FEI Forest School Scotland
a context

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May 2013
What is Forest School?
INTERNATIONAL, UK & SCOTLAND CONTEXT

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This document was written by the FEI Forest School Scotland coordinator.
Thanks to the FEI Forest School Scotland Working Group members for their input.
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<table>
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<th>Mission Statement:</th>
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<td>FEI Forest School in Scotland develops to support the needs of the Scottish people for better learning, health and wellbeing, set within an established ethos for Forest School practice. Forest School delivery must make meaningful links to Curriculum for Excellence, Government objectives and Woods for Learning, set within the wider context of outdoor learning and sustainable development education for Scotland.</td>
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1 WHAT IS FOREST SCHOOL?

1.1 THE INTERNATIONAL, UK AND SCOTLAND CONTEXT

1.1.1 European origins

Forest Schools originated in Europe in the early 20th century as a way of teaching about the natural world. By the 1980s it became part of the Danish early years programme.

The Forest School model originates in Scandinavia and involves participants journeying by foot (if possible) to a local woodland environment to learn outdoors on a regular sustained basis. It is a long-term client/child-led, educational process that promotes, observes and explicitly supports the social, emotional and physical development of children, young people and adults in an outdoor, preferably woodland, environment.

In 1993 a group of childcare students visiting Denmark witnessed the benefits of Forest School for themselves and brought the idea back to Bridgewater College. Here, lecturers that accompanied the students considered how they could apply what they had seen to the childcare provision in their own Early Years Excellence Centre. Since then the idea has grown and Forest Schools are spreading throughout Britain.

Forest School delivery is now one of the main activities of the Forest Education Initiative (FEI), originally a GB wide partnership. ¹

1.1.2 Forest School Trainers Network GB

The Forest School Training Network GB was established to give Forest School trainers (those delivering L3 and above) the opportunity to work together to continue to develop a qualification framework and to improve the quality and consistency of Forest School training. The group meets to discuss Network business and share standardisation of assessment.

The current Network has grown from one which started in Wales. Open College Network (OCN) Units for Forest School were originally developed in Wales and began to be delivered in 2003. Over a period of time the original OCN units were developed and refined through the OCN Wales Forest School Training Network which was set up at the beginning of 2006.

In 2009/2010 the Network revised the Level 1, 2 and 3 awards as a result of standardisation events and these were finalised in early 2010. At this time OCN Wales (Agored Cymru)

¹ http://www.foresteducation.org/woodland_learning/forest_schools/background_to_fei_schools/ (December 2012)
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became completely independent of National OCN, and Forest School Training Network Wales formed a separate sub-group for those delivering in Wales, distinct from the 'Forest School Trainers Network GB'. Representatives from the FSTN Wales group act as a link between FSTN GB and FSTN Wales.

Level 3 Forest School Observation Assessments are available only to those members of the FSTN GB.2

1.1.3 Quality Assurance

A Forest School Quality Improvement Framework project was developed to help improve quality provision within the Forest School (FS) sector. This framework was piloted at five different Pilot Forest School settings in England, Scotland and Wales in 2009. Supporting documents have been developed to help practitioners develop skills in collecting evidence, interviewing and observation, across four sections which address the Learning Environment, Health, Safety & Well-being, Delivery and Communication, and Learners.3

1.1.4 A proposed National Governing Body for Forest School

In early 2010 the Institute of Outdoor Learning (IOL) Forest School Special Interest Group (SIG) voted in favour of exploring the establishment of a National Governing Body (NGB) for Forest School. A national NGB consultation was created by the Forest School NGB steering group, to see if there was a large enough constituency in favour of the establishment of an NGB. This was open as an online survey June - September 2010, promoted via email through existing channels such as FEI cluster groups, Forest School Trainers, national conferences and local Forest School networks. Of the 928 people responding, only 9% were based in Scotland. It is debatable whether a true GB wide mandate was obtained for an NGB at this point.

A part time post (2011 - 2012), was set up to carry out a detailed study through consultation to produce more detailed objectives of the NGB. This identified, amongst other things, a need for some agreed national occupational standards, Forest School practice and training standards, more streamlined communications including single point contacts for Forest School, a national database for FS trainers and practitioners, and national/ professional recognition for Forest School awards, plus the need for agreement over key principles of Forest School and the criteria for Forest School practice. Feedback suggested a need for a national professional body to represent and seek funding for FS, and get acceptance within the education sector for Forest School as a recognised pedagogy. Scotland’s response to these proposals is described in the next section.

Following the consultation process and feasibility study by the development worker, a business plan was been developed for the establishment of a Forest School Professional organisation. The organisation aimed to employ a development officer once it has been constituted. It will be a social enterprise and company limited by guarantee operating as a charity with the following objectives:

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3 http://www.foresteducation.org/woodland_learning/forest_schools/forest_school_quality_improvement_framework/
1. To improve the quality and standards of all those involved in the delivery of Forest School and training of practitioners for the benefit of the Forest School community and the learners involved.
2. To support the development of Forest School across the UK
3. To provide a professional voice for Forest School practitioners and trainers.
4. To formulate National Occupational Standards and establish a qualification on the national qualification framework.
5. To share best practice amongst Forest School practitioners.
6. To provide research opportunities.
7. To explore funding opportunities for Forest Schools.

The new Forest School Association (FSA), the UK professional body for Forest School, was launched at an event at Elvaston Castle Country Park, Derby on 7th July 2012. A part-time post was advertised September 2012 and the FSA Development officer was recruited November 2012. The Institute of Outdoor Learning (IOL) website created a temporary home for the FSA until the FSA website was established in early 2013, badged as the Forest School Association “quality Forest School for all”.  

1.1.5 The Development of Forest School in Scotland

Until 2003 there were about four trained Forest School Leaders in Scotland, but they were scattered geographically and operating locally. Interest, however, had been gathering in Scotland. Previously, in 1999, the Environmental Education Advisor for Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Bonnie Maggio (now FEI Co-ordinator Scotland), went on a study trip to Denmark to observe Forest School practice. Forest School in Scotland was initially promoted by the newly devolved Forestry Commission for Scotland (FCS) in 2003. This built on positive models observed in Wales and the English Home counties. Four Forest School training courses were run in Scotland, supported by FCS – 2 courses in 2003, 1 course in 2004, and 1 course in 2004/5 – with training at that time delivered by an English provider as there were none in Scotland. The initial training programmes resulted in a core group of Forest School trained and accredited people in Scotland. From this a small number of leaders became active Level 3 Forest School practitioners. A wider range of individuals and organisations were now also able to deliver training in Scotland. Since this time there has been a shift in focus from training the wider network to targeted training for teachers.

An evaluation of Forest School in Scotland was commissioned by Forestry Commission Scotland and Forest Education Initiative Scotland, with a report published March 2006.  

Over time, certain areas of Scotland that have shown rapid uptake of Forest School practice. Since July 2006 The City of Edinburgh Council Countryside Ranger Service supported and developed an innovative Forest School project in partnership with the Forestry Commission Scotland, Careers Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Forest Education Initiative Edinburgh & Lothian’s cluster group. In its pilot stage (2006-2008) the project originally aimed to increase the educational use of Council managed woodlands through the Forest School model. This was achieved through providing a supported package of accredited Forest School Leader Training with a particular emphasis on training provision for teachers.

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4 http://www.forestschoolassociation.org/
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to ensure sustainability. The success of this pilot project was instrumental in securing funds for the further three year project (2008-2011) and reported in Edinburgh’s Forest School Draft Strategy (2008-2011).6

In 2010/11, funding from Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Scottish Government Learning Directorate enabled a targeted Forest School training programme for schools to be delivered in four key geographical regions across Scotland, to build on existing capacity. At the end of this programme, 174 people from the target areas were trained at Level 1 – Level 3, in four independently contracted and delivered training programmes. In theory this new cohort of trained teachers and other practitioners will create an increased capacity to deliver Forest School across these areas of Scotland. The next steps are to embed Forest School in the wider context of outdoor learning in Scotland.

Key outcomes for Forest School in Scotland are education and health, with additional but secondary positive outcomes for forestry and biodiversity.

The growth of Forest School in Scotland has been timely, as it has occurred alongside that of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) developed in 2004 with implementation in Scottish schools from 2010/11. Notably, the document *Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning* was published in 2010. Curriculum implementation is being led and supported by three partner organisations: Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and the Scottish Government.

The good fit between Forest School and Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes can create a sustainable programme for teachers. Positive outcomes for health make it relevant for health sector workers, especially for those working in a community context and for those where the reduction of health inequalities is a key outcome of their work.

There is a diversification of approach as Forest School evolves in Scotland, with a shift from direct input by FCS towards FEI Scotland taking the lead in its development. Three regional co-ordinators have been instrumental in providing local support in key areas.

