

OUTDOOR & WOODLAND LEARNING SCOTLAND GUIDANCE FOR LANDOWNERS

WOODLANDS FOR LEARNING

As a woodland owner, you can open up your woods for learning. This guidance provides summary information on the use of woodland for outdoor and woodland learning.

Outdoor & Woodland Learning Scotland aims to increase opportunities for learning outdoors and helps to deliver and promote outdoor and woodland education through a network of local OWL groups.

OWL local group members run a variety of outdoor and woodland education projects. These include Green Woodworking, CPD for teachers, woodland activities and Forest Kindergarten/ Forest School (inspirational programmes that offer children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve, and develop confidence through hands on learning experiences in a woodland environment).

What makes a good woodland site for learning?

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 features:

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

An ideal site may not exist but you can work with the leader to find the best site.

What activities may take place?

Outdoor and woodland learning aims to provide real life 'hands-on' experiences as these provide the most effective form of learning. Activities have minimal impact on the environment, and good practice aims to 'leave-no-trace', or have positive environmental benefits. An OWL programme may involve the following:

- Simple investigation and exploration with minimal equipment, using natural materials as the learning resource.
- Playing games, using the woodland for inspiration for art and writing projects
- Using the woodland for numeracy – counting, sorting, measuring, estimating etc.
- Using simple tools to whittle and do craft work
- Simple rope work
- Developing areas with logs for informal seating, and fire sites to demonstrate fire safety, construction and campfire cooking.
- Temporary shelters may be made with tarpaulins or woodland brash.

Local OWL group leaders understand that any activity should only take place with the prior agreement of the landowner/ land manager. Most outdoor learning and play activities leave no trace. However, if you have any concerns about planned activities, do discuss this with the group leader(s). Activities can be planned that support your woodland management, or can be avoided or relocated where there is concern.

LEGAL ASPECTS

Liability and Insurance

The legal position on liability is largely based on the Occupiers' Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 and common law, where an 'occupier' of land has a duty of care towards people on that land. The landowner must ensure the property is kept in a condition that is not likely to cause injury or damage to people on that land, whether or not they have permission to be there. The landowner is not liable for willingly accepted risks taken by visitors pursuing activities on the land.

Woodland owners are advised to have public liability insurance cover. OWL local groups and Forest School leaders should have public liability insurance cover for their client group and planned activities. In addition, if a charge is made for use of your property, you will need commercial liability insurance. If there is no charge, you should ask to see a copy of the OWL local group's current public liability insurance cover certificate.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment involves checking what potentially might cause harm (hazards) and setting precautions to minimise any associated risk. As a landowner, you should notify any visiting groups of any known hazards on your land. This might include – any open water, old rubbish dumps, disused wells/mine shafts. A woodland site used for education activities must be assessed by the OWL local group or Forest School leaders in order to evaluate the hazards and risks they pose. Risk cannot be eliminated, and learning how to manage risk safely is part of the learning experience. However, good forest education practice must assess and manage risk to keep the level low. There is no additional requirement on the landowner to manage the risk associated with local OWL group activities since a risk assessment will be undertaken by the local OWL group or Forest School Leaders.

PRACTICAL ASPECTS

Safety

Teaching staff have ultimate responsibility for their pupils in any organised school party. The local OWL group and Forest School leaders must have Health and Safety policies, Accident & Emergency procedures and an agreed code of behaviour with their groups. They are responsible for carrying out a site risk assessment for the health and safety of their group undertaking any planned activities on site. Forest education groups should operate under their local authority guidelines, the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the regulations which introduce the principle of risk assessment.

Access

Guidance provided by the Outdoor Access Code (under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003) makes clear that the outdoors cannot be made risk-free and that people accessing land must act with care for their safety and that of others. In Scotland, everyone has the right to be on most land and inland water providing they act responsibly and do not take motorised vehicles on site. Whether you're in the outdoors or managing the outdoors, the key things are to:

- Take responsibility for your own actions
- Respect the interests of other people
- Care for the environment.

As a landowner, you can ask people to avoid routes while work is going on or to avoid particular activities if this causes serious or less obvious risks to arise. Otherwise you have a responsibility to respect access rights, to act reasonably when asking people to avoid certain working areas, and to work with the local authority and other bodies to help integrate access and land management.

Responsibilities

Local OWL groups and Forest School groups have a responsibility to treat the environment with care and respect. As the site landowner or manager, you should inform groups on whether any

part of the site is designated for its natural heritage, landscape or cultural interest, or has any other special features that they should be aware of.

Those running a local OWL group activity or Forest School programme must discuss their planned activities well in advance with the site landowner or manager and seek permission for use of the site. This is particularly important to avoid any conflict with any other planned activities on the land.

SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL ADVICE AND FUNDING

Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage or Historic Scotland may be willing to help to set up local agreements between site landowners/ managers and those looking for a site for forest education. They can also offer advice on issues such as site location, safety, management, natural and cultural heritage designations and felling permissions.

The OWL Scotland manager can help access grants, training and advice on project development.

A list of potential funding sources is available on the [Outdoor Access website](#)

REFERENCE SOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

[Outdoor & Woodland Learning Scotland web pages](#) provide links to Forest School and other resources

[Forestry Commission Scotland](#)

Forest School Quality Improvement Framework (3B Health, safety and wellbeing) - contact the [Forest School Co-ordinator](#) for information

Education Scotland outdoor learning web pages include a useful [list](#) of useful national and local authority contacts

[Paths for All](#) a partnership of more than twenty national organisations committed to promoting walking for health and the development of multi-use path networks in Scotland.

[Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) – provides additional advice to landowners/ managers.

SNH [‘A Brief Guide to Occupiers’ Legal Liabilities in Scotland in relation to Public Outdoor Access’](#)

The [Health and Safety Executive](#) offers guidance on how to carry out risk assessments.

The [Royal Highland Education Trust](#) (RHET) provides advice and information on rural issues, and good practice guidelines for working with children in the countryside.

Woodland Initiatives Network hosted by Small Woods provides a useful [handbook](#) (see Chapter 6 Liability insurance)

Woodland Trust Scotland [Outdoor Learning Pack](#) includes useful information on risk assessment for the outdoor classroom

Your local OWL group contact is:

Name:

Telephone:

Email: