



## Press Release

*Issued: Thursday 3 June 2021*

---

### Walkabout app brings climate concerns closer to home

Help is at hand for anyone who finds the enormity of climate change just a little too hard to grasp.

New smartphone technology lets people discover how the climate crisis can be seen all around them – and not just in extreme events faraway.

The interactive app, which is being user tested in the lead-up to the Edinburgh Science Festival, encourages people to use their senses and rethink how they encounter our changing natural world. It goes live today (Thursday).

Its creators hope the mindful, meditative experience will bring home how human activity and the earth's ecosystems are intensely interconnected.

A team of artists, designers, scientists and AI specialists based at the University of Edinburgh has created a series of playful prompts that are triggered as users walk around the city.

Each prompt invites people to reflect on an element of the natural world, including plants, wildlife and weather.

Listeners are then given facts about how climate change is affecting each of these different elements – making global climate concerns more tangible and locally relevant.

The team, working with the University's Edinburgh Futures Institute, hopes the experience will stimulate curiosity about the science behind the information provided.

People testing AWEN – which is short for A Walk Encountering Nature – can start their walk anywhere in the city at any time during the Festival.

The creators of this dynamic, immersive experience are seeking feedback from users of the free pilot scheme to shape AWEN's future development.

AWEN is a part of a University-led research project called The New Real, which is exploring how digital experiences fuelled by AI can support local climate action.

This project was supported by the Scottish Funding Council Covid-19 Recovery funding to the University of Edinburgh's Data-Driven Innovation initiative.

Edinburgh Science Festival is working with the City of Edinburgh Council and other relevant authorities to implement appropriate Covid safety measures. These include physical distancing which will be implemented for all outdoor walking events.

Dr Drew Hemment of Edinburgh Futures Institute, who conceived The New Real, said: "AWEN is an intimate experience with big ambitions – to connect people to the bigger picture, far away events, a global outlook and also to local action."

Amanda Tyndall, Festival Director at Edinburgh Science Festival, adds: "This is an opportunity to take part in the ongoing design of a mobile experience that challenges us to think about our local environment and how it relates to the wider world."



@EdinburghUni



edinburghuniversity



@UniversityOfEdinburgh



@university-of-edinburgh

AWEN has been developed by The New Real's international team of collaborators.

The lead artist is Madrid and London-based Inés Cámara Leret, recently artist-in-residence at the Department of Geography at King's College London.

Brendan McCarthy and Sam Healy from Ray Interactive in Edinburgh led the digital design and digital build.

The sound designer is Tom deMajo and the creative producers are Malath Abbas and Susie Buchan – all three are part of Biome Collective in Dundee.

The research and science lead is Matjaz Vidmar from the Experiential AI group at Edinburgh Futures Institute.

**For further information, please contact: Ronnie Kerr, Press and PR Office – 07510 328413 or [Ronald.Kerr@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Ronald.Kerr@ed.ac.uk).**