The IFS website states that it:

- provides an international forum for the development of the principles of educational theory and practice associated with the child centred philosophy of Friedrich Froebel
- establishes opportunities internationally for research, discussion and debate on early childhood education
- studies, promotes and develops Froebelian theory and practice in early childhood education worldwide
- promotes university accredited certificates and diplomas in professional practice in early years education and related topics
- monitors and evaluates Froebelian educational activity internationally

Plans to offer international recognition and accreditation for Froebelian educational practice are currently in development.

IFS conferences

2002 (October) Dresden, Germany

The International Froebel Society was founded at the 3-day conference organised by Heinrike Schauwecker-Zimmer in Dresden. The active central group included the UK Chair of the NFF, Franciska Bayliss; the Head of the school of Education at Roehampton; Dr. Chris Lloyd; Dr. Peter Weston; Chair of the Incorporated Froebel Educational Institute (IFEI), Research Committee and NFF member and Professor Kevin Brehony. Dr. Peter Weston was invited to become the President. The Froebel scholars, Professor Helmut Heiland and Professor Ludwig Liegle gave papers in German. Peter Schauwecker-Zimmer translated at less formal evening seminars and discussions. The conference was attended by German kindergarten teachers, and delegates from Ireland, Russia, USA, Croatia, Denmark and the UK. Presidents to date are: Dr Peter Weston, Professor Kevin Brehony, Professor Helen May and Professor Mathias Urban. The biennial conferences have to date received funding support from the Froebel Trust.

The flier of the conference, attended by over 200 delegates, suggests:

to address the questions of what Froebel means in the twenty-first century in terms of a distinctive philosophy and a practice of education. The challenges of the title may be taken to mean the impact of alternative ways of seeing on Froebel’s work and the principles derived from it. Competing approaches to early childhood practices create uncertainties, as do political economic and social transformations of our time. It is hoped the conferences will address these changes and confront them critically in order to provide a new sense of what it is to be Froebelian at the beginning of a new century.

The Plenary speakers were:

Professor Ann Taylor Allen, University of Louisville, USA, *The Kindergarten in Germany and America, 1840–1914: A Comparative Perspective.*

Professor Helen May, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand *Making our own alternative – An Antipodean analysis of advocacy and early childhood.*

Professor Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, Goteborg University, Sweden, *Can play and learning be integrated in a goal orientated preschool?*


The flier of the conference states that:

This conference recognises that work and play are not opposites but complementary. Active learning is unique and another step towards the enlargement and growth of the total person. A person educated and living in an atmosphere where individual discovery, first-hand experience and opportunities for creative work are valued. A person therefore can develop into a balanced and mature adult. Such a person is, able to live in, to contribute to and to look critically at the society of which he or she forms a part.

The keynote speakers were:

Dr. Francis Douglas, University College Cork, Ireland, *The Relevance of Frederich Froebel to early Years education and Care Today*


Dr. Barbara Beatty, Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA, *Revisiting warfare within the American Kindergarten Movement: The International Kindergarten Union Reports and the Return of ‘purist’ Froebelianism.*

Professor Dr. Karl Neumann, Centre for Higher Education Didactics/Technical University of Braunschweig, Germany, *Education of Man in the Post-Modern Society: Friedrich Froebel’s Concept of a Holistic and Sustainable Education of Young Children.*
2008 (9th – 11th July) Boston, USA: Learning to Play – Playing to Learn

The flier of the conference says:

Wheelock College was founded in 1888 under the direction of Lucy Wheelock, an early pioneer of the kindergarten, and was at the forefront of the kindergarten movement in the USA.

The chapter that follows is an example of a panel presentation from Dr Jane Read, which was well received at the conference (see Chapter 38).

Keynote speakers:

Professor Tina Bruce, Roehampton University, Member of the Research Committee of the Froebel Educational Institute and of the National Froebel Foundation. *Learning through Play: Froebelian Principles and their Practice Today*.

Dr. David Elkind, Professor Emeritus, Tufts University, Medford, MA, USA. *Froebel and Montessori: Opposing Views of Early Childhood Education*.