FEI Scotland has a Forest School Working group and a FEI Forest School Scotland Co-ordinator in post from 2010, initially supported by the Forestry Commission Scotland’s Forests for People grant. This post was renewed with Forest Development Programme funding for a further two years from December 2012 and continues to be hosted by Living Classrooms. A network group for Forest School trainers in Scotland has been established from 2011. There is an increasing awareness and interest in Forest School, from the Scottish Government in particular Education and Forestry, local education initiatives within Councils, and from individuals who see the benefits of this kind of work with children and young people.

The FEI website provides an increasing number of examples of the diversity of Forest School practice across Scotland, through its project reports on funded activities.

1.1.6 The Forest School Qualification

All FEI recognised Forest Schools must be led by Level 3 qualified leaders, who undertake the necessary training.

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- Level 3 training is available to teachers, support assistants, nurses, nursery nurses, etc., with relevant experience and is the minimum recognised level of training for Forest School leaders.
- Level 2 training is shorter, and designed for people who only want to work as assistants, who are supporting an existing L3 qualified leader.
- Level 1 training is an introductory course.

- Level 4 (proposed) training is for Forest School Leaders with at least one year’s experience looking for qualification to train Forest School Leaders. There are other routes for becoming a Forest School trainer.

A Paediatric First Aid in Outdoor Settings qualification is also required.

The FEI recognised Forest School training qualification is either delivered through Open College Network (OCN) Units, or as a BTEC Award (BTEC Award for Forest School Leaders L3/ Award in Forest Skills L1).  

1.1.7 Forest School Scotland and the Forest School Association (FSA)

Scotland recognised that a positive outcome of an NGB would be the simplification and streamlining of Forest School. However, some concerns remained. The NGB plans were ambitious, and duplicated some functions already present in Scotland (through FEI and the training network for example) with a focus on standardisation of training and quality of delivery. The Awards and Qualifications system is different in Scotland which creates its own opportunities. The FEI FS Working Group thus decided to loosen involvement with the Forest School National Governing Body (NGB) steering group in November 2011 to concentrate on developing the Forest School network in the right context for Scotland, whilst retaining some cross border communication. When the Forest School Association, the UK body, was formed in July 2012, the FEI Forest School Coordinator Scotland applied and was accepted on to the Board of Directors, and another Forest School trainer/practitioner based in Scotland (Aline Hill, Big World) joined the Executive. This created opportunities to represent Forest School Scotland at UK level and share good practice across the border.

1.1.8 A typical Forest School programme

- A typical programme involves the Level 3 qualified Forest School Leader initially talking to the learners, teachers, parents and guardians. The Leader will explain what Forest School is and will discuss what sort of activities the participants will be doing and what the learners’ needs are.

- An appropriate local woodland site is found and an Environmental Impact Assessment completed to ensure that the site will not be irreparably damaged by the running of sessions. If suitable, the landowner’s permission to use the site is gained and insurance issues sorted.

- Before sessions begin, a site risk assessment is compiled by the qualified leader to ensure the site is safe for the learners and adults to visit.

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7 http://www.foresteducation.org/woodland_learning/forest_schools/training_to_become_a_forest_school_leader/
8 adapted from text (p11) in A Guide to Forest Schools in Wales, Forestry Commission Wales (2009)
http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/AguidetoForestSchools09.pdf/$FILE/AguidetoForestSchools09.pdf
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• Prior to taking them out to the woodland, the Forest School leader will get to know the participants and gain their confidence by leading activities at their educational setting for one or two sessions.

• Under the supervision of the qualified leader, the group (typically up to 15) visit the same local woodland site on a regular basis (once a week) ideally throughout the year but not less than a minimum of ten weeks, except in extreme conditions. The qualified leader will risk assess the planned activities for each session and will check the woodland site before the learners arrive, for any change which may have occurred since the last session.

• Each session is learner-centred, based on the skills and needs of that group.

• Games are played and small achievable tasks are set, such as hide and seek, building shelters and woodland art activities. Free playtime is factored into sessions and as participants get used to the Forest School routine, the leaders’ trust in them grows. Tool use, fire lighting and cooking are gradually introduced alongside strict safety procedures. Over time as the learners become more familiar and confident, not only do they learn how to use tools appropriately and safely but such activities can also promote trust and raise self-confidence and self-esteem.

• Using natural materials the participants develop both practical and intellectual skills, which can be linked with the Curriculum for Excellence.

• To mark participants’ journey of development and to celebrate their achievements, the final Forest School session is usually marked with a celebratory event which parents and other individuals involved in the programme are invited to attend.
2 FOREST SCHOOL IN SCOTLAND TODAY, AND ITS FUTURE DIRECTION

This section sets the wider educational and environmental context for Forest School in Scotland 2012/13. Highlighted sections outline recommendations for future development.

2.1 SCOTLAND – NATIONAL POLICY & CONTEXT

2.1.1 Scottish Government Policy

The devolved government for Scotland is responsible for most of the issues of day-to-day concern to the people of Scotland, including health, education, justice, rural affairs, and transport.9 The Government has five strategic objectives – to make Scotland wealthier and fairer, healthier, safer and stronger, smarter and greener. Additionally, recent policy developments in Children’s and Young People’s Rights, the National Play Strategy and Learning for Sustainability give expression to the aspirations of Scottish Government that Scotland becomes the best place in the world to grow up. National outcomes include:

1) Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.
2) Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens

Appropriately designed and led Forest School programmes can make a contribution to these strategic objectives.

2.1.2 Environment

Scotland’s green spaces, both urban and rural, are essential for Forest School delivery.

Natural heritage issues in Scotland are integrated into policy on the major land uses in the countryside, such as farming and forestry.10 Scotland’s trees, woodlands, and forest estate are the setting for Forest School, and so Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) is a key partner for FEI Forest School. FCS was created on 1 April 2003 as a result of the Forestry Devolution Review, is funded by the Scottish Parliament and directed by Scottish Ministers. The FCS works with the Scottish Government to deliver the Scottish Forestry Strategy, and contributes to many aspects of wider Scottish Government policy such as energy, environment and climate change, biodiversity, healthy living, rural transport, tourism and education.11

Umbrella organisations like Greenspace Scotland and partners, and local authority environmental/ countryside services can have a stake in Forest School. Other partners could include non-departmental public bodies such as Scottish Natural Heritage, Loch

9 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About
10 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Countryside
11 http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7upd3g
Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority, and the Cairngorms National Park Authority, with their role in the sustainable management of the natural heritage.

Early in 2013 a Scottish Government consultation on a Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill \(^\text{12}\) outlined some key issues about asset transfer to communities and communal ownership of land. This has potential implications for the securing of land for Forest School activities. A draft Bill is due be considered by the Scottish Parliament in winter 2013-2014.\(^\text{13}\)

A new website resource Scotland's Environment Web (or SEWeb) brings together information on Scotland's environment. This provides useful information on trends and data which sets the socio-environmental context for the strategic development of Forest School in Scotland.\(^\text{14}\)

2.1.3 Education

The Scottish Government's lifelong learning strategy aims to ensure that everyone develops the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need for learning, life and work. The curriculum is all the experiences that are planned for learners to support the development of these attributes, knowledge and skills.\(^\text{15}\)

Education Scotland was formed by the merger of LTS, HMIe, the National CPD Team and the Scottish Government's Positive Behaviour Team from 1st July 2011. It aims to ‘provide the best blend of national support and challenge to inspire and secure continuous improvement in the opportunities that all Scottish learners can access’ by:

- leading and supporting the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence
- increasing the capacity for self-evaluation and self-improvement amongst education providers and practitioners
- promoting high quality professional learning and leadership
- identifying and stimulating innovation, sharing successful approaches widely with others
- providing independent external evaluations of the quality of educational provision at individual provider, local authority and partners, and national levels
- supporting the development and implementation of policy at national level

Curriculum for Excellence ( CfE) aims to achieve a transformation in education in Scotland by providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18. It has been introduced to raise standards in learning and teaching and improve Scotland’s children’s life chances.

The curriculum in Scotland is non-statutory and not dictated by the Scottish Government. Rather, the Government provides the framework for learning and teaching. Responsibility for what is taught rests with local authorities and schools taking into account national guidelines and advice. Getting it right for every child (also known as "Getting it right" or GIRFEC) is a

\(^\text{13}\) Pers. Comm. Julie Wilson (Development Officer Outdoor Learning, Education Scotland)
\(^\text{14}\) http://www.environment.scotland.gov.uk/
\(^\text{15}\) http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum
new, national approach to supporting and working with all children and young people in Scotland.

