Divergently Together

Accessibility and Creativity in Climate Policy Workshop

1 October 2025

About this Document

- The document uses Plain English
- It is divided into sections.
- You can use the table of contents below to click into the section you want to explore.
- If you are short on time or energy we recommend reading the summary. It is in **Easy Read** format.

1. SUMMARY

Accessibility & Creativity in Climate Policy Workshop

	What: A day to make climate communication and policy more accessible and creative.
	When & where: 1st October, 2025 in Dublin City University (DCU).
	Who: We invited people from a diverse range of experience: Neurodivergent people, people with disabilities, policy-makers, researchers, artists, community practitioners. These people all have **expert knowledge** and **lived experience** in their fields.

They are also part of **networks** so that they can **share** the learning from the event with others.

We wanted to have a **conversation** with the people in the room. To do this we needed to keep the numbers small. This is why we are producing this report to share the learning more widely.

A list of people who came to the workshop can be found in Appendix 1.

Why: Climate change hits disabled communities harder. But, their experience is often missed.

The day aimed to listen, learn, co-design, and take practical next steps.

What happened?

Short talks on Universal Design, language, and climate access.

Hands-on workshops on listening, alt text and inclusive communication.

Unmasking Nature: Sensory Burrow, a nature based sensory room for regulation and inclusion.

ISL interpretation.

	Visual notetaking by Orla O'Brien
	Live scribing by Sybil Cope who wrote this report.
	The full schedule for the day is included in Appendix 2.

Key takeaways (the gist)

	Disabled people are experts in navigating barriers; listen to these voices so everyone benefits.
	Park the ego. Share power and decision-making.
	There is pressure to deliver. People are not given space to try, fail, and learn.
	Design for the edges first so systems work for everyone.

	Language shapes access. Plain English and Irish terms add needed nuance.
	Alt text adds depth, not "dumbing down". Invite people into the experience, think about all of the senses when you describe.
	Access is a process. Build it in from the start; test, learn, iterate.
	Nature helps regulation. Natural stim tools enable focus and calm.

	Neurodiverse ways of thinking can show us new ways to be in nature.
	An online <u>Collaborative Library</u> has been created where you can learn more.
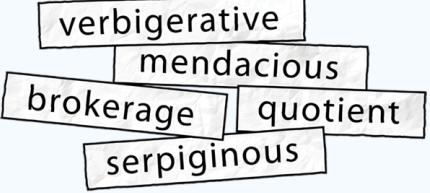
Barriers we heard about
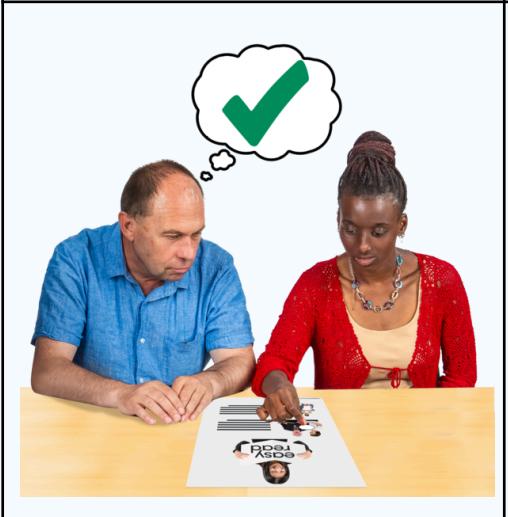
	Access added late; materials sent too close to events.

	Dense policy language. Gaps in ISL/BSL and captions.
	One size does not fit all.
	Limited co-design. People who are on the edges of society are not included enough.
	"Eco-ableism" is a new word to many. Eco-ableism is when environmental actions or policies forget about the needs of disabled people.

What we will do next (quick wins)

	Send Easy Read agendas.
	Create 'Know Before You Go' guides
	Add short glossaries for complex subjects.
	Budget by access: ISL/BSL, captions, and hybrid participation.

	Use alt text as the norm.
	Test content with users.
	Co-design from the start with diverse participants.
	Test a portable sensory space to give people access to nature.

Quotes from the day to carry forward

"Accessibility is not about being reductive or 'dumbing down', but about adding depth and understanding." — Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan

"Enabling people to access nature, enables them to be themselves." — Karan McLernon

2. INTRODUCTION

What is Divergently Together?

- Divergently Together is a creative project.
- It is led by artist Alan James Burns and the Insight Centre at DCU.
- The project helps disabled and neurodivergent people take part in climate action.
- It uses art, research, and co-design to make climate action fair and inclusive.
- It brings together:
    - People with lived experience of disability
    - People working on climate change
- Everyone learns and creates together.
- Workshops are made to be accessible and welcoming.

About the Workshop

- This report is about a workshop held on 1 October 2025 at DCU.
- The workshop was about accessibility and creativity in climate change policy.

What Happened on the Day?

- Talks to share ideas and set the scene.
- Workshops to explore and test new ways of working.

- Sensory activities with nature to help people feel calm and included.
- Live drawing and note-taking to capture ideas and barriers.

What We Wanted to Do

- Listen to disabled and neurodivergent people.
- Collect ideas for making climate action more accessible.
- Connect communities, researchers, and policy-makers.
- Create a record to share after the event.

Why This Work Is Important

- Climate change affects disabled people more than others.

Examples:

- Hard to get climate information (eco-ableism).
- More danger during storms, floods, and heatwaves.
- Some medicines make people more sensitive to heat.

But disabled and neurodivergent people also have important strengths:

- Resilience (strong in tough times).
- Resourcefulness (good at solving problems).
- Creative thinking (can help find new climate solutions).

These strengths are often left out of climate action.
This project wants to change that.

3. FRAMEWORK and INTENTION

What Was the Day About?

- A day for Accessible Communication through Creativity.
- People came together:
  - Disabled and neurodivergent people
  - Policy-makers
  - Researchers
  - Artists and creatives
- The goal: share knowledge, learn, and plan better climate action.

The Setting

- The workshop was held in a top-floor room at DCU.
- The room was bright and had views of the Dublin skyline.
- The room felt creative, with some nerves and excitement.
- People felt curious, hopeful, and ready to act.
- There were two ISL Interpreters present, Ela Cichocka and Shelley Gibson.
- Downstairs, there was a sensory space.
- It is called Unmasking Nature: Sensory Burrow.
- The room was low lit and felt calm and comfortable.
- There were bowls and dishes laid out on the ground.
- They were overflowing with natural items such as beech nuts, pine cones, moss, lichen, tree bark and rocks.
- There were beanbags, chairs and tables to sit at.

Opening Intention by Alan James Burns

A chair was placed for people who could not be there; for people and for nature.

'Know before you go' information helps people take part.

Access to nature can be supported using Easy Read.

The goal is clear access for everyone.

Why Communication Matters

- Disabled people are most at risk in extreme weather.
- They are not being told what is happening in ways they can understand.
- This means they cannot take action or stay safe.Many climate action plans are not available in Irish Sign Language (ISL) or British Sign Language (BSL).
- Written English can be a second language for ISL/BSL users.