Professor Diane Levin, Wheelock College, Boston, USA, *Play: An Endangered Species*.

Professor Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Lesely University, Cambridge, MA. USA. *Reclaiming Play: Helping Children Grow and Learn through Play in Challenging Times*.

2010 (8th–10th April) Institut fur Bilung und Kultur University of Jena, Germany: Froebelian pedagogy in a modern context; education and social action

The flier of the conference says:

ich wollte freie, denkende, selbstthatige menschen bilden [I want to build free, independent thinkers]

(Froebel, 1828)

Friedrich Froebel’s work was set within the historical context of the Enlightenment, the pedagogy of the philanthropists, Pestalozzi, Herbart and Schleiermacher, and the philosophies of German Idealism and Romanticism. It is tied to specific times but at the same time it is original and clearly modern. Since its appearance, his work has not only been used in various ways in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but it is also a current worldwide source of inspiration today.

Thus, the conference program provides insights into the latest research findings on Froebel with regard to educational theory: a discussion on the state of brain research, learning research, research on bonding and on pedagogical diagnostics. The conference will seek to find new answers to the question of whether and how the concepts of the child’s own initiated education and activity should be applied to early childhood didactics. This process can be seen within the context of a national and international debate on educational plans and curricula. Philosophical and educational frameworks and the various ways in which Froebel’s work was received historically will be included along with the most recent empirical studies on the importance of children’s play.
Special emphasis, as in the three previous conferences of the International Froebel Society, will be placed on political and socio-educational aspects of Froebel’s pedagogy. One example is the widely discussed postulate of the educational partnership between parents and public educational facilities – a leading principle of Froebel’s conception of the kindergarten. For the first time in the history of IFS biennial conferences, an attempt will be made to include the public of Jena and the region into the Conference via a panel discussion on the subject of ‘childhood, education and poverty’. Following the congress, a trip to visit the locations of Froebel’s work in Bad Blankenburg will be offered to participants.

The Friedrich Froebel Museum is located in Bad Blankenburg, where the first kindergarten was created. Delegates also visited Keilhau the location of Froebel’s first school and community. Froebel also studied at the University of Jena.

The speakers were:

Professor Dr. Lieselotte Ahnert, Professor Dr. Kevin Brehony, Professor Dr. Helmut Heiland, Professor Dr. Bruno Hildenbrand, Professor Dr. Gerald Huther, Professor Dr. Ludwig Liegle, Professor Dr. Helen May, Professor Dr. Roland Merten, Professor Dr. Wolfram Meyerhofer, Dr. Kristen Nawrotzki, Professor Dr. Karl Neumann, Professor Dr. Johannella Tafuri, Professor Dr. Michael Winkler.

2012 (12th – 14th April) Froebel College of Education, Sion Hill, Blackrock, Dublin, Ireland: international perspectives on Froebelian theory and practice

The flier of the Conference says;

The goal is to bring together educators, carers, academics, researchers and others interested in the education and welfare of young children, adolescents and adults in an interdisciplinary discussion about the development of Froebel’s education philosophy.

The theme of the conference is International Perspectives on Froebelian Theory and Practice. Like other movements in education, the engagement with an application of Froebel’s ideas and practices across the globe has been inconsistent. Variations occurred as adaptations to local cultures were made. Perhaps the one constant that gives Froebel’s ideas an almost universal quality is the emphasis on the importance of play, as education through play is perceived to be the touchstone of the Froebelian approach.

As the International Froebel Society has developed delegates attend from an ever widening range of countries, including Ireland, Scotland, England, Germany, Norway, Spain, USA, Canada, Japan, South Korea, China and New Zealand. All the NFF trustees attended. A video message was given by Joachim Liebschner.

