

Esri makes £100 million worth of digital mapping software available to Northern Ireland schools



Pictured at the launch of Esri's ArcGIS for Schools Northern Ireland in W5 at the Odyssey, Belfast, are (L-R): Caitlin Brady; Ellen McNally; and Aiesha Mouhsine of St. Ronan's College Lurgan.

Belfast, 15th February 2019 – Esri, the market leader in Geographic Information Systems (GIS), today announces the launch of ArcGIS for Schools in Northern Ireland, making over £100 million worth of digital mapping software freely available to every Northern Ireland primary and post-primary school. More than 300,000 pupils in up to 1,146 schools* will have free access to Esri's digital mapping platform.

The platform allows students to explore subjects in new ways by collecting, analysing and visualising data on a wide range of topics. For example, students can use GIS to plot geological points of interest, study climate change, predict future scenarios, explore history visually, conduct field-based surveys, and perform many other cross-disciplinary activities.

The technology is already in use in six pilot schools located across Northern Ireland including primary, grammar and secondary schools. Lurgan College, St. Ronan's College and Lurgan Junior High School – all based in the town of Lurgan, Co. Armagh – worked together on a shared education programme project using Esri's ArcGIS to explore spatial dimensions of sectarian divisions in their town.

Alistair Hamill, Head of Geography, Lurgan College, said: “The cross-community element of the project was very important. Residential areas in Lurgan tend to be segregated, and shared public spaces are often underused, especially at night. The project brought together students from every school in the town to explore these divisions.

“Using Esri’s mapping platform and mobile app, students visited areas across the town and recorded their perception of safety within that space. Data collection through Esri’s app was seamless and intuitive, meaning the tech never got in the way of the subject. The project enabled students to visit places they’ve never been before – increasing their sense of understanding of both the town and each other.”

Hannah Murtagh, geography teacher, St. Ronan’s College, concluded: “This project gave young people in Lurgan the opportunity to have their voice heard – enabling them to put forward suggestions to make the town a better and more inclusive place. Incorporating digital elements within learning makes absolute sense as using the technology came as second-nature to my students. The Esri team were fantastic in their support throughout and I will continue to utilise the digital mapping platform for other topics as well as recommending its use to my colleagues.”

Esri Ireland will enable a fully supported ecosystem consisting of hosted and managed infrastructure and continually updated mapping data, including both global content and local data from Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland (OSNI®) – allowing students to explore their local area in detail. Lesson plans aligned to primary and post-primary teaching and a GeoMentor programme, designed to connect mapping experts with local teachers, will also be provided.

Esri Ireland held stakeholder meetings with numerous members of the education sector including both the Education Authority Northern Ireland (EANI) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). The programme is in alignment with EANI’s strategic priority to provide excellent education support services – leveraging technology and promoting digital education for young people throughout Northern Ireland.

Joanne McLaughlin, ArcGIS for Schools Sponsor, Esri Ireland, said: “We are thrilled to announce the rollout of the ArcGIS for Schools programme to every school in Northern Ireland and at every level of primary and post-primary education. The initiative has been a real success in other countries and initial feedback amongst the Northern Ireland pilot schools has been hugely positive. We are committed to providing ongoing support for teachers as well as dedicated lesson plans, detailed online resources and consistently updated maps to make the programme truly impactful here.

“GIS helps us to understand subjects by exploring them in new ways – connecting the topic to its location, place and geography. As well as becoming more prevalent in the technology we use daily, exposure to GIS will help students to think critically, to better understand our planet and to become better problem solvers and evidence-based decision makers. Esri is a firm supporter of closing the digital skills gap by encouraging young people to consider careers in STEM subjects. By enabling new skills in young people through technology, we can help empower tomorrow’s leaders to safeguard our planet for future generations.”