2.1.4 Health and Well Being

The Scottish Government commissioned an independent evaluation project ‘Good Places Better Health for Scotland's Children’. The project report (December 2011) identifies four key health challenges facing children in Scotland: obesity; asthma; unintentional injury; mental health and wellbeing. The report cites evidence to support that access to green, natural or semi-natural outdoor spaces is a significant dimension of good health, because it is associated with increased levels of physical activity as well as stress relief and enhanced mental wellbeing. The report recommendations include ‘supporting activities within greenspace, woodland, and other natural settings to encourage use and provide a child-friendly focus’. 16

Recommendations: National Policy

- Clear links are established between Scottish Government objectives & Forest School programmes
- Education, Health & Well-being are primary outcomes
- Forestry & Biodiversity are secondary positive outcomes

16 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/good-places-better-health/Recommendations/GPBHForScotChildren
2.2 EDUCATION AND LEARNING

2.2.1 Woods for Learning

The Forestry Commission has developed the strategic programme Woods for Learning.

Woodlands are a rich context and resource for learning, demonstrated by the Woods for Learning case studies, including Forest School examples, available on the Education Scotland website.\(^\text{17}\) In addition, ‘woodland learning’ is promoted on the FEI website as one aspect of outdoor learning, with woodlands as the learning resource. This encompasses:

- Forest School
- Rural skills & vocational training
- Wood as a sustainable resource
- Climate change, and skills & apprenticeships

Forest School may not be the best or first choice for everyone. It sits at the ‘deeper end’ of immersion in outdoor learning, and for some teachers this may be too daunting or not appropriate. The Woods for Learning approach could provide a training ladder of progression. Using local woodland to deliver curriculum for excellence through outdoor learning may be the most achievable and cost effective option for teachers wishing to develop skills and confidence initially. This first step on the learning outdoors ladder could lead to Forest School qualifications - if teachers and other educators decide to pursue that particular pedagogy, with its particular challenges and rewards.

An FEI guidance document has been developed to outline this progression pathway. This explores the range of woodland learning options outdoors, and summarises which approaches require training, if at all. This is available free to download from the FEI website resources.\(^\text{18}\)

Forestry Commission education and learning strategies are summarised in Appendix 3 of the research review by Rebecca Lovell et al (2010) commissioned by FCS.\(^\text{19}\)

The report ‘Forest School Scotland: An Evaluation’ provides outcomes and curriculum linkages for Forest School, although these are probably in need of updating.\(^\text{20}\)

Most curriculum areas and their outcomes can be delivered outdoors, or through a combination of classroom based and outdoor experiences, as exemplified by Education Scotland’s Experiences and Outcomes Guides for Outdoor Learning.\(^\text{21}\) The four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) - to enable each child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor – fit well with

\(^{17}\) http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/sharingpractice/w/woodsforlearning/index.asp

\(^{18}\) http://www.forestonline.org.uk/resources/FCS_WL_models_tables_2.doc

\(^{19}\) http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Education_and_learning_research_review_2010.pdf/$FILE/Education_and_learning_research_review_2010.pdf


\(^{21}\) http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/about/experiencesandoutcomes.asp
the holistic pedagogy of Forest School. This fit between the aims and outcomes of CfE’s four capacities and Forest School is summarised in the John Muir Award Forest School Guide.  

The role of school inspection can reflect on Forest School practice. Previously known as Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMie), this agency was merged in 2011 to become part of Education Scotland, and now known as HMII and HMI. The role of the Inspectorate is to promote sustainable improvements in standards, quality and achievements for all learners in Scottish education through first-hand, independent evaluation. Following a recent review and consultation, the school inspection framework document for Scotland was published on 11 August 2011.  

Previously, HMie had begun to recognise the value of Forest School, stating in one inspection report for example: "The curriculum had been enriched by a range of innovative projects, for example the Forest Schools initiative through which pupils learned outdoors, improved their skills in working with others and developed their understanding of the local environment."

Similarly for Ancrum Primary school, Jedburgh, a Scottish Borders Council Inspection report (May 2011) says "The forest school initiative has involved all children and has been exceptionally successful in developing their self-confidence, independence, initiative, teamwork and leadership."

Taking part in Forest School develops skills and capacities in young people that are not acknowledged within the formal qualification system. Education Scotland suggests that ‘schools, colleges and other education providers should be looking at how young people’s achievements beyond formal qualifications might be recognised’.

As CfE is rolled out, schools and local authorities will identify their particular area of focus for CfE development which might include Literacy, Health and Well-being, Sustainable Development, Geography or Mathematics. This creates opportunities for Forest School practitioners to engage with settings, using Forest School as the outdoor experience to achieve positive outcomes in these areas.

Forest School programmes have been adopted by some schools to provide continuity with the curriculum, for example as a class activity within a course. Gracemount High School is one such example with S3 and S4 students taking the Biology Access or Intermediate 1 course and engaging with Forest School.

2.2.2 National Qualifications and Awards

At present, for those training to be Forest School leaders or assistants, the Forest School qualification is accredited by the Open College Network, which is administered by a range of OCN centres in England. A Forest School BTEC Award (L1 and L3) is also offered by some training providers.
The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is the national accreditation and awarding body in Scotland. The SQA ensures that learners receive recognised awards for their achievements. National Qualifications include Standard Grades, national units, national courses and Scottish Group Awards.\textsuperscript{26} In this accreditation role, the SQA authorises all vocational qualifications that are available in Scotland and approves organisations that wish to deliver them.\textsuperscript{27}

The fundamental aim of the Scottish qualifications system is to provide a 'learning ladder' that provides opportunities for everyone to achieve their full and true potential. There are qualifications at all levels of attainment and settings, for students at school, further education colleges and in the workplace. The SQA provide a useful toolkit.\textsuperscript{28} The SQA Personal Development Units provide National certificated recognition for personal development initiatives and this could be applicable to for those training to become Forest School practitioners.

Forest School programmes can also help to develop vocational skills. Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) Units are based on national 'standards of competence' - properly called 'National Occupational Standards'. These are drawn up by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). SSCs are independent, employer-led, UK-wide organisations which are designed to build a skills system driven by employer demand. There is a Scotland Sector skills council.\textsuperscript{29}

Each SVQ Unit defines one aspect of a job or a work-role, and says what it is to be competent in that aspect of the job. To achieve a Unit, candidates have to produce evidence to show they are competent. SVQ Units can be built into SVQs. They are sometimes used in wider schemes, such as Modern Apprenticeships. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) credit points and level of an SVQ Unit will depend on the needs of the industry. The Timber industry is a natural link for young people who have developed practical skills in a Forest School programme.

It is likely that HMI/ Education Scotland would respond positively to relevant qualifications. As Scotland is devolved in terms of forestry and education it is in a position where it could work with GTCS/CLD Standards Council Scotland/Scottish Social Services Council/ Scottish Government to set up a framework and qualification for Forest School – that is fit for purpose for the people and context of Scotland.

Currently there is no formal 'certification' process or link within Scottish qualifications system, so this may lead participants to feel Forest School lacks a formally recognised 'value' within the system. Where links are made, this can be through existing award schemes and these are usefully summarised in 'Amazing Things – A guide to youth awards in Scotland'. Published by Youth Scotland, this is a guide to the various youth award schemes in Scotland.\textsuperscript{30} It is a useful tool for schools and other establishments, including those running Forest School programmes, in planning opportunities for young people’s achievement.

Some Forest School programmes have made connections with existing award programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme, John Muir Award and ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network).\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{26} http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishschoolsonline/glossary.asp
\textsuperscript{27} http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/5656.html
\textsuperscript{28} http://www.scqf.org.uk/Schools%20Toolkit/Schools%20Toolkit%20Introduction
\textsuperscript{29} http://www.alliancescotland.org
\textsuperscript{30} http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/Amazing_Things_2_tcm4-623121.pdf
\textsuperscript{31} http://www.asdan.org.uk/
FEI Forest School Scotland today and future direction
EDUCATION & LEARNING

Forest School practitioners find the John Muir Award (JMA) an excellent means of recognising client groups’ achievement and skills. For example, during the first year of Forest School at Gracemount High School, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme was a focus. Since then, this has been swapped in favour of every student gaining a John Muir Trust Award. This approach has proved more flexible and manageable.\textsuperscript{32}

The John Muir Award is focused on wild places - local/urban and further afield, and is the only youth award to focus on the natural environment. The JMA and Forest School guide cited earlier shows the links between the JMA challenge based scheme and Forest School. Participation in this scheme through a Forest School programme can be awarded by a nationally recognised JMA certificate.

Other possibilities exist. For example, Apex Scotland is an organisation that works with ex-offenders and young people and adults at risk to give them the necessary skills to help them find and stay in work, so is a potentially good partner for a Forest School skills programme.\textsuperscript{33}

It will be important to link with partners like Career Scotland (‘The Path is Green’) that provide career advice. The LANTRA website for example includes a case study about a woman who chose the Forest School practitioner route.\textsuperscript{34}

2.2.3 Scotland’s teachers

On 13 January 2011, Graham Donaldson published his report setting out the findings of his Review of Teacher Education in Scotland. The Review commenced in February 2010 with a 10 months consultation exercise. These meetings, as well as responses to the call for evidence, responses to surveys issued by the Review and the findings of the literature review, helped to form the thinking behind the 50 recommendations set out in the Report.