Our Task

- Change how we communicate.
- Make sure people can:
  - Access information
  - Understand it
  - Take action
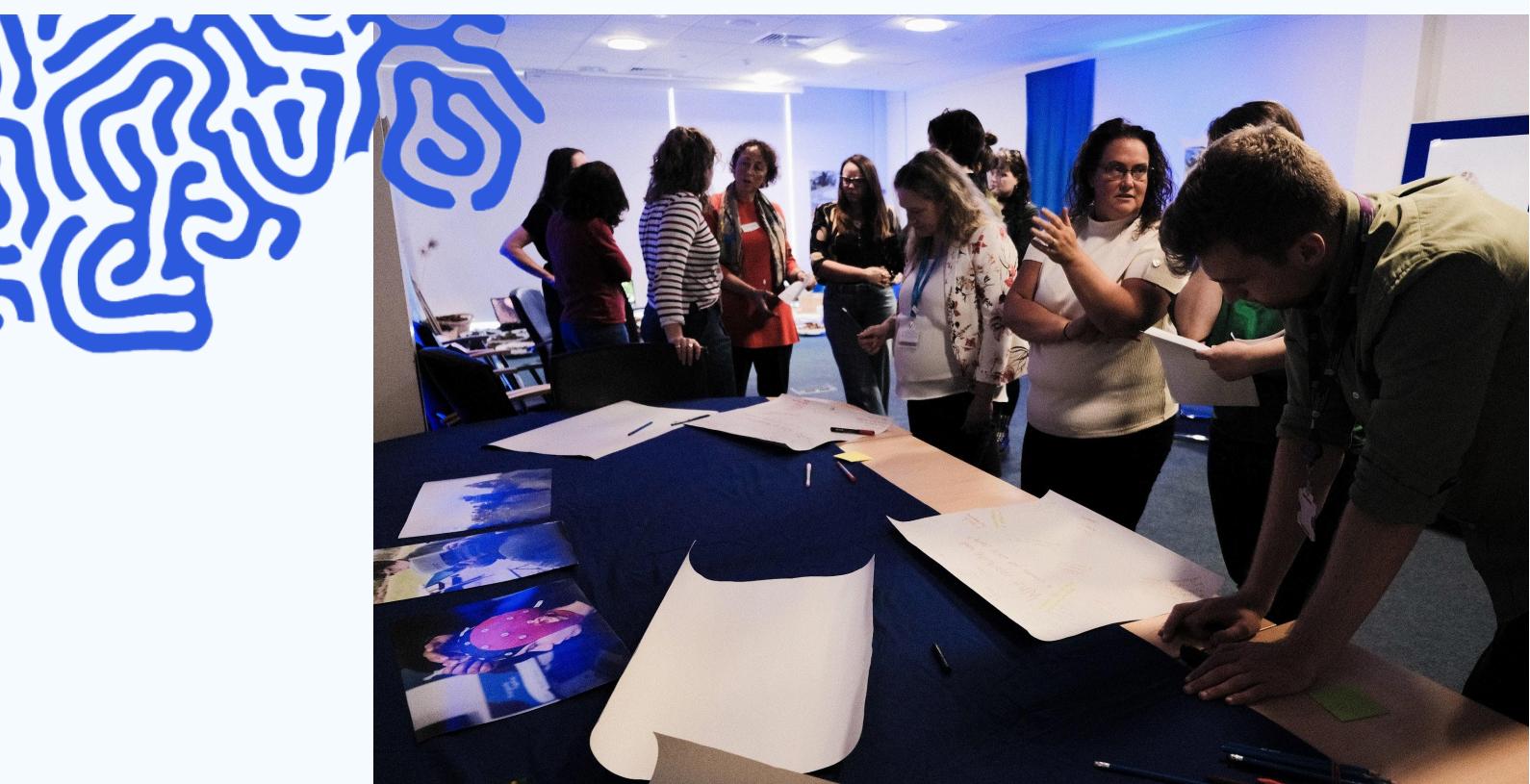
Why We Bring People Together

- Climate change hits disabled communities harder.
- Disabled and neurodivergent people have key strengths:
  - Resilience
  - Resourcefulness
  - Creative thinking
- We want to learn from each other:

- - Lived experience
  - Policy and practice
- People can take ideas back to:
  - Their organisations
  - Councils
  - Services
  - Communities

This creates a ripple effect:

- Better access
- Better communication
- Real change

We also want to build:

- Connection
- Trust
- A shared voice for accessible climate action.

4. TALKS

Talk 1: Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark, Cavan and Fermanagh

Speakers: Karan McLernon & Martina O'Neill

Focus of the talk

- Karan and Martina talked about the Divergently Together project.
- This project included workshops with Alan James Burns and the Divergently Together team.
- The workshops helped the Geopark team learn new ways to make their work more inclusive.
- These lessons are now part of how the Geopark works every day.

What is a Geopark

- A Geopark is a protected area with special nature and history.
- It supports local communities by helping with:
  - Education
  - Tourism
  - Jobs and businesses
- Geoparks care about:
  - Archaeology
  - Wildlife
  - Local stories and culture
- They work with people and businesses to protect nature and share knowledge.
- UNESCO made Global Geoparks an official programme in 2015.
- There are 213 Global Geoparks in 48 countries.
- The Fermanagh–Cavan Geopark is the first Geopark that crosses a border.
- It puts nature and community at the centre of its work.

How Diverengently Together led to real changes

- Staff gained the knowledge and confidence to ask questions about access needs and to adapt sites and programmes.
- They are meeting neurodivergent needs more intentionally across visitor information, guided experiences and site design.
- Their 'Know Before You Go' guides now give clear sensory and access information and suggest quiet opportunities in nature.
- Most of the foraged natural stim tools in the Unmasking Nature: Sensory Burrow came from the Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark.
- "[Divergently Together] gave us the knowledge and the confidence to ask questions. Unless we ask, we won't understand." — Martina

Policy and community impact

- The Geopark team now looks at climate and disability together, not only through a scientific lens but through human experience.
- Local networks help carry this work forward:
  - Regenerative Tourism Business Network (32 members): businesses that restore places, create jobs and protect skills, such as thatching.

- Geopark Ambassadors (30): local storytellers and guides who share heritage and model inclusive practice.
- Their Geopark status helps spread these lessons across more than 200 Global Geoparks.

Why it matters

- The project moved from workshop to real change: clearer information, calmer options, better questions, better design.
- Inclusive design for neurodivergent visitors improves the experience for everyone.
- Their networks create a ripple effect, from one project to community practice, policy and international sharing.

Talk 2: Universal Design

Speaker: Ger Craddock, National Disability Authority, Centre for Excellence in Universal Design

Focus of the talk

- Ger explained what accessibility means and how it is supported by laws, design principles, and practical actions.
- He introduced the idea of Universal Design and shared examples of how it works in education, public services and emergency systems.
- He also talked about the importance of designing for diversity and including people with different needs from the start.

What is accessibility?

Accessibility means giving people access and ease of use for:

- Buildings

- Products
- Services

Ger listed the laws and duties that support accessibility in Ireland and the EU:

- Disability Act 2005
- Equal Status Acts 2000–2018
- EU Accessibility Act 2025

What is Universal Design?