Keynote speakers:

Professor Helen May, University of Otago, New Zealand, Contemporary Issues in Early Education: An Analysis of Growth and Constraint.
Professor Yumiko Suzuki, University of Hiroshima, Japan, The use of Froebel’s ‘Spielgaben’ in a Japanese Kindergarten to aid the transition from Kindergarten to Elementary School.
Dr. Glenda Walsh, Queen’s University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, The Power of Play-based Learning in Early Childhood Care and Education: a Northern Ireland Story.
Dr. Kristen Nawrotzki, Paedagogische Hochschule, Heidelberg, Germany, *As the Nation Shrinks, Its Kindergartens grow: Early Childhood Care and Education in Today’s Germany.*

Professor Larry Proctor, University of Alberta, Canada, *Kindergarten in the Colonies: Canada, New Zealand and Australia.*

*A transcription (from Peter Weston) of the Introductory Conference Video by Joachim Liebschner, recorded on 2nd April 2012 in his garden in Midhurst, Sussex*

I am very sorry not to be able to be with you on this occasion, but am very grateful to be able to talk with you via this kind of equipment. But my first greetings must go to the people in Ireland with whom I have worked for so long. I learned a lot from them, especially from the nuns.

One of the nuns took me out to Dublin one evening and we passed a beggar, who had his cap on the floor on one side of his legs, and he had a bottle of beer on the other. My nun threw a coin into his hat, and when we were out of earshot I said to her whether she thought this was wise, and I said ‘he will only be buying another bottle of beer’. She said, ‘Yes, Mr Liebschner, you may well be right, but he may also be buying himself a loaf of bread’.

I notice from your programme that you have a very varied programme. May I be allowed to add another two variations? One dates back to the time that Froebel was very active. He had an invitation from the Duke of Meiningen. Now Meiningen was next door to the area where Froebel was working. He had an invitation from the Duke to help him with the education of the children in his dukedom. Could he come for lunch? So they made an appointment and he went to discuss this over lunch. But Froebel started walking to the place – it took him five hours. He walked to the place, and on the way he looked at the people’s cooking pots. And what did he find, in the farm workers’ cooking pots? He found potatoes, turnips, carrots, it was a pretty meagre kind of food for those farm labourers. So when he was sitting down at the Duke’s table, with beautiful china, silver knives, forks and spoons, the Duke said, ‘Well, Mr Froebel, are you prepared to come and talk and help me with the education of the children?’ Froebel said, ‘Yes, of course I will, but first you have to promise me that you will do something about the living conditions of your farm labourers’. Of course, Froebel didn’t get the job. What Froebel was really saying was that . . . education on its own won’t do: there also must be some substance, some support from the home and from the community.

My other example that I would like you to consider is from Froebel’s wife from the last days of his life. I have done research on Froebel through his writings, and his handwriting was very clear and easy to read. But there was a small piece of paper written in pencil, with a strange handwriting. I didn’t recognise it, so I left it to one side, until one day I took the time to decipher it. It was written by his wife. On that day, the day that he died, a child from the kindergarten came upstairs with a bunch of flowers. This child – I don’t know how old he was, about five or six, probably. This child gave the flowers to old Froebel, who was lying in bed. Froebel took the flowers, he kissed the child’s hand, and then passed the flowers over to his wife, and he said, ‘Look after my flowers – and my weeds – for I learned from them both’. Now, if you translate this in terms of children, what Froebel was really saying was, ‘Look after my good children, the bright ones, but also look after those who don’t fit into the mould into which you want to press them. Learn from them both, because they all have to give something’.

Well, I wish you a very good conference, and I hope you have enough time to consider those things as well. Thank you.
Obituary of Joachim Liebschner by Dr Peter Weston

The very sad news of the death of Joachim Liebschner marks a significant moment in the story of the Froebel movement in Britain. For it was he who rescued Froebel from his earlier relative obscurity in the shadows of Montessori and Piaget in the 1960s. I was privileged to assist Joachim with the editing and publication of his autobiography *Iron Cross Roads* in 2005–2006, and after a conversation in July last year asked him to write a short account of his time at Froebel College. In it he wrote that, in the late 1960s and after much searching, he managed to gain unique access to the Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften in East Berlin, where he found ‘three large wardrobes filled with Froebel’s writings’. Other scholars from the West were not admitted. Whenever he visited his parents near Dresden, he spent one week in East Berlin, where ‘every day from 8.00 am to 6.00 pm I was bent over Froebel’s articles, letters, speeches and notes’. He made handwritten copies until ‘after several years’ the Director of the Archives made Xerox copies which were sent to him. The data thus gathered led to the basis of the Froebel Archive at Roehampton University, to his own book *A Child’s Work* (1992), and to his own MEd degree (he had no Bachelor’s degree). With his typical modesty he summed up all that he accomplished while at FEI in a handwritten note – ‘As you can see – nothing very special, except that I was doing what I enjoyed doing most’.