With the shift in emphasis in training teachers in Forest School practice in Scotland, it becomes important to understand how teachers can gain professional recognition and/ or registration through the Framework for Professional Recognition / Registration. This was established to help teachers develop their knowledge and skills and to ensure that they are able to gain the recognition they deserve. Currently, teachers in Scotland can gain professional recognition from GTCS in Outdoor Learning and Sustainable Development Education. It is necessary to be a registered teacher in Scotland to apply.\textsuperscript{35} At present there is not professional recognition by the GTCS of Forest School trained teachers. However, there are some teachers who have professional recognition for outdoor learning who used the context of Forest Schools as the basis for the evidence they submitted for their professional learning. This was only as a part of the whole picture of their work in curriculum development and learning and teaching.\textsuperscript{36}

In some cases, useful early links have been made with Forest School. Student placements have been common place throughout Edinburgh’s Forest School Partnership, particularly with students from the University of Edinburgh’s Outdoor Education Department, Moray House School of Education.

\textsuperscript{32} http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/sharingpractice/f/forestschoolsessions/process.asp?strReferringChannel=sharingpracticetext&strReferringPageID=tcm:4-651086-64
\textsuperscript{33} www.apexscotland.org.uk
\textsuperscript{34} http://www.lantra.co.uk/News-Media/Case-Studies/Trees-and-Timber/Women-and-Work-funds-Forest-School-teacher.aspx
\textsuperscript{35} http://www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-development/professional-recognition.aspx
\textsuperscript{36} Pers. Comm. Julie Wilson (National Development Officer Outdoor Learning, Education Scotland)
2.2.4 Outdoor Learning and the National Curriculum

Outdoor education has until recently been the domain of the adventure activity sector that has provided outdoor educational experiences – typically field trips, residential activities and expeditions. As outdoor learning is an ‘approach to learning’ within Curriculum for Excellence rather than a curricular area or cross cutting theme, there is now a shift in political and educational emphasis to the ‘outdoor learning that schools might provide closer to home’\textsuperscript{37} as an integral characteristic of everyday practice. This has been reflected in changing practice with a move away from outdoor learning as a set of activities or a context for learning towards the employment of core methodologies for learning and teaching in the outdoors in all areas of the curriculum.\textsuperscript{38}

This gathering momentum for outdoor learning in Scotland is reflected in the policy document \textit{Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning}. Benefits of good practice are supported by research findings.

The Forest School approach is supported by CfE through Outdoor Learning which states ‘The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences.’

Within CfE there are eight curriculum areas, each with their own principles and practice: Expressive arts, Health and wellbeing, Languages, Mathematics, Religious and moral education, Sciences, Social studies, and Technologies.

In addition there are cross cutting subjects that are the responsibility for all practitioners…:

- Health and wellbeing across learning
- Literacy across learning
- Numeracy across learning

…and themes across learning:

- Global citizenship
- Enterprise in education
- Financial education

Global citizenship is most likely to share outcomes with Forest School, although Enterprise may be particularly pertinent in terms of skills for life and links to the timber industry that Forest School practice can equip young people with.

Sustainable Development Education (SDE), under Developing Global Citizens (DGC), is a key context for learning within Curriculum for Excellence. Sustainability issues feature prominently in the experiences and outcomes and offer learners an opportunity to engage with complex ethical issues relating to climate change, social justice, interdependence, health and wellbeing and biodiversity. Education Scotland notes that SDE is an ideal vehicle

\textsuperscript{37} Beames, S., Higgens, P., and Nicol, R. (2012) \textit{Learning Outside the Classroom Theory and Guidelines for Practice}

\textsuperscript{38} Pers. comm. Julie Wilson (Development Officer Outdoor Learning, Education Scotland)
for interdisciplinary learning and can be used to bring relevance, depth, challenge and breadth to learning. Forest School is mentioned as a popular programme within SDE.  

As yet no formal links have been developed between Forest School outcomes, and curriculum area experiences and outcomes nationally, although Forest School practitioners, particularly teachers, are likely to have made these links individually. However, there are a couple of key documents (both published 25 October 2011) that can facilitate this process for all outdoor practitioners:

- **Outdoor Learning: Practical guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland** This document provides new materials and resources to support the embedding of Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning.

- **Building your Curriculum: Outside and In** This document supports a strategic approach to the development of Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning.

There is an increasing emphasis in the outdoor learning community on Place Based Learning, exemplified by Sam Harrison of Open Ground and this has been reinforced by Education Scotland at regional seminars on outdoor learning held from early 2012.

At present the approach across the country is inconsistent, as each local authority has different processes for signing off outdoor programmes. Some of these processes are centralized, and others are not. For schools, health and safety concerns, ‘risk-averse’ practice, restrictive timetabling, and practical issues such as transport, access, toilets, staff cover costs all present constraints to the adoption of outdoor learning.

The need for a ‘road map’, to show the place of Forest School in the wider outdoor learning context, was highlighted in the FEI Forest School Seminar Scotland held in September 2010. As Section 2.2.1 notes, this is now available as a resource on the FEI website.

### Recommendations: Education and Learning

- Key national partners are engaged with Forest School

- Clear demonstrable links are made between with CfE Experiences and Outcomes (E’s & O’s) across sectors

- Exemplification of interdisciplinary working captured and communicated from a range of Forest School projects

- Skills & capacities formal & informal recognised through National qualifications & Awards and through Inspection

- Woods for Learning Forest School aims & objectives are met

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40 [http://www.openground.eu/](http://www.openground.eu/)

2.3 FOREST EDUCATION INITIATIVE (FEI)

2.3.1 FEI Scotland

The Forest Education Initiative (FEI) is the natural ‘home’ for Forest School in Scotland. FEI aims to increase the understanding and appreciation, particularly among young people, of the environmental, social, and economic potential of trees, woodlands and forests and of the link between the tree and everyday wood products. It is a partnership body with representatives from forestry and timber industry, and conservation/education sectors. FEI partners and partner bodies include British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), Field Studies Council, Forestry Commission, Groundwork, Timber Trade Federation, or Forests Forever, The Tree Council, The Community Forests, and The Confederation of Forest Industries (UK) Ltd.

FEI produces a range of learning resources, and encourages the public, especially young people, to use trees, timber and the forest environment for learning and gaining skills within their natural environment. The practical work of FEI is achieved through local cluster groups, who initiate and deliver various local projects, including Forest School.

Until recently, FEI operated across Scotland, England and Wales. There have however, been significant changes in early 2012 which has affected the national groups. FEI England ceased to exist from April 2012 due to loss of funding. Forestry Commission Wales has merged with the Welsh Environment Agency and Countryside Commission Wales to form Natural Resources Wales. FEI Scotland continues to operate strongly with the support of Forestry Commission Scotland.

2.3.2 FEI and the Forest School Network in Scotland

Scotland, as a small country, and with certain sectors such as education and forestry devolved to the Scottish Government, benefits from having relatively easily connected networks. The well networked outdoor learning sector in Scotland is a particular strength. The Forest School community can be found within the wider outdoor and woodland learning networks, and the 2010 research review by Rebecca Lovell, Liz O'Brien, and Roz Owen commissioned by FCS, usefully identifies examples of tree, wood and forest education and learning providers in Appendix 4 of their report. The Forest School Scotland network includes Forest School training providers, those in training, accredited practitioners, the Forest Kindergarten network, FEI cluster groups, and key FEI and Forestry Commission contacts.

To date in Scotland, some particularly active FEI cluster groups have supported the development of FS programmes e.g. Edinburgh & East Lothian. Local development officer posts have been instrumental in developing and supporting Forest School and wider Forest Education activity in their areas.

Currently there are 20 FEI local cluster groups in Scotland. FEI cluster groups play a key role in the development and delivery of Forest School programmes. However, there is not

42 http://www.foresteducation.org/
full coverage across the country – some groups are weak or non-existent and not all have Forest School activity. The current economic recession has put a strong squeeze on services that have previously supported FS practice at Local Authority level or Forestry Commission regions. These include countryside ranger services and Forest Education Development officer posts coming to the end of their term such as those in Edinburgh and the Lothians, and NE Scotland. More recently, a new Development Officer post for North East Scotland FEI has been established, once again supporting local Forest School activity.