Universal Design means designing for everyone from the start, so people can:

- Access
- Understand
- Use what is provided

Ger explained that Universal Design in education needs a whole-system approach:

- Micro level: meeting individual needs
- Meso level: changing institutions, such as schools and universities
- Macro level: setting good policy within organisations and at government level

A practical example

Ireland's text message based emergency service improves safety for people who cannot make voice calls.
This is an example of how Universal Design can make services more reliable and inclusive.

Gaps and challenges

Ger noted that there is still too little focus on:

- Diversity
- Intersectionality (how different identities   and experiences overlap)

Key idea: "Oversample the tails of the bell curve"

Ger used the image of a bell curve to explain how people vary.

- The middle of the curve = most people with average needs
- The tails at both ends = fewer people with very different needs
  (for example: blind users, Deaf signers, wheelchair users, people with learning disabilities, low digital skills, older people, very tall or short people)

Oversample the tails means:

- Do not only design and test for the big group in the middle.

- Include and prioritise people at the edges when you research, design and test.
- If your design works for diverse experiences, it will usually work for everyone else too.

Examples of good design

- Bottle banks: If the opening height works for a wheelchair user or a person of short stature, it will also work for most standing adults.
- Web pages: If a page is clear in plain English, works with screen readers, can be navigated by keyboard only, and has captions and ISL/BSL, it is still accessible to other users.
- Forms and apps: If the journey works for someone under stress, with low data, on a small screen, or with limited literacy, it will be smooth for most other users.

The room will have an air purifier, facemasks if you want to wear one, and hand sanitiser.

If you have any access requirements please let us know.

Made with Photosymbols
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DCU is a busy college, so the halls might be noisy with students and staff.

You can find ear defenders in the room if you need them.

Why it matters

- Universal Design prevents exclusion rather than fixing it later.
- It improves quality for all users, not just a few.
- It helps find problems early, like complex language, fiddly controls, poor colour contrast or bad layout.

Talk 3: Neurodiversity, Climate Change and Language
Speaker: Chandrika Narayanan-Mohan, Artist, Writer and Poet
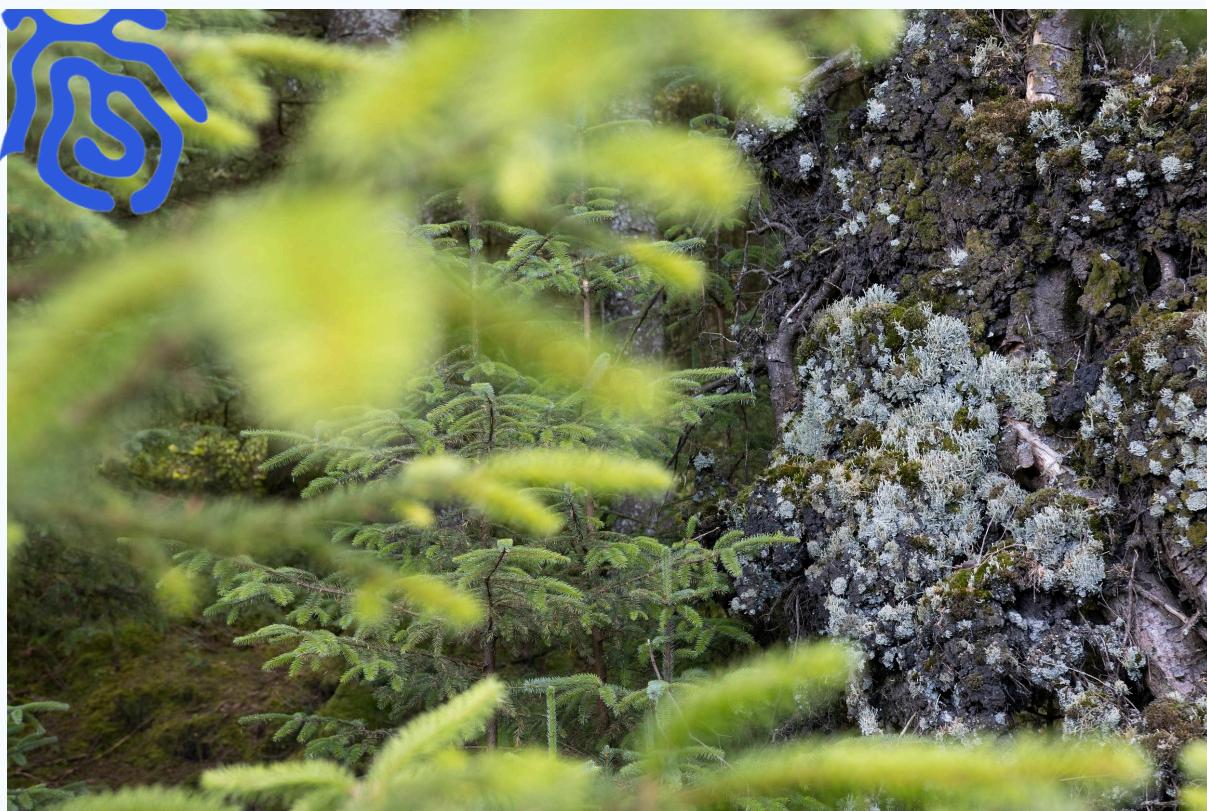
Focus of the talk

- Chandrika spoke about the importance of language in making climate and cultural policy more inclusive.
- They explained how using better words helps describe needs and experiences without stigma, and how this leads to stronger design and policy.

Key ideas

- Accessibility adds depth, not simplification
  "Accessibility is not about being reductive or 'dumbing down', but about adding depth and understanding."
- Neutral, useful terms help self-advocacy

- Words like sensory, pattern recognition, over/under-stimulation, and special interests replace judgment with clarity.
- Nature gives us better metaphors

  - *Fallow* = needed rest
  - *Foraging* = thoughtful knowledge-gathering
  - *Rewilding* = unmasking and allowing difference

"Like a blackberry or a bramble, we can be sweet and spiky in equal parts. Spikes can be necessary to protect us."

