even been released to the press was a privilege, particularly as I'm interested in cars; undertaking complex drainage investigations involving over 100 properties and arranging difficult works in default in situations this wouldn't within EH remit; or getting involved in home energy conservations initiatives and housing grant processes for major renovations or disabled facility grants, much of which would probably fall to the NIHE.

Another difference is the legislation – whilst most is virtually identical in one form or another, it is common for new legislation to be implemented in England before Northern Ireland. As a result I was able to benefit from implementing things like the new statutory nuisance provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Light and insects) and to avail of training seminars programmed in advance of its commencement.. Personally, as a newly qualified EHO I was given a lot of responsibility early on, in terms of supervising technical officers and autonomy in managing my own workload. This may have been due to scarcity of resources (funding issues and staff vacancies) and whilst this may have had disadvantages in terms of increased pressure to perform at an early stage in my career, it provided a challenging and stimulating job where you learn a lot very fast.. Promotion opportunities seemed to be quite common and after 3 years at Knowsley following internal reorganisation I was appointed Housing Renewal Manager, managing the Councils provision of financial assistance to home owners for improvement of housing standards. During this time I gained plenty of management experience, as well as partnership working with other organisations as a high level. Knowsley Council also sponsored my attendance on an MSc Management course.

During the 2 years in the Housing Renewal Manager role, whilst providing me with management experience and expertise in the housing field, I had recognised that a lot of the duties would be undertaken by the Housing Executive in NI. Whilst RPA was in its early stages and there was a possibility of some of these functions maybe transferring to local authorities in the future, I felt I wanted my career to be closed to the 'core' of EH. As a result I took up a Principal EHO at Wigan Council in 2004 where I was responsible for managing the Public Health team dealing with public health nuisances, pest control, environmental crime and antisocial behaviour.

### So what brought you back?

Whilst my initial intention was to come back after a year or so, things didn't happen that way. Shortly after arriving in Liverpool I met Gillian who is now my wife. Whilst Gillian was also from home we enjoyed living and working in north west England. The big catalyst for coming home was when our daughter Olivia was born. Missing the grandparents and family, we moved back in August 2008 after nine years in England.

**Thanks, David—really interesting piece, best of luck back home to you and Gillian.**



To find out more about David why not contact him at [ciehnorthernireland@cieh.org](mailto:ciehnorthernireland@cieh.org)

# Student Environmental Health Symposium

On cold snowy days at the beginning of February students from the First, Second and Final years of the BSc Environmental Health Course gathered to participate in a two day symposium, partly funded by CIEH. The purpose of the event was to facilitate the study



of current and emerging issues relevant to environmental health strategy and practice. An underlying theme of the event was also to enable interactions between students at different levels, tutors and visiting practitioners.

In the course of the two day three major topics were explored namely, community safety in Belfast , which covered issues such as **Anti Social Behaviour**, examining **Alcohol Fuelled Violent Crime**, **Hate**

**crime & Fear of crime**, **Housing** looking at regeneration & HMOs and finally Climate Change using the were the Six degrees scenario was used to outline the impact of each 1 degree rise in global temperatures above current levels.



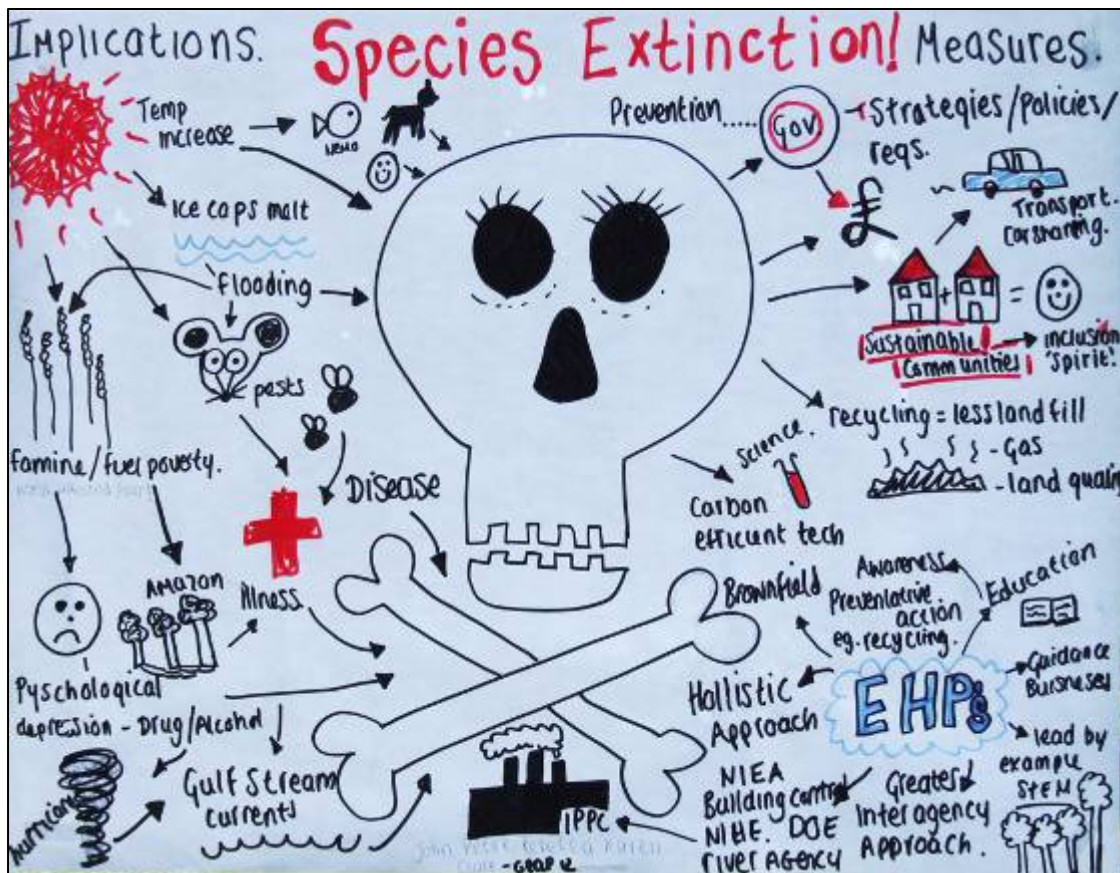
Each of these sessions was delivered by outside practitioners namely Sean McCormack from Belfast City Council who led on the Community safety section, Kevin Bloomfield from NIHE the Housing section & Gary McFarlane who gave the presentation on global warming. Each of these presentations was supplemented by contributions from UJJ staff, Bob Cameron, Ursula McAnulty & Sean MacIntyre .



After each of the presentations the students had to complete a range of tasks including drawing up community safety risk assessment forms and producing a "Rich Picture", poster to illustrate the issues associated with the work of EHPs & global warming.

Feedback indicated that the event was warmly received by the participants, which was in direct contrast to the weather over the two days, however despite this

the symposium was regarded as a successful learning experience drawing to together students at different stages of their degree, lecturing staff & practitioners.



The environmental Health staff at the University of Ulster would like to thank all those who assisted with the running of the symposium. It is anticipated that a similar event will be held in the next academic year, the study areas & venue for which are currently under consideration.