FCS Central Scotland Conservancy has an Education Officer in post, originally as Forest Kindergarten Officer for this area. She continues to support this sector and Forest Schools. The promotion and development of Forest Schools across the Central Scotland Conservancy is a major project which includes the Glasgow Forest School Programme. This is a partnership project with Glasgow City Council to deliver Forest Schools within its schools.43

Edinburgh’s Forest School Partnership project (July 2006 – July 2011) provides a good model of integrated practice and successful take-up of Forest School, with spread by ‘ripple effect’ to neighbouring local authority areas. East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian found independent funding and mechanisms to support further Forest School Leader Training courses resulting in an even greater amount of accredited Forest School practitioners throughout the surrounding Lothian’s area. However, the close of this Partnership project in July 2011 creates an obvious support need for those individuals and establishments who wish to provide more woodland learning opportunities.

Moreover, the lack of a centralised database can lead to poor communications particularly outwith local (cluster) groups, as not all practitioners are members of a FEI cluster group, or have a local FEI cluster group nearby. A diversity of approach in very different settings and geography can also lead to a dilution of Forest School practice and ethos with other woodland learning/ environmental education approaches.

The FEI Forest School Coordinator Scotland reviewed the Forest School network at the start of her post in 2010 and found a plethora of groups associated with Forest School across the country. It was recognised that the network needed rationalising to streamline communications. At the same time, proposals, described above, for a National Governing Body for Forest School were being explored, prior to formation of the UK Forest School Association.

**Recommendations: FOREST EDUCATION INITIATIVE**

- Partner bodies & Cluster groups have understanding of FS in wider context
- Active cluster groups in all areas to support FS and similar
- Cluster groups supported in delivering Forest School (training & practice) where appropriate to local needs

43 Forestry Commission Scotland Central Scotland Engagement Strategy 2010 - 2013
2.4 FOREST SCHOOL TRAINING

To be a Forest School Assistant or Leader practitioner it is important to hold the relevant Forest School award certificate. This is achieved through undertaking the necessary training, accreditation by a Recognised Centre (the Forest School training provider), and obtaining the formal qualification from the appropriate Awarding Body.

2.4.1 Training Providers in Scotland

At the time of writing the following organisations offered OCN (and one BTEC) accredited training opportunities in Scotland: Archimedes Training, Bridgewater College (the BTEC Forest School course), Forest School Training Company, and Mindstretchers Ltd. Forest School Training Company and Archimedes also have licensed trainers based in Scotland who operate independently. A North East Outdoor Learning Group has also recently acquired OCN recognition to deliver Forest School and other training.

2.4.2 Network for Forest School Trainers

The Forest School Trainers Network (FSTN GB) is represented on the FEI website. An early survey by the FEI FS Coordinator for Scotland showed that a minority of the Scottish network are members of the GB network. The results also indicated that the majority of trainers/practitioners polled wanted a network for Scotland but also wished to maintain links with the GB group (see first section) which has value for those operating GB wide.

A decision was made at an initial Scottish Trainers network meeting held in August 2011 to establish a Scottish FS trainers’ network which would operate as a subgroup of FEI FS Scotland Working Group. Members would comprise Forest School training companies delivering in Scotland and local/national Forest School Scotland co-ordinators. The function of the group is to address standardisation, marking, guidance, and sustaining practice post training within the Scottish context, and include sharing good practice, the involvement of external partners and engagement with FEI local groups. Minutes of these meetings are posted on the Scotland news pages of the FEI website and shared among the network by the FEI FS Co-ordinator Scotland.

Recommendations: FOREST SCHOOL TRAINING

- There is clarity and coherence in training models to fit the Scottish context
- Completed programmes are evaluated
- There is targeted funding in place for further training
- The Forest School Scotland Training Network is well established & supporting training standards
- Data collection and sharing established as good practice
2.5 FOREST SCHOOL PRACTICE

Forest School works with a range of people in the outdoors over a period of time, introducing responsible risk-taking and setting participants up to achieve. Children and adults are supported in their learning and encouraged to explore the outdoor environment and appreciate nature. Forest School leaders use learning and teaching strategies, which develop confidence, emotional resilience, independence, language and communication skills and increase levels of physical activity and mental wellbeing.

The key features are:

- The use of a woodland or natural area
- Regular and frequent time outdoors
- Learning can be linked to the curriculum
- The freedom to explore sense of self and place using multiple senses
- A high adult to pupil ratio

Some of these key features are not unique to Forest School but when brought together they provide an inspirational experience for the child, or adult, that they would not get elsewhere.

On-going research and evaluation from a variety of sources are showing positive benefits including improving behaviour and motivation to learn; increasing physical activity and improving mental health and well-being.

Extract from FEI Forest School Scotland leaflet

Generally, Forest School is defined by the need to have a trained and accredited Level 3 Forest School leader to deliver a Forest School programme. In particular it is defined by its ethos and pedagogical approach. Forest School can support formal, non-formal and informal (play based) learning.

Forest School sessions can be held in all weathers, except for high winds and storms. Visits should ideally continue throughout the year, allowing children to experience all weathers and the changing seasons.

There are issues surrounding the lack of a clear identity for Forest School (or logo) and debate about the definition of Forest School and its distinction from other outdoor practice or activity programmes. Some groups, with members experienced in delivering outdoor activities (for example the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association), or teachers trained in child development, may resent the need to ‘brand’ Forest School as something distinctive and different, with its requirement for specialist training. Implicit in this is a suggestion for these professionals that it undermines or devalues existing knowledge and skills. Terminology varies. There can be lack of clarity about what is being practiced, and the lines of distinction between Forest School/Kindergarten and other woodland or outdoor learning programmes/ outdoor can be blurry.

A consultation seminar on Forest School Training in Scotland held on 21st September 2010 in Edinburgh identified the need for clarity and general agreement on the ethos and definition of Forest School in Scotland, in order to support the promotion of Forest School and the evaluation of Forest School training and practice. The ethos and definition were

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finalised by the FEI Forest School Working Group Scotland following circulation to the wider Forest School community in Scotland for comment in March 2011. This statement is now available on the FEI website.45

2.5.1 Maintaining quality Forest School practice

The Forest School Quality Improvement Framework described earlier in the UK section of this report had been developed to address the need for safety and standards in FS practice and minimise accidents. The Forest School Quality Improvement Framework (FS QuIF) was developed to address the need for safety and standards in FS practice and minimise accidents. Part of this will include methodology to review and evaluate Forest School sessions. Supporting documents aim to support practitioners develop skills in collecting evidence, interviewing and observational skills.

Lovell et al (2010) note that schemes like this can help to reassure schools and users by providing accreditation about the quality of education experiences offered and quality of provision of health and safety.

However, to date the Forest School Quality Improvement Framework has not been largely used or adopted by the Forest School sector. There remains a need for benchmarks.

Something to consider would be National Occupational Standards (NOS), which describe competent performance in terms of outcomes. They allow a clear assessment of competence against nationally agreed standards of performance, across a range of workplace circumstances for all roles. 46 OCN, for example, could be the standard linking to NOS/sector skills.

It would be worth reflecting on the National Assessment Resource (NAR) which provides support for a single coherent assessment system through which understanding and professional practice in assessment and standards and expectations will be developed and shared.47

2.5.2 Forest School Practitioners

An increasing number of people are becoming accredited trained Forest School practitioners. They include teachers, countryside rangers, private individuals/ freelancers, and independent training organisations. The self-employed freelance workers may be reliant on this practice for their income or main business or would like to be. The more recent audience are trained teachers already in employment, reflecting a shift in emphasis from external or independently supported practice to Forest School programmes being initiated and run by school teachers themselves. A number of schools are actively participating in Forest School programmes across the country. However, it appears that Early Years/ Nursery settings and Primary are the most likely sectors most engaged, with Secondary schools less so and information on SEN setting involvement is patchy.

46 http://www.skillsforjustice.com/template01.asp?pageid=37
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Typically, those involved appear to be self-motivated people with strong ethic for a child centred approach and a love of nature and ‘the outdoors’. This group is rich in creative thinking and approaches, but independent practitioners may sometimes resent attempts at regulation and control.

There is no robust data on practitioner numbers or geographical spread, and in terms of demand there may be over capacity in some areas and under capacity in others. Most practitioners rely on their FEI cluster groups for local support. Many lack funding or the opportunity to practice Forest School and poor communications may have been a barrier.

Forest School activities funded by the FEI Partnership Fund are recorded as Project Reports and made available on the FEI website. Otherwise, there is currently no agreed system of logging or monitoring independent practice across the country, and a lack of robust data or statistics, including information on those trained in Forest School, and qualified practitioners.