He really did lay the foundations for the current flowering of the Froebel movement in the UK, but also he was very well known in Ireland for having been the External Examiner for many years at the then Sion College (the Froebel College) in Dublin, where some allegedly thought he was Froebel! So when the fifth International Froebel Society Conference was scheduled to be held in Dublin in 2012 it was agreed to invite Joachim to make a brief introductory speech, but as he was unable to travel there, it was agreed to make a film of his talk. So with Kevin Brehony I drove down to his home in Midhurst, Sussex, where we met a film crew from Roehampton. Filming began and my most vivid recent memory of Joachim is of him talking for 10 minutes without notes on camera on a sunny morning in his garden.

Subsequently the Froebel College Dublin has moved to Maynooth University.

Brian Tubbert, Senior Lecturer, Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University

Froebel College of Education was founded in 1943 by the Dominican Sisters and operated as a stand-alone teacher training college until the introduction of the Bachelor in Education degree in 1975. Froebel College remained in Blackrock but became an associate college of Trinity College, Dublin.

With the financial crisis of 2008 in Ireland all small colleges came under threat of closure. Froebel College decided to become pro-active and seek a closer, more enduring relationship with a university. Many on the college staff felt it was appropriate in the twenty-first century for teacher education to be fully integrated on to a university campus, and not to operate separately from other university disciplines.

Maynooth University already had an Education Department (2nd level teaching and post-graduate), Adult & Community Education and a Centre for Teaching & Learning (3rd level teaching). The university felt that a Primary and Early Childhood Education department would give the full range of teacher education.

Following intensive negotiations it was announced in 2010 that Froebel College would move to Maynooth University in 2013 and become the *Froebel Department of Primary & Early Childhood Education*. A new building would house the four Education departments. College staff held many meetings, among themselves, with college governors and with university executives.
to ensure that Froebel principles and ethos would be maintained in the move. ‘Froebel’ was retained in the department title. Favourable staff-to-student ratios were retained so small class groupings (c.30) could operate active learning. Dedicated, purpose-built rooms were included in the new building for Visual Arts (2) with outdoor access, Drama/Music, PE Hall and Classroom, an Early Childhood Room, Maths & Science. A model school garden and outdoor play area are situated immediately outside the Early Childhood Room.

The new School of Education, including the Froebel Department and the three other education departments, building opened in October 2016. As we reflect on our first year in our lovely new building our task now is to retain all we value while integrating into broader university life . . .

2014 (26th – 28th June) Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU): Play, self-activity, representation and development

The conference received significant funding because the recently formed Froebel Trust wished to acknowledge the work of the Edinburgh Froebel Network and financed the attendance of 17 members from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, who gave presentations disseminating their work as graduates of the University of Edinburgh Froebel Course, taught by leading members of the Edinburgh Froebel Network.

Just as the conference in Jena had involved members of the wider educational community in the local area, so at this conference the third day was for local practitioners as well as for those who attending the academic presentations, with visits to Community Playthings who have always been closely linked to Froebelian approaches education. Professor Helen May became the President. Since the sad death of Professor Kevin Brehony the practice has become established of having a memorial lecture in his honour. This was given by Dr. Peter Weston.

Keynote speakers were:

Dr. David Whitebread, University of Cambridge, England, *Play, metacognition and self-regulation*. Associate Professor Nelleke Bakker, University of Goningen, the Netherlands, *Elise van Calcar and the origin of Froebel’s kindergarten in the Netherlands*.

Professor Lydia Plowman, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, *Interplay: Play Learning and ICT in Preschool Education*.

