



Botanic Gardens Education Network

Annual Report 2024

This Annual Report summarises Bgen activity from 1st January to 31st December 2024

Botanic Gardens Education Network
c/o Botanic Gardens Conservation International
199 Kew Road
Richmond
TW9 3BW

info@Bgen.org.uk
www.Bgen.org.uk
Bgen is a registered.
Charitable Incorporated Organisation
no: 1103482

BGEN

Who we are

Bgen (the Botanic Gardens Education Network) was founded in 1990 by a group of botanic garden educators, to share expertise and develop best practice in environmental and biodiversity education.

Our network supports and builds capacity in educators across the UK in areas such as the natural and plant sciences, biodiversity and sustainability, visitor engagement, audience development and impact, as well as funding, training, and job opportunities.

The network is run by a voluntary Board of Trustees, supported by a part-time Coordinator to help administrate and organise training and networking activities for its members.

Our Mission

To be a knowledgeable and strong network of organisations and professionals delivering inspiring, innovative, and relevant public engagement through plants and nature.

Our Vision

To inspire, innovate and influence how people engage with plants and the environment by empowering a strong network of organisations and building capacity in our membership.

Our Objectives

1. Serve our members and strengthen the network.
2. Position Bgen as experts in the field with regards to learning and engagement with plants and the environment.
3. Become a resilient organisation, through strong relevant governance and financial stability.

Our Values

Innovate: We welcome new ideas and find creative solutions to educate and engage the public in plant based and nature conservation.

Pursue excellence: We aspire to excellence in everything we do, by delivering high quality services to our members and always keep on improving.

Collaborate: We believe that by working together with our members and partners through reflective practice and sharing resources and ideas, we can provide better services and solutions.

Be inclusive: We value ideas, views, and strengths of everyone we work with and support. We treat everyone with kindness and respect.

Act with integrity: We promote an open and honest environment that gives credit and acknowledges mistakes. We ensure charity resources are managed responsibly, with ethical values and sustainable working practices.

Trustee Declaration

The trustees have paid due regard to public benefit guidance published by the Charity Commission, and in deciding what activities Bgen should undertake.

1. Bgen Membership

As of 31st December 2024, Bgen has 247 members, this includes members from 36 organisations and 22 individual members. Membership renewals were significantly delayed this year, due to the impact of a missing coordinator. Renewals were processed in October, rather than April. Procedures have been put in place to ensure a smoother handover in the future.

Compared to the previous year, organisational membership reduced by 7 organisations. The total membership has reduced by 97. This is largely due to decreased communications with members in the absence of a coordinator, and significant Trustee turnover.

Membership fees: the Board reviewed membership fees in 2022 after lockdown and these prices remained the same for 2024.

Membership type	Price
Individual	£40
Student	£18
Organisation 1-4 staff	£135
Organisation 5-10 staff	£170
Organisation over 10 staff	£210

Bgen provides:

- Networking for members
- Promotion for members' events, training, and job / volunteering opportunities
- Reciprocal membership across participants
- Training events across the UK (currently delivered online)
- An annual conference to reflect on current sector trends and themes

Reciprocal members include:

BGCI

Botanic Gardens Conservation International - BGCI's work aims to promote and develop a more efficient, cost effective and rational approach to plant conservation in botanic gardens.

Black Environment Network

Black Environment Network is working towards a vision of full multicultural environmental participation, local and global.

Thrive

We use gardening to bring about positive changes in the lives of people living with disabilities or ill health, or who are isolated, disadvantaged, or vulnerable.

LEEF

London Environmental Educators forum. LEEF is a membership organisation for London's most passionate green educators. We meet to share skills and knowledge to improve the quality and quantity of environmental education delivered across the capital.

BIAZA

The British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) is the professional body representing the best zoos and aquariums in the UK and Ireland.

PlantNetwork

PlantNetwork is a charity and membership organisation that provides training and network support to gardens and gardeners throughout Britain and Ireland.

2. Training and Events

2024 saw a reduced output for our training and events calendar. This was largely due to the absence of a Coordinator impeding operations between February 2024 and October 2024, and a significant change to the Bgen Board.

2025 will have a full training programme available to members, comprising virtual coffee mornings for networking and member updates and more formal structured training programmes for professional development.

Bgen Virtual Coffee Morning: The Orchard Project – 23rd January 2024

Jo Homan, Education, Skills, and Training Manager at The Orchard Project delivered a talk on the aims and achievements of The Orchard Project and sharing what was learnt from setting up the forest garden project, Edible Landscapes London.