- Seasonal language is more honest than corporate language
- Corporate jargon demands constant blossom and ignores things that need to be in seed.
- We could use words like wintering, hibernating, and fallow to describe natural cycles and rest.
- Irish offers nuance that sometimes English can't carry
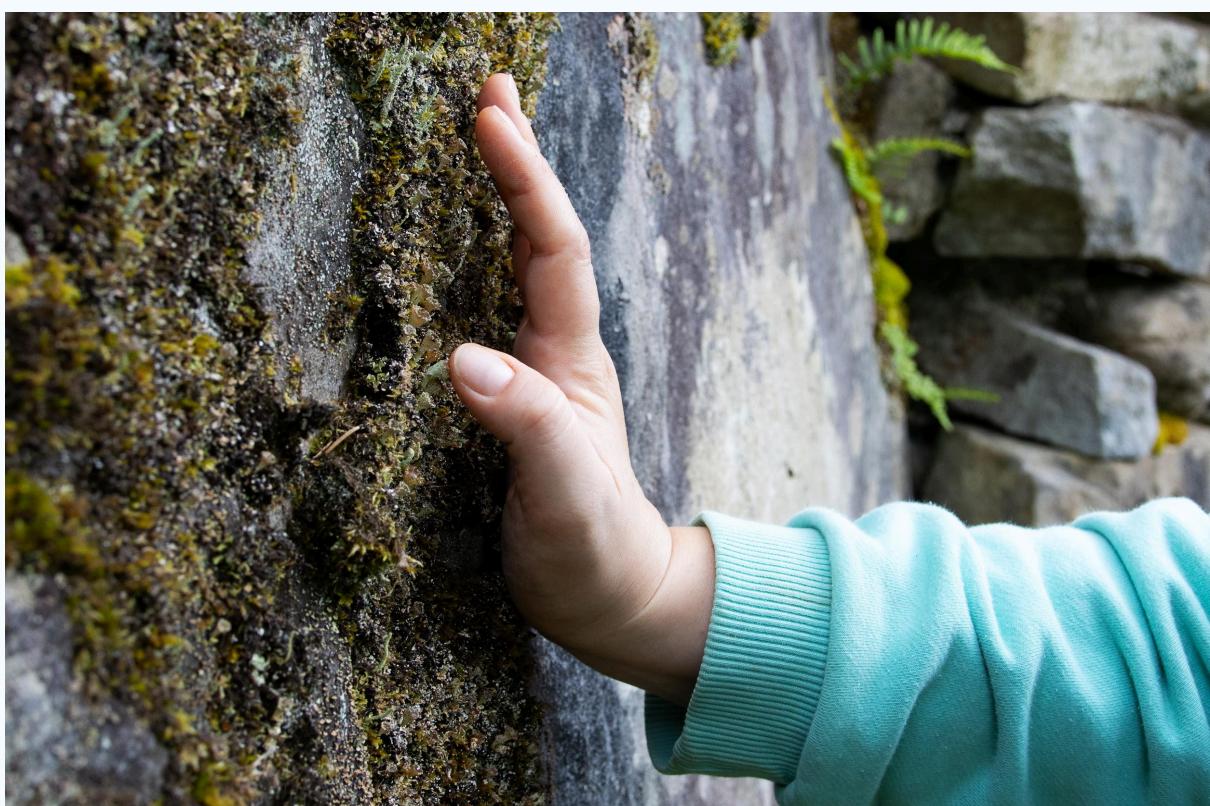
Why Irish words help

- Irish words can hold clues about behaviour, time, place, and patterns in nature and farming.
- Using Irish terms can make climate and nature work more accurate, more local and more meaningful.

Examples

Breac

- The literal translation in English is *speckled*.
- It also translates as Trout. The trout is a fish easily defined by its speckles.
- It is also seen in *báirín breac* or barmbrack which means speckled loaf. The currents in this fruit loaf make it speckled.
- One word can link colour, pattern and species. It shows how Irish packs connected meanings into one word.

Imeall

- This translates as edge or boundary.
- *Imeall* is also the Irish name for the *Navelwort* wildflower, which grows on the edges of banks or walls and in rock crevices.
- The word points to where life happens, at the edges.
- This idea of the edge also resonates with communities at the margins.

Why it matters

- A richer shared language could help to express neurodivergent experiences.
- It helps shape inclusive climate and cultural policy and invites more people into the conversation with precision, empathy and depth.
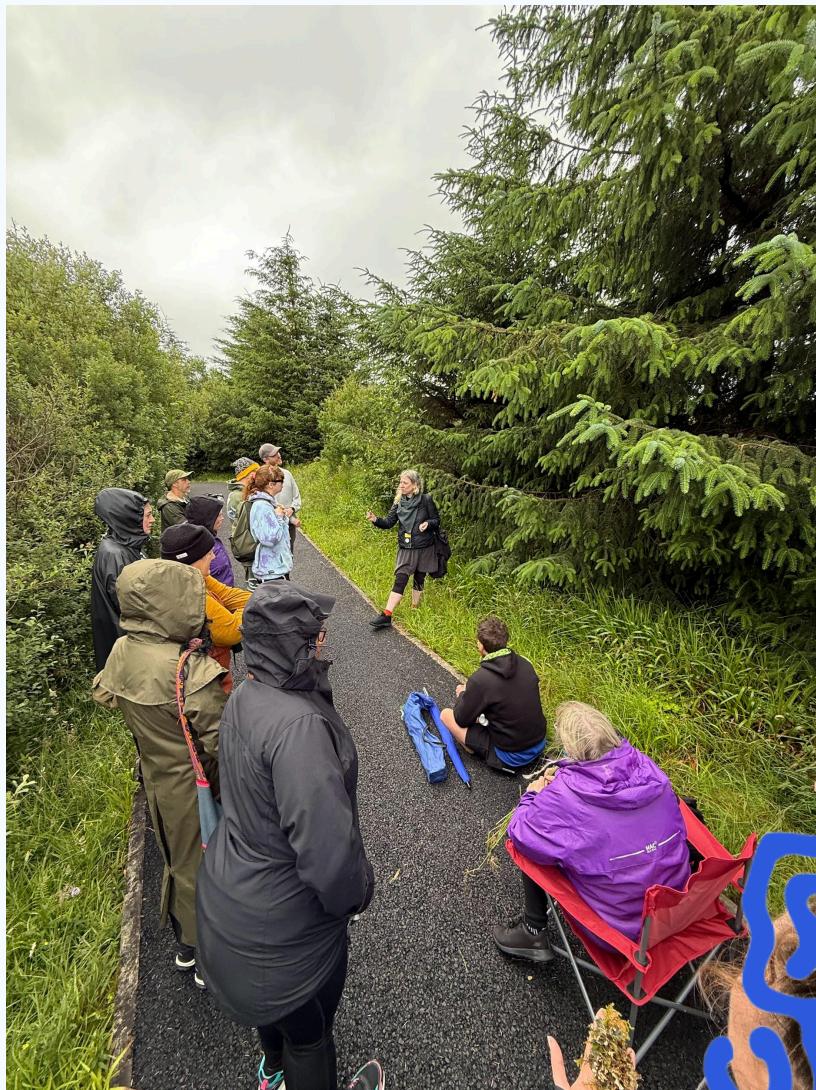
Talk 4: Sensing Climate

Speaker: Dr. Sarah Bell, University of Exeter

Focus of the talk

- Sarah spoke about how climate action must be made accessible by design.
- She explained that disabled, Deaf and hard of hearing, neurodivergent people, and those with long-term conditions should be able to shape climate-resilient futures, not just be consulted.
- *"The climate crisis is causing increasingly unpredictable environments. Yet the people who know best how to live in a disabling world are often excluded from climate action and policy."*

Sensing Climate

- Sensing Climate is a five-year project based in Bristol, Glasgow, and Dublin.
- It maps where disability sits in climate law and policy, and where the gaps are.
- It listens to lived experience using qualitative and arts-based methods.
- It turns findings into practical workshops and policy actions

Why it matters

- Current climate work often treats disabled people as a single "vulnerable group", which flattens real experiences and overlooks expertise.
- Sarah encouraged us to move beyond stereotypes and create spaces that really listen.