Previously, the lack of a ‘road map’ to show Forest School in the wider outdoor learning context, meant some practitioners taking a non ‘joined-up’ approach, and missing opportunities to link with other initiatives. This mapping resource is now available on the FEI website. This includes opportunities to promote resources that provide information on timber careers and skills.\(^{48}\)

There are certain geographical areas where schools and communities face greater barriers than many to offering regular outdoor woodland learning opportunities therefore need greater support, for example areas such Craigmillar, Liberton and Gilmerton in Edinburgh.\(^{49}\) In Central Scotland, a number of Scottish lowlands Forest District rangers have been trained to deliver Forest Schools across the district with the support of the Forestry Commission Central Scotland Conservancy.\(^{50}\)

This diversification of approach with patchy support services is likely to be repeated in different areas across Scotland. Forest School programmes are intermittent. Funding is erratic, participating schools may change their focus, or senior management support may be lost, leading to a lack of continuity in practice.

Within this context, there is a need for Forest School practitioners to access a CPD programme to maintain and update their knowledge, skills and practice. Currently, there is no existing programme of CPD for Forest School leaders, although some trainers have set up support groups or skills refresher sessions, and FEI cluster groups sometimes offer skills sharing days.

Differences in prior learning between sectors (teachers versus countryside rangers for example) means there is no one size fits all approach to CPD.

**2.5.3 Who takes part in Forest School programmes?**

There are a variety of user groups for Forest School including children from 3-18, those with additional support for learning needs, adults and families.\(^{51}\)

\(^{48}\) http://www.thedoorway.org.uk/
\(^{49}\) Pers. Comm. Jenny Watters
\(^{50}\) FCS Central Scotland Engagement Strategy 2010-2013
\(^{51}\) FEI Flyer Forest School in Scotland
There is no data available on the number and type of participants in Forest School programmes, although the majority of programmes involve early years/primary aged children.

Secondary students are much less likely to be involved unless they have particular support for learning needs, but there is huge potential in the secondary sector. Education Scotland, for example, present a case study about how taking part in Forest School course has influenced the career choice of some pupils at Gracemount High school. Pupils' behaviour and attendance improved and so did their school work, some discovered new skills and interests, and found new work experience and apprenticeship links. However, career choices arising from Forest School are not generally recorded or followed up.

Timetabling can be an issue particularly at secondary level. This has been addressed in some settings. For example a case study of Gracemount High School describes how a 14-week Forest School option would work well in S2 and give more pupils a Forest School experience. This would allow for a progression of experiences and activities for the children who chose to continue Forest School in S4.

Schools can find the high adult-to-child ratios demanded by Forest School practice a challenge, particularly given recent cuts to Learning Assistant hours which reduces ratio's and puts an even greater reliance on finding volunteers/parent helpers.

Family programmes have the benefit of circumventing the high adult-to-child ratios that can be a problem for schools. For example the successful Gatehouse of Fleet family Forest School programmes in Dumfries and Galloway.

2.5.4 Forest School Data collection

Concern about the lack of data or follow-up from training programmes led Forestry Commission Scotland/FEI to commission a contractor to produce a set of baseline data about Forest School Scotland for 2011. Difficulties arose in obtaining data from some training providers and other bodies, largely due to data protection issues. Data was collected on people who completed L1-3 FS training across Scotland with three different training companies (mainly before April 2011) as well as re-organising a dataset from Forestry Commission Scotland on the Forest School training 2003-2009. There is overlap in these 2 datasets so numbers are indicative not definitive.

The total number of people taking part in FS training although not necessarily completing their course or practising FS was approximately 366 in April 2011. The majority were L3 trained, followed by L1 and to a much lesser extent L2, plus 1 L4 person. (This number assumes that the 291 people recorded as being trained in the FCS dataset are duplicated by


the training company figures, in particular Forest School Training Company who delivered the first 5 training courses in Scotland on behalf of Forestry Commission Scotland).

These figures have since been boosted by a Scottish Government (SG) funded Forest School training programme in 2010/11.

The Forest School Scotland Training Programme 2010 – 2011 funded by Forestry Commission Scotland and SG Learning Directorate aimed to train 180 additional Forest School practitioners. The results showed that 174 people (mainly teachers) took part in this Forest School training programme. Of these, 85 were trained at Level 1, 57 at level 2, and 57 at Level 3.

These data collection attempts have highlighted the need for better communications with and between the training companies and external bodies interested in Forest School. In particular for all to recognise the need for robust Forest School data, to share standardised data collection and recording systems, and agree to share data across the network (in accordance with data protection guidelines) to allow further support and strategic direction for Forest School in Scotland.

### 2.5.5 Forest School Procedures including Risk Assessment and Liability

Risk assessment Forest School training covers the importance of identifying on site hazards as a Forest School Leader for specific Forest School locations. As part of the training, trainees are also assessed on site with their client group and all their paperwork is checked. They are expected to produce a Forest School Handbook which covers all operational procedures, policies & procedures (e.g. child protection, data protection, emergency procedures).

The leader: client ratio will depend upon the Forest School activity and needs of the client group.

It is the responsibility of the Forest School Leader/ class teacher to ensure that all the Health & Safety / Planning, policies & procedures and roles and responsibilities have been communicated with all staff / volunteers and understood well in advance of the programme. If school insurance doesn’t covers parent volunteers, those intending to lead FS on a regular basis, may consider taking out Public Liability Insurance if not covered by the school insurance. Some insurers have policies specific for Forest School and these cover volunteers.

If the school Parent Council is a member of the Scottish Parent Teacher Council (SPTC) this gives access to insurance that covers volunteers, if the event is advertised by the Parent Council. Practitioners need to check with the SPTC insurance if this covers Forest School activity in this case. Local Authorities may have insurance in place for all educational visits which covers adult volunteers also (Midlothian Council for example).

Forest School training covers all aspects of Health & Safety and participants should be told to ensure that they know which forms they should be using (e.g. if the school has a generic form).

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55 Chalmers Smith, pers.comm.
Class teachers should be covered by school insurance as long as they are qualified and experienced to undertake the activities plus appropriate RA undertaken and doing so under their remit as Council employees.

Until recently there had been a perceived over-emphasis on risk versus benefits with different interpretation of procedures at local authority level, and a lack of clarity over council insurance policies. This inconsistency nationwide did lead to duplication of effort and reinventing of wheels in communications.

More crucially, the combination of anxiety about real and perceived hazards outdoors and risk assessment bureaucracy can prevent people taking groups outdoors. As Marian Cairns (Early Years Development Officer, North Lanarkshire Council), pointed out, there is a need to acknowledge that ‘perception of risk is based on people’s own experiences…take people with you’. 56

However, refreshed HASEE guidance ‘Going Out There’ is now available on the SAPOE website. 57 This is refreshed employer guidance for all off-site visits, with guidance for visit leaders and establishment leaders. There is renewed emphasis in the guidance on lessening bureaucracy and on considering the benefits alongside risks. SAPOE are presently working with Education Scotland and Scottish Government to deliver a coherent strategic programme of CPD and advice alongside the launch of the guidance. This is primarily to encourage consistency of adoption across all 32 local authorities in Scotland to lessen the likelihood that individual LAs will add their own layers of interpretation. 58

The involvement of children and young people in the process of assessing and managing risk is also an important aspect of development in Health and Wellbeing. The Health and Safety Executive publish case studies for different areas of the curriculum and for different sectors, and this provides an opportunity to share Forest School practice. 59

In early 2012, the Scottish Government consulted on options for the replacement of Adventure Activities Licensing in Scotland. Currently Forest School activities do not fall under licensing requirements for adventure activities, but proposed changes to the licensing system may have an effect on which activities and organisations are covered, either through a new regulatory or voluntary scheme. While Forest School activities are not classed as ‘adventure activities’, practitioners do help participants where appropriate to explore challenges such as climbing trees, using tools and other practices which require skill and care, where ‘safe as necessary’ is the ethos. The concern remains with practitioners who are ‘rusty’ and have had little or no practice since training. They may need refreshing particularly on safe practice and procedures. To have confidence in Forest School, parents, schools and local authorities need assurance that Forest School leaders are competent, safe and professional in their practice.

2.5.6 Forest Kindergarten

Forest Kindergarten was a term developed in Scandinavia for using a Forest School approach in the Early Years. They have been established there for over 25 years. They offer young children frequent, regular play opportunities in woodland or other natural setting,

56 Marian Cairns, Forest Kindergarten conference February 2011
57 www.SAPOE.org.uk
58 Pers.comm. Julie Wilson (National Development Officer Outdoor Learning, Education Scotland)
59 http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/case-studies.htm
throughout the year, in almost all weathers. Learning though play is child-centred and enhanced with the freedom to explore using multiple senses. There are clear curriculum links and a high ratio of adults to children. ‘Nature kindergartens’ is a term developed for those settings that promote outdoor play in natural settings but have no access to woodland.

Forest Kindergarten has been adopted by settings in the UK, including Fife Council’s Early Years services in Scotland. In 2006, a 3-day introductory Forest Kindergarten training programme was run in Fife by Chris Miles (now the Chair of the FEI/ Forest School Working Group) in 2006, with 80 settings taking part within 2 years.