Members: 11. Non-Members: 1.

Bgen Virtual Coffee Morning: Welcome from your new Board – 26th November 2024

Re-launch of the Bgen Virtual Coffee Mornings to introduce the new Bgen Board, hosted by the new Bgen Chair, Dr Lauren Baker. Introduction of the new Bgen Board, overview of the Bgen re-launch and information on upcoming events, including the next Bgen Conference in 2025. Members Q&A.

Members: 30. Non-Members: 0.

3. Bgen Annual Conference (Online)

Inside Out & Inside In - 7th & 8th February 2024 – Sponsored by Timberplay

Due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19, and to facilitate learning from international speakers, the 2024 Bgen Conference was held online using Zoom.

Being an online conference enabled us to be truly international with speakers from Edinburgh to Brisbane and attendees also coming from a wider range of countries, including Australia, America, India, and

France. Going forward Botanical Gardens Education Network plan to alternate between online and in person conferences to get the benefits from face to face networking and online facilitation.

In total, the conference attracted 100 attendees over the two days. With 21 speakers, there was a wide range in topics for attendees to learn about, to enhance the work they do in education, participation, and engagement. Ngaire Gillian, Education and Interpretation Coordinator from Brisbane Botanic Gardens, gave a fantastic overview of their Pokémon inspired botanical activity. Mandy Leivers, Community Coordinator at Westonbirt Arboretum, shared great insights into the wellbeing programme at Westonbirt and how it had effectively broken-down barriers to accessing nature. The successful conference concluded with keynote speaker Richard Louv, award winning author of Last Child in the Woods, spoke on human and nature consciousness: how we pay attention in the natural world, implications of that for education and, for the future of all species – with a particular focus on the role of botanic gardens in tackling nature deficit disorder.

We thank Timberplay for their sponsorship of the programme and BGCI for the technical support provided in hosting and running the Zoom webinar.

Our next conference will be held in person at the National Botanic Garden of Wales, from Thursday 6th – Friday 7th February 2025.

4. Structure Governance and Management

Changes to the Constitution:

In late 2024, Bgen began a robust review of its governance including its policies and procedures. The Bgen Board is committed to ensuring its governance practices align with best practice and tasked the governance committee with a thorough review.

Due to the departure of the coordinator and some long-standing trustees, this review began in late 2024 with a gap analysis. The results of the gap analysis will be used to prioritise the development of new, and the review of existing policies in 2025.

To ensure handovers between trustees and coordinators are effective in future, several standard operating procedures which are required, have been identified. These will be actioned in 2025.

5. Bgen Board

5.1 Bgen Board Meetings:

All Board meetings were held online to maximise Trustee participation:

- 19th February 2024 – welcomed new trustees, review of conference 2024, training plan for coming year and recruitment of new coordinator discussed.

- 20th May 2024 – election of Lauren Baker as Chair and Sophie Musckett as Vice Chair. Coordinator recruitment ongoing. Kirstin Corrie voted in as an invited member. Conference themes discussed.
- 4th July 2024 – communication plan established and areas for improvement identified. Internal Board Team channel under construction to streamline trustee communication and effective file storage. Coordinator recruitment live, interview panel and timetable established. Steve Nash and Zoe Chapman stepped down as Board Members. Treasury contacts and banking access discussed.
- 9th September 2024 – Coordinator recruitment closed (over 150 applicants!), interviews scheduled for 11th – 12th September. New equipment purchased for coordinator. Treasury group to begin credit card application. Communications channel continuing steps to secure Microsoft 365 license. Risk Register discussed, and general policy and procedures review by Governance stream. Conference title confirmed and speakers being emailed. Membership renewals sent 6 months late (biggest impact of the absence of coordinator).
- 8th November 2024 – Welcomed Sam Bowden as the new Bgen Coordinator. Membership renewals underway. Relaunch of coffee mornings and training programming discussed. Conference main focus of discussion. Gail Bromley Award formalised and launch discussed.

The AGM for 2025 was confirmed for Thursday 6th February, as part of the Bgen Conference.

5.2 Bgen Board Workstreams:

Each Board member serves on one (or two) specialised workstream groups: Training, Conference, Fundraising, Communication & Membership and Governance.