Key Ideas

Six dimensions of access

- Physical: step-free routes, accessible toilets and parking, hearing loops, microphones, large print and contrast, tactile cues, quiet rooms, ventilation, lighting that won't trigger migraines; online: captions, ISL/BSL, tech support

- Temporal: plan for crip time; longer lead-ins, clear pre-reads, proper breaks, flexible pacing, space to process

difficult content

- Affirmative: people feel welcome and valued; multiple ways to contribute (spoken, signed, written), Easy Read/Plain English, audio description, captioning, and show how input changes outcomes (and pay people appropriately)

- Safe and empathetic: avoid guilt-based messages; address material realities (e.g. reliance on energy-intensive equipment). Build trust, not just attendance

- Intersectional: design with awareness of ableism, racism, classism, sexism, ageism

- Leadership: support disabled leadership and paid roles in climate work; fund reasonable adjustments and skills pathways

Tools you can use now

- Sarah shared Crip Up Climate Conversations; four free guides to help start respectful, practical conversations.
- These guides are available in designed, large print, plain language, and Easy Read formats. They can be adapted to different contexts.

About this book

This book has been made by a project called Sensing Climate.

Sensing Climate is trying to find out how to make climate change fair for Disabled people. (Climate change means our planet is getting dangerously hot.)

There is also an Easy Read book for Disabled people who want to talk to people who look after the planet.

You can talk to us by emailing:
sarah.bell@exeter.ac.uk

Why it matters

- Sarah's framework gives a practical access plan for before, during and after events and in the creation of policy.
- It also offers a language shift that centres dignity, agency, and disabled leadership in climate policy.

5. Workshop activities

Activity 1: Listening pairs

Question

"What is your experience of climate change? How is it affecting you as a human, as you age, in your body, and in the world?"

Structure

A one-to-one chat. Three minutes each. One person speaks, one person listens.

No fixing or reassuring.

Aim

To practise deep listening and respect.

Reflections from the room

- Climate change affects how people feel day to day and the choices they make
- People are making small changes but want system change too
- Common mixed feelings: hope and worry together, and a sense of responsibility

Activity 2: Inclusive climate communication

We asked these questions to learn how to make climate communication fair, clear, and inclusive for everyone.

What are the current barriers to inclusive climate communication?

- Pressure to deliver, with little space to try, fail, and learn
- Accessibility added on at the end, not built in from the start
- Under-representation of diverse humans and more-than-human perspectives
- People who use alternative communication do not get heard enough
- Individualism and big systems create a gap between policy and practice

- Narrow toolkits for communication; not enough respect for the creative process
- Language barriers: words like "sustainability" mean different things; some terms are ableist (e.g. "active travel")
- ISL gaps for policy words; non-verbal communication is overlooked
- Platforms differ: Zoom felt more accessible than Teams
- Blind/low-vision access online is often poor, one size does not fit all
- Lack of co-design and low awareness of what "inclusive" really means
- Frameworks can limit change; some people still do not accept climate change

How do we nurture divergent mindsets?

- Language matters: the words we choose can close or open doors
- Respect, openness, adaptability
- Playfulness and active listening before broadcasting messages
- Allow ourselves to be affected; be willing to change
- Bring Universal Design into education and workplaces; give time for inclusion
- Check our bias; be curious; keep a beginner's mindset; avoid righteousness

- Treat accessibility as ongoing. Needs can conflict, so keep adjusting
- Build multi-pronged community programmes for different ways of thinking and learning
- Easy Read is a chance to examine word choice and meaning
- Park the ego; share power and decision-making
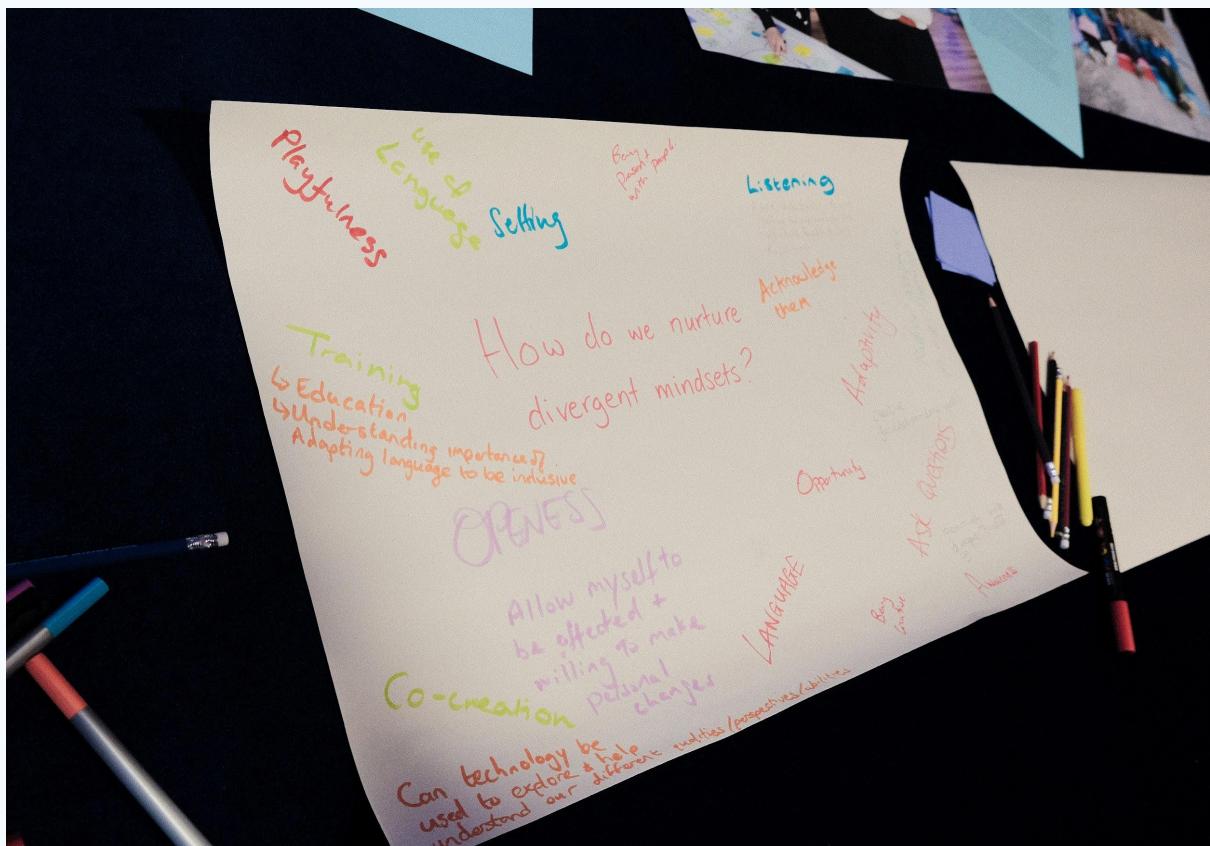
What opportunities would a climate-just world create?