This CPD training for teachers to encourage the development of regular outdoor child led experiences in Fife, has been further developed through a Forest Kindergarten programme in the Glasgow and Clyde Valley area supported by the (then) Forestry Commission Scotland Forest Kindergarten (now Education) Officer. Information on this programme can be found on the FCS Central Conservancy website pages. 60

The benefits of these Early Years programmes are seen as supporting child-centred learning through play, set in a ‘real world’ context. Such schemes promote the freedom to explore, using multiple senses. It is good for health and well-being, and helps the development of self-esteem, confidence and perseverance, the acquisition of knowledge, problem solving skills and self-risk assessment skills. Young children also supported in developing an appreciation, understanding and care for natural heritage whilst overcoming the apprehension of being wet and dirty.

Barriers to settings engaging with Forest Kindergarten programmes were identified in phase 1 of the Forest Kindergarten Feasibility Study. Health and safety issues, lack of suitable clothing for children, weather, and lack of parental support in accompanying outdoor sessions were barriers for the settings and nursery staff. Lack of time and transport, and the cost of transport created barriers to accessing outdoor sites. The report suggests that a number of these barriers could be overcome with support and training.

The lines of distinction between Forest School/Kindergarten can be blurry, and terminology varies between practitioners and settings. Some may refer to Nature kindergartens/nursery for very similar practice. Others would argue that there is little real distinction in ethos between Forest Kindergarten and Forest School.

2.5.7 Complementary programmes

A number of outdoor learning programmes may be compatible or complementary to the Forest School approach. These include Branching Out, an FCS (Central Conservancy) outdoor programme to support mental health, Philosophy for Children (P4P) 61 and other woodland learning programmes.

Mindstretchers offer “Nurture through Nature” and a “Nature Kindergartens” OCN Level 3 course which are specifically aimed at the pre-school sector. Their OCN Forest School courses are also taught by qualified and experienced Early Years practitioners. There is also the Camphill Nature Nurture project which supports young children and families in areas of

60 www.forestry.gov.uk/forestkindergarten
61 www.sapere.org.uk
deprivation in the north-east. Archimedes, a training company for Forest School, now also offers an accredited ‘Beach School’ qualification.

These and other woodland learning programmes are illustrated in the FEI woodland learning resource.

2.5.8 Forest School research

Typically, research on Forest School practice to date has taken a qualitative approach with anecdotal reporting. For example, Worcestershire county council undertook research into the benefits of a Forest School Experience for Children in their Early Years and reported positive effects on children's personal, social and emotional development, and on their language and communication skills. This found benefits for boys as well as girls, and for children of all abilities, including those with a range of learning and emotional difficulties. More recently, Sara Knight's book, *Forest School for All* (2012), provides an up-to-date overview of research.

An evaluation of Forest School in Scotland was commissioned by Forestry Commission Scotland and Forest Education Initiative Scotland, with a report published in March 2006. The Forestry Commission for Scotland has published a number of research reports, the most relevant to Forest School listed under the publications category ‘people, trees and woodlands’. Given the Forestry Commission's strategic direction, much of this research around woodland learning has a particular interest in physical and mental health. For example, research on Forest School in 2009 by Jenny Roe, Peter Aspinall and Catharine Ward Thompson found that the forest setting was advantageous to the mood of the all the sample group of young people, segregated into three behaviour type groups, but the restorative experience was most intense in the ‘mental disorder’ group. A key finding was the ability of forest settings to stabilise anger across all three groups.

In 2010, FCS published a desk based review by Rebecca Lovell, Liz O’Brien, and Roz Owen on the research evidence in relation to the role of trees and woods in formal education and learning. The focus of this research review was primarily on more formal provision of outdoor education and learning, less so on woodland learning/Forest School outcomes. Much of this research explores personal, social and emotional development rather than specific educational outcomes. The authors cite research that suggests that woodland learning programmes such as Forest School can have a range of positive impacts on


64 Forest School Scotland evaluation report http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ForestSchoolfinalreport.pdf

65 http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/ByUnique/INFD-5WBLHH


67 http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Education_and_learning_research_review_2010.pdf
participants: including increases in confidence and self-esteem, improving social skills, communication and language, motivation and concentration and improving physical skills. Referring to O’Brien and Murray (2007)\textsuperscript{68}, Lovell \textit{et al} note that key element to the positive impacts derived from Forest School is the regular attendance over a period of time allowing children and young people to become familiar and comfortable with the woodland environment.

Lovell \textit{et al} find that outdoor learning can also provide greater opportunities for physical activity and be of benefit in terms of broad health and wellbeing. This report identifies gaps in knowledge and potential opportunities for future research.

While it has been the larger institutions that have led research in this area, the FEI Forest School Scotland Co-ordinator also receives a number of enquiries from individuals keen to research specific aspects of Forest School.

To date then, there is some positive evidence albeit largely qualitative about the benefits of Forest School experiences. Limiting factors have included methodology and sample sizes. The lack of long term studies, and empirical data, particularly with specialist groups, provides a paucity of evidence of benefits.

There is some disentangling to do to separate the benefits of the Forest School approach \textit{per se}, versus the benefits of regular and frequent outdoor learning/ experiences in general.

\subsection*{2.5.9 Wider Research}

The review cited earlier, carried out by Lovell \textit{et al} (2010), identified research that indicated that education and learning in the outdoors, and in particular that which takes place in more green environments, is highly beneficial.

A number of Scottish based organisations provide information on research and the outdoors. Many outdoor learning research links are usefully summarised and accessed via the Creative STAR Learning Company website.\textsuperscript{69} This includes a link to a BBC research report that suggests that the time children spend outdoors could be linked to a reduced risk of being short-sighted.

Education Scotland provides an e-bulletin summary ‘research round-ups’, some of which have relevance for the Forest School community in Scotland.

The Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing website provides useful summary of research with particular reference to the influence of the outdoors on physical health and mental wellbeing.\textsuperscript{70}

There is a wider social context in Scotland that may influence access to Forest School. A report which presented the findings of research that explored the links between inequality, materialism and wellbeing in children in the UK, Spain and Sweden, found common ground

\textsuperscript{69} http://www.creativestarlearning.co.uk/support/outdoor-learning-research.aspx
\textsuperscript{70} http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/flourishing-lives.php?p=6GkPTE3MyZpZD02NjQ=
in that children’s well-being centres on time with a happy, stable family, having good friends and plenty of things to do, especially outdoors. However, it found that in the UK, in contrast to Spain and Sweden, parents struggled to find time to spend with their children, to help them participate in outdoor, sporting or creative activities, or to establish and enforce household rules. The main reason for this was long working hours. There was less participation in outdoor and creative activities particularly amongst older and more deprived children in the UK.71

Access to greenspace is important too for Forest School programmes, particularly those in urban or urban fringe areas. This had been flagged up in the Forest Kindergarten Feasibility study cited earlier. However, Greenspace Scotland, in 2011, revealed a steep drop in the number of people using their local green spaces over the last two years. This is because they are seen as more stressful, less attractive and more dangerous places now than they were in 2009.72

Social research methods may help Forest School practitioners evaluate their sites. The Social Research on Investment (SROI) tool developed by Greenspace Scotland can highlight the social, economic and environmental benefits of using outdoor sites using an outcomes based system of evaluation.73

Also pertinent is research related to formal learning.

Teaching in Nature, a research report commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage carried out by Greg Mannion et al (2011) found that participating teachers developed their expertise through working collaboratively on planning and executing excursions to natural environments. Although these findings were related to NNRs, it indicates that taking this collaborative approach for visiting any outdoor setting can help with implementing Curriculum for Excellence, including single curriculum areas and cross-curricular themes.74

Forest School practice at secondary level can develop real and practical skills in students. A study on vocational education in lower secondary schools in North Lanarkshire carried out by University of Stirling (2011), found that vocational subjects, when offered within a mixed curriculum, can motivate and engage pupils in work-related learning activities. Work-related learning was often perceived by young people as meaningful, when set within an educational context and taught by teachers with relevant occupational experience of the subject area. A number of generic qualities were being developed through the vocational subjects, such as teamwork, communication, self-confidence, and literacy and numeracy. One of the major unexpected outcomes of the study was the degree to which this provision can lead to under-achieving pupils being retained within the upper secondary school, lessening the likelihood of non-positive outcomes for these individuals.75

Recommendations: FOREST SCHOOL PRACTICE

- FS ethos & practice set within outdoor learning models to ensure best practice to meet local needs
- Access to CPD/ training/ events to maintain standards and develop skills, including for teachers
- All practitioners are on a national database & mapped
- Procedures for evaluating practice are in place
- More practitioners trained & embedded in schools, across all sectors with community outreach
2.6 FOREST SCHOOL SCOTLAND RESOURCES

2.6.1 FEI National Co-ordinators

An FEI Forest School Scotland co-ordinator was appointed with funding from the Forest for People Challenge Fund, with match funding from Education Directorate, and took up post in October 2010. This part-time post is hosted by FEI partner organisation Living Classrooms, and managed by a small steering group with a day to day Living Classrooms line manager. The post aims to gather data and information to enable better support for Forest School leaders and providers, and provide strategic direction for Forest School in Scotland. The project plan for this post is linked to this Forest School Strategy for Scotland.