Workstreams meet regularly in between Board Meetings, to plan in detail their areas of work and advance on actions across the year. The focus of activity for these workstreams have been:

- **Communications & Membership:** advertising of job opportunities and promotion of events, audit of comms activity, recruitment of voluntary event reviewer role
- **Governance:** recruitment and induction of new Trustees to the Board, recruitment of new Coordinator
- **Fundraising & Sponsorship:** submission of bids to external trusts and foundations
- **Conference & Training:** plan events through the year and the annual Conference
- The **Treasury Group** have continued to oversee the Bgen finances and make recommendations to the Bgen Board.

5.3 Bgen Board Members:

After the last AGM in January 2024, the Bgen Board had the following changes:

Resignations: Sophie Edwards (Coordinator)

Election: In 2024 we welcomed new Board members Lauren Baker, Sophie Musckett, Nia Crouch, Ruth Godfrey and Rupert Bannister.

Bgen Board (pre - 29th January 2024 AGM):

Trustee Name	Workstream	Appointed	Status
Lauren Baker, Oxford Botanic Garden	Chair Governance, Communications and Conference Lead	2024	Active
Sophie Muskett, Royal Horticultural Society	Vice Chair Communications Lead	2024	Active
Zoë Chapman, Ness Botanic Gardens, University of Liverpool		Jan 2022	Resigned Date: July 2024
Felicity Gaffney, National Botanic Garden Ireland	Conference and Training	2015	Active (Handed in resignation to come into effect after 2025 AGM)
Sarah Garry, PCA	Finance and Governance	Jan 2022	Active
Susie Kelpie, Bgen Member	Training and Conference	2012	Active
Steve Nash, Wild Planet Trust	Communications	2023	Resigned Date: July 2024
Helen Miller, BGCI	Finance	2019	Active
Frances Sampayo, Chelsea Physic Garden	Governance	Jan 2022	Resigned Date: December 2024
Sarah Webley, South London Botanical Institute	Training (Lead) and Conference	Jan 2022	Active
Ruth Godfrey, University of Leicester Botanic Garden	Conference	January 2024	Active
Rupert Bannister	Communications and Conference	January 2024	Active
Wadzanai Mavhura	Treasurer, Finance Lead	December 2023	Active
Nia Crouch, Forestry England	Training and Conference	January 2024	Active
Kirsten Corrie, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh	Training and Conference	January 2024	Active (Invited Member)

The Bgen Board is supported by Samantha Bowden as Bgen Coordinator (started 15th October 2024), PushLogic (website) and Sandy Openshaw (bookkeeper). Sophie Edwards, the previous coordinator, finished her notice period in February 2024.

6. Reference and administrative information

Charity name: Botanic Gardens Education Network (Bgen)
Charity Registration Number: 1103482
Registered Office: c/o BGCI, Descanso House, 199 Kew Road, Richmond, TW9 3BW

Trustee Selection:

Bgen is managed by a Board of Trustees drawn from its members, and thanks to recent changes to the Constitution, Bgen can now recruit Trustees from outside the membership that can bring specialist skills and experience in support of Bgen's objectives.

Our trustees bring a broad range of skills and sector knowledge to the Board, with no financial remuneration from the charity. Trustees are appointed based on their knowledge and experience. Every trustee is appointed for an initial three-year term by a resolution passed at annual AGM and can also be co-opted throughout the year before they are confirmed at annual general meetings. Trustees can be re-elected when their initial three-year period.

Bgen trustees abide by Charity Commission guidelines on Trustees Responsibilities. Bgen's Constitution and Trustee Handbook provide further guidance in this area.

7. Financial Review and Accounts for financial year 2023/24

Reserves Policy

Reserves are the part of a charity's unrestricted funds that are freely available to spend on any of the charity's purposes. Bgen maintains free unrestricted reserves:

- to provide a level of working capital that protects the continuity of our work, ensuring the stability of the network, its programmes, employment, and ongoing operations.
- to provide a level of funding for unexpected opportunities, non-recurring expenses that will build long-term capacity, such as staff development, research and development, or investment in equipment and support materials.
- to provide cover for risks such as unforeseen expenditure, one-time unbudgeted expenses, unanticipated loss of income or funding, or uninsured losses.

The board of trustees will review the above criteria with reference to Bgen's strategy and Annual Plan and determine the target level of free reserves to meet these.

The Board of Trustees will at times designate funds from free reserves for significant project costs or replacement of major assets.

Operating Reserves are not intended to replace a permanent loss of funds or eliminate any ongoing budget gap. It is the intention for Operating Reserves to be used and replenished within a reasonably brief period. The Operating Reserve Policy will be implemented in concert with the other governance / policies of BGEN and is intended to support the goals and strategies contained in BGEN's Finance Policy and strategic and operational plans.