- More connection and better communication; unexpected ideas and better solutions
- Equity for all; tree equity and access to green space
- Bio-centric approaches and alternative economics

- Deeper knowledge of the natural world; respect for non-traditional knowledge
- Individuals can influence change; communities feel re-energised
- Mutuality and shared care
- Warmer, better homes and everyday respect
- A creativity boom: more reuse, hands-on skills, and making
- We need to keep learning and adapting as new challenges appear
- Disabled people are experts in navigating barriers; centre these voices so everyone benefits.

Quick wins we can act on

- Co-design from the start with diverse participants
- Use plain, non-ableist language; add glossaries where terms are needed
- Provide multiple formats (text, audio, ISL, high-contrast slides, tactile where possible)
- Choose more accessible platforms and test them (e.g. Zoom vs Teams)
- Add accessible labelling/signage (e.g. braille on bins)
- Make listening time a set part of meetings (no fixing, just listening)
- Keep a feedback loop: test, learn, iterate

Activity 3: How to write good Alt Text

Speaker: Emilie Conway, Vocalist, Composer, Artist
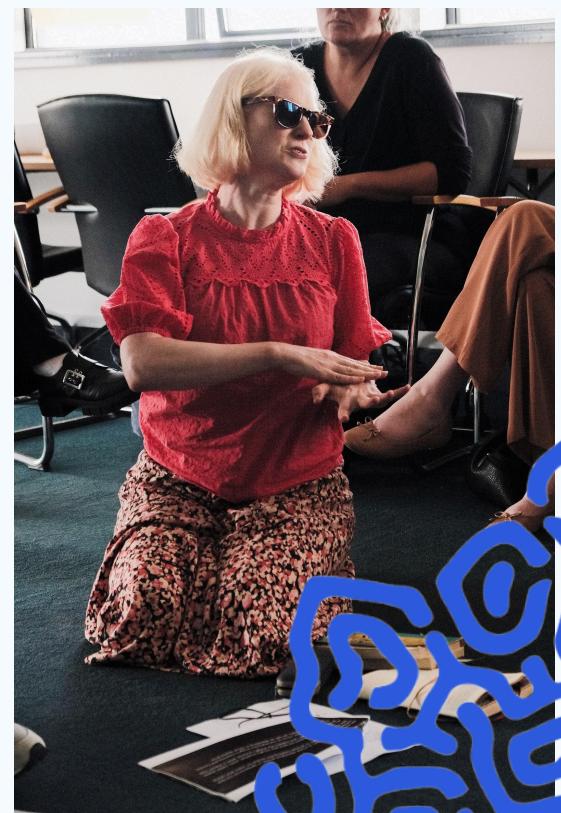
What is Alt Text and Audio Description

- Alt Text is the descriptive phrase for non text content, particularly images
- Audio description is spoken description for live or recorded content.
- Both follow the same principles.

Focus of the talk

- Emilie spoke about how alt text is a form of access, not just a technical feature.
- She explained that good alt text should give a multi-sensory, vivid description of an image's purpose and feel.
- It helps include people who are blind or visually impaired, and supports inclusive design.

Key ideas

- Alt text is a way to include people by describing images in a way that they can understand and feel.
- Alt text supports a multi-dimensional experience.

  "We link sight to fact, but do you know what you see; or do you only see what you know?"

- We use different forms of communication, like images, sound, and tone, because each one can express something unique.
- A picture can speak a thousand words, and alt text helps convey that richness.
- It's not just about describing what's visible, but about inviting people into the experience.

In the session

- Participants wrote their own alt text for an image on screen.
- The exercise encouraged people to slow down, think first, then describe.
- They practised using sensory language; sound, touch, temperature, texture, even taste and smell, so people can visualise through words.

How to write better alt text

- Start with intent: Why is the image here? What should the reader understand or feel?

- Make it multi-sensory: Include texture, sound, pace, mood, heat/cold, movement, not just how it looks
- Be specific: Avoid flat, one-line labels. Use words that carry energy and rhythm
- Context and people matter: Name who is present (race, gender expression, disability, age) when it's relevant
- No single 'correct' version: Art is subjective. Different versions of alt texts can be valid
- Audience first, not character counts: Write for the reader's needs and the document's purpose

Quick checklist for alt text

- Purpose – what the image is doing here
- Who/what – people, setting, action
- Salient details – colour/shape only if meaningful
- Sensory cues – texture, sound, temperature, movement, mood
- Inclusion – name identity markers when they matter to context

Example

Flat: Sunset over a beach with seagulls.

Richer: Low sun warms your face as small waves gently patter the pebbles; the sky fades from orange to deep red, and gulls wheel overhead.

Why it matters

- Good alt text invites people in and offers a fuller experience, not a reduced one.
- It can be a multi-sensory experience

6. Unmasking Nature: Sensory Burrow

What the room was like

- A calm room filled with thousands of natural objects spread across the floor: pinecones, conkers, beechnuts, leaves, twigs, stones, seed pods, lichen, grasses, soft fibres.
- Items were foraged locally, from DCU campus, the Geopark, and nearby places.
- Tables and trays invited touch, smell, sound, and sight.
- These items were to be used as nature's own fidget tools.

What is a Fidget tool

- A fidget tool is a small object you move with your hands to help your body and mind stay calm, focused or regulated.
- People also call it a stim tool.

What is stimming?

- Stimming means repetitive actions that help people self-regulate. For example: fidgeting, tapping, rubbing.
- Many neurodivergent people stim. It is valid and helpful.

Examples

- Conker: a small, smooth touchstone that can bring focus and hope

- Beechnut shell: rough and bristly outside; soft inside; the nut is geometric with deep grooves.

The rule of foraging

The rule of thirds:

- Don't take more than we need. A third for people, a third for nature, and a third for animals to eat.

The stim box

- Everyone was invited to walk the space and choose items that felt good to handle.
- We put them into a personal stim box to take home and use when we need to focus, calm, or process feelings.

- This gave permission to fidget, explore, and self-regulate.

Why this space exists

- Alan James Burns began this as an arts project with neurodivergent groups in Cavan, Fermanagh and Omagh.
- At first, we brought plastic fidget tools. Then we tried a box of pinecones. Everyone went to them.
- We realised nature is a sensory space already. It offers tools that invite curiosity, wonder, and space to breathe.
- The room shows that nature is diverse, and so are humans. It says: "It's OK to be me."
- We are learning how this can become a model: permanent sensory spots on campus or in parks, with clear maps and signs so people can find them.
- We are also making stim videos to support people everywhere.

Key idea

- There is no one-size-fits-all.
- Access needs can differ or even conflict.
- We keep adapting.

The periodic table of holding stones

A poem by Grace Murray was displayed alongside stones of all shapes and sizes, lined up together to be used for stimming:

Why we pick up rocks:
 For comfort.
 They ground us.
 You can turn them over and over in your hand.
 Put any overwhelm into them.
 Stim.

They look nice.
 They connect us with a place and a time.
 They can evoke and unlock memory.

They are reliable, they last forever, they won't erode.