Much of this work relies on local knowledge from FEI cluster groups and the Forest School network, and requires robust data on Forest School in Scotland. This post was initially funded for two-and-a half years and due to end December 2012, although further funding through the Forest Development Programme has guaranteed this post extension to the end of 2014.

Under this post, an evaluation framework for Forest School has been developed (February 2013). This provides a summary of the current position of Forest School in Scotland and a proposed future model. It is organised into three key areas: strategic issues, philosophy, and practice and delivery, and includes a Forest School Scotland communications network.  

There is also an FEI co-ordinator for Scotland, responsible for supporting the FEI cluster group network and managing grants to this national network. This FEI coordinator and Forest School coordinator work closely to provide joined up support for FEI and Forest School in Scotland.

2.6.2 Forest School Sites

Currently there is no national mapping of Forest School sites.

The minimum required is an outdoor site with natural features including some trees and shelter, whether this is in an urban context or the wider countryside. However, the ideal setting for learning in the woods would have the following:

- Be a well-managed broadleaved/mixed woodland, with a diversity of smaller trees, shrubs and open areas.
- Have good mobile ‘phone reception in case of emergencies.
- Ideally, be accessible on foot.
- Have a clear access point at the entrance for emergency vehicles and an external parking/drop off point for educational transport if required.

RESOURCES

- Have easy access within it plus opportunities to explore off the main paths.
- Have minimal public access, and no accessible open deep water nearby

Qualified practitioners are best able to judge suitability for their needs. Landowner or manager consent for use is also required. A useful resource is the Guidance for Landowners posted on the Scotland downloads page of the FEI website.

Local Forestry Commission Scotland Conservancy offices can help to identify the woodland owner if unknown.

Some school settings may struggle to find suitable sites. Identification of suitable sites was a key part of the Central Scotland Forest Kindergarten Feasibility Study.

Other online resources may be of use to Forest School practitioners, either for finding or sharing information on their sites.

Visit Woods is a new interactive website developed by the Woodland Trust showcasing local woods. The site includes searchable maps, inspiring ideas, free activities and space to upload photos and tips.

Education Scotland/ Learning Teaching Scotland’s online site search facility helps to identify suitable sites for taking learning outdoors.

At a strategic level, the Second State of Scotland’s Greenspace Report published on 6 February 2012 by greenspace Scotland provides information on the extent and type of urban greenspace in all 32 Scottish local authority areas. Natural spaces provide 22% of the urban greenspace types found. This report draws its findings from greenspace mapping that has been carried out with Scotland’s local authorities and collated in Scotland’s Greenspace Map. The amounts, types and distributions of greenspace vary widely across local authorities and the maps provided could be used give an indication of what spaces may be available for Forest School practice.

2.6.3 Funding for Forest School

FEI (Forest Education Initiative) manages the FEI Partnership Fund which specifically supports the work of FEI clusters, and indirectly, local Forest School activity. It can provide match funding for specific activities, which enhance the overall objectives of FEI. These are to help develop, among young people, a greater understanding of trees, woodlands, forest management, forest products and wood as a sustainable resource. Funding rounds with closing dates each year are signalled by the FEI Scotland Coordinator to the FEI.

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78 http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/HCOU-4U4J23
79 www.forestry.gov.uk/forestkindergarten
80 Visitwoods.org.uk
81 http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/learningteachingandassessment/approaches/outdoorlearning/placestolearnoutdoors/index.asp
82 http://gss.cmph.org/1l/E7CzLS-0lWF01d4wQhh4Cg
83 http://gss.cmph.org/1l/aBd48WcahIM3ME2i7WXw
As described earlier, Forest School enjoyed early support by FCS to fund the initial Forest School training courses, and more recently there has been input from Scottish Government’s Learning Directorate. The FEI Forest School Scotland coordinator post was initially funded by the Forest for People Challenge Fund, managed by the Forestry Commission and part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme. The Forest for People Fund closed at the end of 2012, but since then the Forest Development Programme has supported this post.

Funding for Forest School training and practice at local level can be a challenge, particularly for independent practitioners and those seeking to be trained. A model for funding was provided by Forest School in Wales, when a Welsh OCN was developed which then received funding from the Welsh Assembly. A similar approach with the Forest School qualification in Scotland might help to draw down funding from the Scottish Government.

Involvement with local FEI cluster groups can be a route to some funding opportunities for Forest School but in 2011/12 Forest School activity was not a priority, due to earlier investment. A time limited Forest Education grant was made available in November 2012 and successful applications included a number of Forest School projects. Funding opportunities for FEI Cluster Groups are shown on the FEI website.

Schools that wish to develop and support Forest School programmes in their own setting have to fund these somehow. There are cost implications if they have to source external practitioners to lead and support programmes, or if teaching staff embark on Forest School training. The latter may be more sustainable in the long run but demands staff time and supply cover costs. Schools however, can be resourceful. For example, Gracemount High School Forest School programme accessed funding from Scottish Natural Heritage to transport children via minibus to Bonaly Country Park in the Pentland Hills and for countryside ranger support for some sessions. School of Ambition funding, helped obtain boots, gardening gloves, tools, a kelly kettle and a big lockable cabinet in which to store the Forest School equipment.

2.6.4 Communications, Promotion and Marketing

Good communications and the promotion of Forest School depend on a coherent Forest School network, and effective means of sharing information and resources. Forest School enjoys a reasonably high profile and strong interest from a range of sectors – schools, parents, and some local authorities. There is however, some inconsistency with how Forest School is presented, lack of awareness in certain sectors and confusion with other types of woodland learning. Sources of information vary. Training companies and individuals promote their Forest School training courses, and there may be local promotion of Forest School programmes by FEI cluster group members and Forestry Commission Scotland conservancies, each with their individual approaches and agendas.

http://www.foresteducation.org/local_cluster_groups/the_fei_partnership_fund
http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7epeed#f4p
http://www.foresteducation.org/local_cluster_groups/other_funding_sources/.
http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/sharingpractice/f/forestschoolsessions/process.asp?strReferringChannel=sharingpractice&strReferringPageID=tcm:4-
FEI Forest School Scotland today and future direction

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Feedback from the Forest School consultation seminar in 2010 included a need for the Forest School ethos to be stated more clearly and agreed/owned by the FS community in Scotland. This was done so by a FEI Forest School Scotland Working Group and made available on the FEI website July 2011.88

Given that the outdoor play ethos is best developed in the Early Years sector, this may be the best place to start in terms of engaging parents and carers.

An FEI Forest School seasonal e-newsletter format has been developed for distribution among all those on the FEI Forest School Scotland database, and the FEI cluster group network. The first bulletin was distributed spring 2013, and is available on the FEI website.

2.6.5 FEI website

The FEI website was recently redeveloped and re-launched in early 2011. It provides the locus for Forest School communications and resources, both for Scotland and GB wide. The FEI FS Scotland Coordinator has administrator rights for updating and uploading any new or relevant FS information. The Forest School information was updated in early 2013 to make this section more relevant for Scotland, and updates should be on-going.

A FEI Forest School leaflet has been developed, available online to download and also as a paper leaflet. This has recently been updated as a Gaelic linked version.

There are existing resources already established such as the Guidance for Landowners which includes liability and H&S topics.89 These resources can be further developed and updated. The FEI Forest School Coordinator did circulate initial enquiries to the FEI cluster groups to identify resource needs and this requires following up.

2.6.6 FEI Facebook Group

Established on the FEI website by the FEI Coordinator Scotland, this Facebook group has proved an invaluable resource for sharing information and advice, including on Forest School issues and activity, and is very well used. A tabbed link is available on the header section of the FEI website.90

2.6.7 Outdoor learning

At national level, Education Scotland’s Development Officer for Outdoor Learning, has set up a new blog which is accessible to those who do not have Glow Login. This provides weekly updates on events and general information and should prove very useful in helping those in the Forest School community connect with wider outdoor learning developments.91

90 http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=101821253217957
91 https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/OutdoorLearningNetwork
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Other networks and blogs are also available and opportunities to share information about Forest School through these links should be explored.

Recommendations: RESOURCES

- FEI FS Coordinator post support with FEI Scotland Coordinator
- FEI Website, Facebook & learning resources developed
- Access for all to suitable sites outdoors to practice Forest School
- Research – quantitative/ qualitative data available from long term studies