

# Virtual Technology Stimulates Children's Interest in the Natural World

*Fri 23rd May 2008*

Science and nature education in the classroom moves into virtual territory with the launch of **Brigit's Virtual Garden** by NUI Galway. The habitats and features of local visitor attraction, Brigit's Garden, have been digitally recreated in a 3D virtual space. The first public demonstration of the interactive Brigit's Virtual Garden takes place on Wednesday, 28 May, at 3pm in Brigit's Garden, Rosscahill, Co. Galway.

**Brigit's Virtual Garden** is an educational tool, alive with virtual versions of the insects and plants of the 'real' garden. The user navigates the virtual space by controlling the movements of 'Rua' the fox who takes them on an interactive tour of the 3D garden.

The virtual garden was designed as part of a project called the **Digital Hedge School (DHS)**, which is a collaborative effort between Brigit's Garden and several partners from NUI Galway including the **Environmental Change Institute (ECI)**, the **Digital Enterprise Research Institute (DERI)**, and the **Education Department**. The DHS project team have been working together for two years to create intergenerational programmes for primary, secondary, and third level students, by exploring the potential of novel technologies to enhance children's environmental education.

This year's participants in the DHS project were 4th and 5th class students from St. Patrick's National School, and transition year students from the Presentation Secondary School. Students from both the Galway City schools completed an eight-week training programme in environmental peer education.

The students involved in the Digital Hedge School Project spent time in Brigit's Garden taking digital photographs and drawings insects, water bugs, flowers and trees. The students were then shown how to upload their work into the virtual garden. Access to Brigit's Virtual Garden will be available to teachers involved in the project, for use in the classroom as a tool for supporting the educational experience of students visiting Brigit's Garden.

*"Incorporating technology into environmental education is the way forward in terms of relating to younger generations", says Professor Gerard Jennings, Director of the Environmental Change Institute at NUI Galway. "The creators of Brigit's Virtual Garden have been very successful in providing a technology that stimulates children's interest in the natural environment and encourages them to step outside the classroom and explore the world around them."*

For more information on the project or the launch event please contact Dr. Sarah Knight, Outreach Officer for the Environmental Change Institute, on 091 495061.

*links:*

[www.galwaygarden.com](http://www.galwaygarden.com)

[www.deri.org](http://www.deri.org)

[www.nuigalway.ie/eci/](http://www.nuigalway.ie/eci/)