Sustainability says:
 You can pass them on,
 You can put them back.
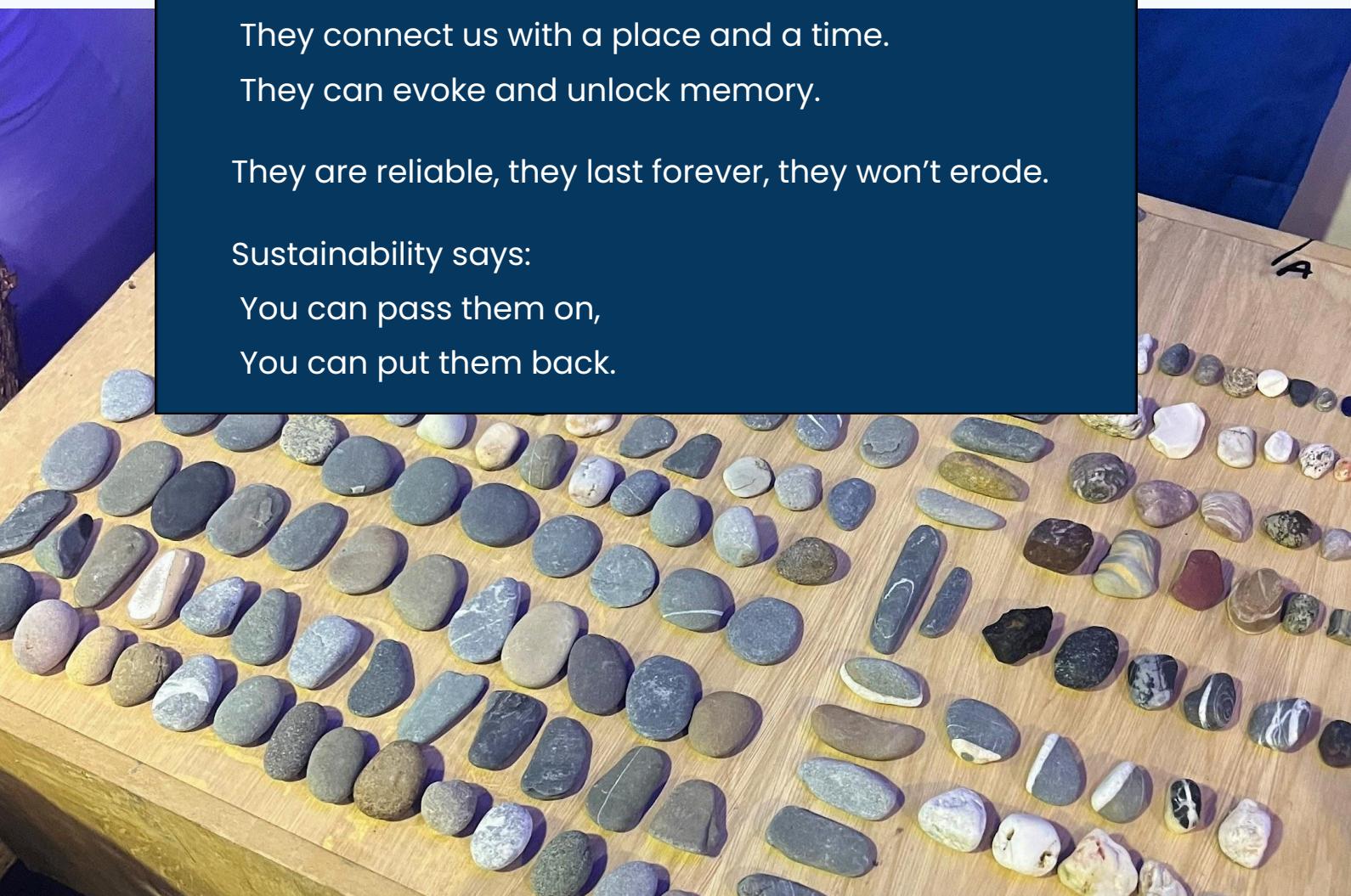
Emma Mohan O'Grady: the foraging story

- Emma is a Project Artist for Unmasking Nature.
- Emma is autistic and has ADHD.
- Emma's diagnosis does not define her, but it means she navigates the world differently.
- On a hard day, Alan suggested a walk. Emma touched grass, literally: grass, leaves, bark.
- Emma found that stimming with natural objects helped her feel and process emotions safely, without masking.
- This reconnected Emma with a childhood love of woods and parks. She felt relief and peace.
- From there, Emma began sensory foraging: pinecones, flowers, leaves, stones, twigs, lichen; whatever pleased her senses.
- Emma's mood lifted. Friends noticed a positive change.

"The divide between me the brain, me the body, and the world began to dissolve."
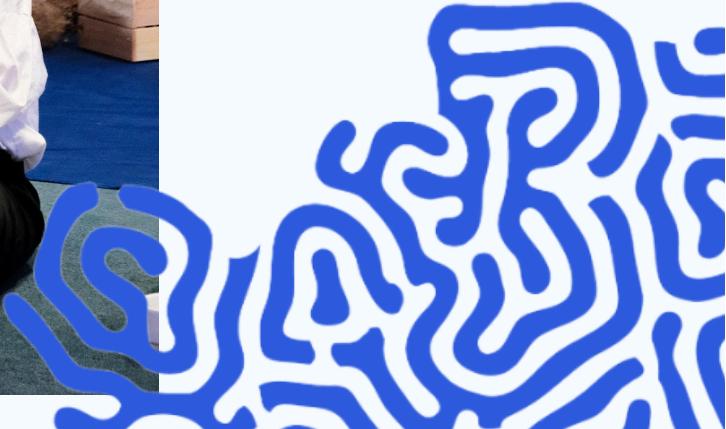
Emma wants others to know:

- It is OK to be as you are, to feel, and to belong.
- Nature can support that.

What this space does

- Normalises stimming and reduces shame
- Offers safe, low-cost, natural tools for focus and calm
- Builds a bridge to nature, which can support mental health
- Sparks conversation about access, neurodiversity, care and the environment

7. Reflections, ideas and voices from the day

Quotations from participants

Professor Tomas Ward, Director, Insight SFI Research Centre for Data Analytics

> *"I've been blown away by the natural, organic way Alan James Burns and the team bring very different people together, without forcing them to 'sing the same tune' and help us express our research to new audiences at scale."*

Junaid Akhlas, Science Foundation Ireland – Scientific Research Officer

> *"This is the first time I've engaged at this level with such a diverse group. It opened my eyes to barriers and terminology I hadn't considered. We often design for the many, but not for all."*

Siobhán Keogh, Climate Resilience Researcher, Climate NI

> *"Making the world more accessible for people with diverse needs makes it better for everyone. We need less performative solemnity, more creative solutions."*

Dr. Fiona Byrne, Divergently Together, Evaluation and Learning

"It's great to see the project having real impact. The Geopark is realistic and committed and it shows this work in action, with tangible outcomes, not just talk."

Tanya Banotti, Creative Ireland

"I found the day very useful. It was an opportunity to connect with others working on climate action, to learn from what Divergently Together had themselves learnt as part of their two-year project and to come away with useful ideas to implement."

Greta Szabó, Department of the Climate, Energy and the Environment

"I hadn't met 'eco-ableism' as a concept before, but now I know it needs to be part of my work. Accessibility of the Climate Action Plan is a real issue."