Treasurer's Report

A new Treasurer, Wadzanayi Mavhura, was appointed at the end of 2024. The Bgen Coordinator, Sophie Edwards, left the position at the beginning of 2024 and by end of the financial year, the position was still vacant. During this time, there was no coordinator to manage membership income and training courses income, which temporarily inhibited our main income streams.

Bgen adopted a simplified 'Receipts and Payments' accounting system which shows money moving in and out without taking account of accruals - money that has been earned or spent but not yet paid. As we transition, this means there are occasional mismatches between what monies Bgen has and the paperwork.

Outcome for the Year

Total income for the year decreased by 24 % (current year £16,295: previous year £21,512). Total expenditure decreased by 16% (current year £15,383: previous year £18,383). The charity recorded a marginal net profit of £567 compared to £4,593 in previous year. This reflects the drop in membership renewals and conference income.

Income from training contributed £3,370 in the financial year (previous year £3,146), a 7% increase. Membership income decreased significantly to £3,650 compared to £4,445 in the previous year. Conference income decreased to £6,895 compared to £13,007, a 47% drop. Advertisement contributed £2,330 to the

total income compared to £2,130 due to promotion through our social media channels and member and subscribers emailing.

The financial year 2023-24 closed with £21,512 in the Bgen accounts.

The accounts have been approved by the Board in January 2025. We now seek members' adoption of the accounts at the AGM so that they can be filed with the Charity Commission.

Our thanks to the Board, the Treasury Group, our Bookkeeper and Coordinator for all their support over the past year.

- Wadzanayi Mavhura, Bgen Treasurer



CHARITY COMMISSION
FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Charity Name Botanic Garden Education Network	No (if any) 1103482
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Receipts and payments accounts

For the period from	Period start date 01/04/2023	To	Period end date 31/03/2024
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Section A Receipts and payments

	Unrestricted funds to the nearest £	Restricted funds to the nearest £	Endowment funds to the nearest £	Total funds to the nearest £	Last year to the nearest £
A1 Receipts					
Sale Discounts	-	-	-	-	-
Training Days	3,370	-	-	3,370	3,146
Membership	3,650	-	-	3,650	4,445
Conference	6,895	-	-	6,895	13,007
Adverts	2,330	-	-	2,330	2,130
Grants	-	-	-	-	-
Miscellaneous	50	-	-	50	248
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total (Gross income for AR)	16,295	-	-	16,295	22,976
A2 Asset and investment sales, (see table).					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total receipts	16,295	-	-	16,295	22,976
A3 Payments					
Administrator	10,017	-	-	10,017	10,379
Computer & Software	675	-	-	675	368
Bookkeeping	1,671	-	-	1,671	992
Bank charges & Interest	393	-	-	393	383
Conference Expenses	2,591	-	-	2,591	6,253
General Expenses	97	-	-	97	8
Training Day Expenses	200	-	-	200	-
Marketing	-	-	-	-	-
Consultancy & Professional	85	-	-	85	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	15,728	-	-	15,728	18,383
A4 Asset and investment purchases, (see table)					
	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	-
Sub total	-	-	-	-	-
Total payments	15,728	-	-	15,728	18,383
Net of receipts/(payments)	567	-	-	567	4,593
A5 Transfers between funds	-	-	-	-	-
A6 Cash funds last year end	20,945	623	-	21,568	-
Cash funds this year end	21,512	623	-	22,135	4,593

Section B Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B1 Cash funds		21,512	623	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
	Total cash funds	21,512	623	-
	(agree balances with receipts and payments account(s))	OK	OK	OK

Categories	Details	Unrestricted funds to nearest £	Restricted funds to nearest £	Endowment funds to nearest £
B2 Other monetary assets	Debtors	2,095	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-
		-	-	-

Categories	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B3 Investment assets			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-

Categories	Details	Fund to which asset belongs	Cost (optional)	Current value (optional)
B4 Assets retained for the charity's own use	Laptop		-	1
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-
			-	-

Categories	Details	Fund to which liability relates	Amount due (optional)	When due (optional)
B5 Liabilities	Creditors	57.2	-	
			-	
			-	
			-	
			-	

Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of all the trustees

Signature	Print Name	Date of approval

Special thanks to Sophie Edwards and Sam Bowden, Bgen Coordinators, for their dedication, determination and invaluable coordination of all network activities and support to the Board.

Thanks to our Board of Trustees for their work and commitment this past year, and to all our members for their continuing participation and support in so many ways, to help advance Bgen's mission and objectives.