Professor Tina Bruce CBE, University of Roehampton, England, *Play: a Froebelian approach*.

Edinburgh Froebel Network presentations (see Chapter 35) formed part of a day which was envisaged by Yordanka Valkanova at Canterbury Christ Church University. She wanted a greater practitioner presence at the IFS conference, and so the first two days were researcher led and the last day was organised to promote Froebelian practice. Other contributions to the practitioner day were presentations from the Froebel Trust teams working in South Africa (Stella Louis and Georgie McCall) and Kolkata (Sara Holroyd and Jill Leyburg) (see Chapter 37 for more detail.) This day was funded by the Froebel Trust.

2016 (23rd – 25th June) Kassell, Germany, Was Heist: Froebel verstehen? Arbeiten an, mit und nach Froebel heute (What does it mean to understand Froebel? working on, with and according to Froebel today)

The Froebel Trust continued the tradition of funding members of the Education Committee to attend IFS conferences. Funding was also awarded to those about to graduate from the Froebel
Trust-endorsed travelling tutor training. Each recipient of funding was asked to submit a report of the conference.

Professor Mathias Urban was elected President of the IFS. The two vice presidents are Kristen Nawrotski and Larry Proschner.

The flier of the conference says:

Nationally and internationally, we see today a broad variety of opportunities to value Froebel pedagogy in terms of both theoretical and/or practical interests. The range of readings and applications covers philologically exact reconstructions of the ‘authentic’ Froebel as well as modernized interpretations and even some divergent forms of practical transfer into concrete kindergarten work. An important aim of the conference is to provide a forum for the different forms of work and research on, with and according to Froebel worldwise and to offer opportunities for dialogue and mutual exchange about individual access to and the handling of Froebelian pedagogy.

Keynote speakers:

Professor Dr. Winfried Bohm, Wurtzburg, Was Heilst Froebel verstehen? What does it mean to understand Froebel? This lecture was in German.

Professor Dr. Helen May, Dunedin, Was ist ein Kindergarten in der Kultur und Politik von Aotearoa-Neuseeland im 21sten Jahrhundert? What is a Kindergarten in the culture and politics of Aotearoa-New Zealand in the 21st century?

PD Dr. Freimut Schirmacher, Froebel Pedagogik auf dem Weg-Perspektiven für die Praxis. Opening Lecture given by the host of the Conference. This lecture was in German.

Professor Dr. Karl Neumann, The Kevin Brehony Memorial Lecture.

Professor Dr. Karl Neumann, Bildung und Religion: Froebel didaktisches Erbe im Kongext aktueller fruhpaedagogischer Konzepete. Education and religion. Froebel’s educational legacy in the context of current early childhood concepts. This lecture was in German with notes in a paper in English provided.

Professor Dr. Frithjof Grell, Friedrich Froebel oder Uber die Erziehung. Friedrich Froebel or On Education. This lecture was in German.

Some workshops were in German, but many were in English.

In 2018, 6th–8th September, in Hiroshima, Japan, Professor Michiru Watanabe and colleagues will host the eighth biennial conference: How Froebel research can make contributions to an education aimed at international peace. The conference is organised by the Japanese Society for Study of Pestalozzi and Froebel, with the Hiroshima Banka Gakuen University and the Chair is Professor Michiru Watanabe. The flier includes these inspiring words with which to end this chapter.

The ideal goal of Froebel’s education is to create a world harmonising individuality with the whole, all the while accepting diversity of our lives. From the beginning Froebel’s kindergarten has this ultimate aim. For about 170 years the kindergarten embodying his ideas has spread throughout the world as an institution of care and education.

Hiroshima has for 70 years been promoting the importance of peace and the senselessness and worthlessness of war all over the world. Additionally, teachers in Hiroshima have developed an educational programme of peace education and repeatedly highlighted the
core themes to pupils from primary school throughout secondary school. At this IFS conference in Hiroshima 2018 we are planning to reclaim the roots of Froebel's philosophy and rediscover how Froebelian research, based on his philosophy in which he longed for unity of all living creatures, can make a useful contribution to education aimed international peace.