Katie Harrington, Decarbonising Dublin / CODEMA

"The day has been mind-altering and humbling. We'll definitely add a 'Know Before You Go' guide to our festival and budget for ISL interpreters for the future. Access should be embedded; done slowly and purposefully, not as a tick-box."

What worked well

- Lived experience front and centre. Hearing from artists and participants made access practical, not abstract.
- Hands-on sensory space. The natural stim kits helped people regulate and re-engage.
- Cross-sector mix. Policy, research, arts, community; creating valuable dialogues that rarely happen together.
- Practical takeaways. Easy Read tips, alt-text practice, 'Know Before You Go' models, and ISL awareness.

What people will do next

- Add Easy Read summaries and clear signposting to public information
- Embed alt-text practice and test content with users
- Plan budgets for ISL/BSL and hybrid options
- Create sensory-friendly spaces and DIY stim kits at work
- Set up internal access and inclusion "sense-check" groups

"Thought-provoking. Pause, listen, then act together."

"I'll be more aware of different ways we experience the world and bring that into my work."

"I'm making stim boxes and a small sensory space in our office."

"Confidence to ask: what would make this more accessible?"

Overall mood

Hopeful, Connected, Calm, Motivated

Reflections

Alan James Burns, Divergently Together, Lead artist

Alan spoke about the unexpected connections between groups and government bodies; people who wouldn't usually be in the same room.

"I don't know why an art project is doing this, but it is!"

Alan believes the arts create space for this kind of engagement because people are more intrigued, open, and willing to connect.

What the project has done

Alan shared how amazed they are by the project's positive impact on others; especially seeing people learn about themselves through stimming, and discovering how powerful and calming nature can be.

Alan spoke about the importance of people being able to drop stigma, feel safe, and just be themselves.

They have learned a lot from the participants, collaborators, and artists throughout the journey.

> "I love it that people are no longer afraid to stop and smell the roses. Not being worried about it."

Alan also reflected on the wider ripples the project is creating; influencing policy, shaping climate activism, and opening up new conversations about access, care, and inclusion.

How it started and where it's going

> "I started out not knowing what the project was. Now I know what it is."

Alan feels the project is nearing the end, but in many ways, it's only just beginning.

> "It has grown legs, and there's a room full of people who want to engage with it. I really believe in this."

What's next

Alan wants to bring the project into care facilities, like residential homes, where people rely on care workers to access nature.

> "If it's a rainy day or someone is sick, how can you touch grass or smell soil?"

Alan is excited to take steps toward making nature access possible, even indoors, for people who need it most.

8. Challenges and Recommendations

Challenges

- Accessible materials need to be sent earlier

  Easy Read agendas should go out in advance of meetings and events.

- Participation needs to be broader

  These conversations should not be invite-only. More people need to be included.

- Access often comes too late

  Accessibility is still added at the end. It needs to be built in from the start.

- Climate policy is hard to understand

  Climate plans feel dense. Accessibility is a known issue.

- We still design for the majority

  People at the edges of need are often missed.

- Formats are limited

  ISL/BSL, captions, hybrid options, and plain-language summaries are not yet routine.

- Eco-ableism is a new concept for many

  People want examples and practical guidance.

- Nature access is unequal

  Sensory and nature-based supports are not available in most everyday services.

Recommendations

- Send access in advance

  Share Easy Read materials and 'Know Before You Go' guides at least one week ahead.

- Make access standard

  Budget for ISL/BSL interpretation, captions, and hybrid options as default.
  Add an access checklist to all project briefs.

- Write for everyone

  Use Plain English, one idea per sentence, and alt text on all images.

- Design for the edges

  Ask "Who's missing?" during planning.
  Provide a quiet/sensory option using natural materials.

- Explain eco-ableism

Create a short primer with examples for policy, services, and communications.

- Scale nature access

Pilot portable sensory/nature spaces.

9. Credits

Divergently Together is jointly funded by:

This report was written by Sybil Cope. www.sybilcope.com

Thanks

Thank you to everyone who came, took part, and shared your ideas. With special thanks to our speakers, our funders, our ISL interpreters and the team who planned and ran the day.

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Appendicies

Appendix 1.

Name	Role	Organisation
AlanJames Burns	Lead Artist/Director	Divergently Together
Emma Mohan O'Grady	Project Artist	Divergently Together
Shelley Gibson	ISL interpreter	
Dr. Shauna Caffrey	Assistant Producer	Divergently Together
Ela Cichoka	ISL interpreter	
Dr. Fiona Byrne	Evaluation & Facilitation	Divergently Together
Ailbhe O'Connor	Production	Divergently Together
Laura O'Keeffe	Communications	Divergently Together
Emilie Conway	Vocalist, composer, artist	
Cliona Kelliher	Climate Action Officer	Dublin County Council
Siobhán Keogh	Climate Resilience Researcher	Climate NI
Reece England	Climate Education Officer	Fermanagh Omagh District Council
Tania Banotti	Director	Creative Ireland
Orla McGovern	Executive Officer	Creative Ireland
Martina O'Neill	Countryside Manager and Geoscientific Officer	Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark

Karan MacLernon	Development Officer - Tourism and Business	Cuilcagh Lakelands Geopark
Gréta Szabo	Assistant Principal Officer	Dept of Environment
Gerald Craddock	Chief Officer, Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) and Standards & Monitoring	National Disability Authority
Katie Harrington	Executive Manager - Public and Stakeholder Engagement	Codema
Aedín Donnelly	Communications Manager	Dept of Taoiseach
Giovanna Galvani	Communications and Engagement Intern	Codema
Teresa Gadd	Director	Ace Communications
Dr. Junaid Akhlas	Discover Team and the Science for Society Directorate	Research Ireland
Niamh Brennan	Education Officer	Global Action Plan Ireland
Julieanna Richmond	Co-Designer	Divergently Together
Prof. Tomás Ward	Insight	Insight Centre for Data Analytics, DCU
Dr. Aoibheann Bird	Education and Public Engagement Manager	Insight Centre for Data Analytics, DCU

Appendix 2. Attendee Schedule

9:30 - 10:00 - Tea & Coffee in H306
10:00-10:45 - Welcome & Introductions
10:45 -11:00 - Talk: Accessibility as a Right - Legal contexts
11:00 - 11:15 - Talk: Neurodiversity, Climate Change and Language
Writer, performer and cultural consultant Chandrika Narayanan Mohan will discuss the expansive language of neurodiversity and its relationship to the more-than-human.
11.15 - 11:30 Activity 1
11:30 - 11.45 Break
11:45 - 12:15 - Talk: Sensing Climate
Dr. Sarah Bell (University of Exeter) will introduce Sensing Climate, a five-year research project placing disabled people at the forefront of the climate crisis, and discuss how to create inclusive and accessible opportunities for disabled, Deaf and neurodivergent people to shape climate resilient futures.
12:15 -13:15: Activity 2
13:15 - 14:15: Lunch (H206)
14:15 - 15:15: Alt Text & Sensory Language
In this exercise, led by singer, composer and lyricist Emilie Conway, we will explore theories of sensory language, cognitive bias, and their application in the creation of alt text.
15:15 - Break. Tea & Coffee
15:35 - 16:00: Creative Reflections