

# The Forest School Approach

## Ethos/Definition

***“Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self-esteem, through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.”***

***Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and compliments the wider context of outdoor and woodland education.***

## Principles with criteria for good practice (bulleted)

**1. *Forest School is a long- term process with frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural wooded environment rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaption, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.***

- FS takes place regularly, ideally at least every other week, with the same group of learners, over an extended period of time, if practicable encompassing the seasons.
- A FS programme has a structure which is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners. This structure should clearly demonstrate progression of learning.
- The initial sessions of any programme establish physical and behavioural boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.

**2. *Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.***

- Whilst woodland is the ideal environment for FS, many other sites, some with only a few trees, are able to support good FS practice.
- The woodland is ideally suited to match the needs of the programme and the learners, providing them with the space and environment in which to explore and discover.
- A FS programme constantly monitors its ecological impact and works within a sustainable site management plan agreed between the landowner/ manager, the Practitioner and the learners.
- FS aims to foster a relationship with nature through regular personal experiences in order to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices in staff, learners and the wider community.
- FS uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and to encourage intrinsic motivation.

**3. *Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners***

- Where appropriate, the FS leader will aim to link experiences at FS to home, work and /or school education
- FS programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of the learner.

**4. *Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.***

- FS opportunities are designed to build on an individual's innate motivation, positive attitudes and/or interests.
- Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners, and dependent on completion of a baseline risk assessment.
- Any FS experience follows a Risk/Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

**5. Forest School is run by qualified Forest School Practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.**

- FS is led by qualified Forest School Practitioners, who are required to hold a minimum of an accredited Level 3 FS qualification.
- There is a high ratio of practitioner/adults to learners.
- Practitioners and adults regularly helping at Forest School are subject to relevant checks into their suitability to have prolonged contact with children, young people and vulnerable people.
- Practitioners need to hold an up-to-date first aid qualification, which includes paediatric and outdoor elements.
- FS is backed by relevant working documents, which contain all the policies and procedures required for running FS and which establish the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- The FS leader is a reflective practitioner and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too.

**6. Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.**

- A learner-centred pedagogical approach is employed by FS that is responsive to the needs and interests of learners.
- The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building
- Play and choice are an integral part of the FS learning process where play is recognised as vital to learning and development at FS.
- FS provides a stimulus for all learning preferences and dispositions.
- Reflective practice is a feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.
- Practitioner observation is an important element of FS pedagogy. Observations are used to 'scaffold' and tailor learning and development at FS.

*This definition, principles and criteria were based on the original principles and criteria agreed in 2002 and were reviewed in 2011. They were agreed after 5 months of consultation with the FS community in 2011. Published by the FS IOL SIG group and NGB Steering group in February 2012.*

*Forest School is guided by the Forest School Association the new national governing body that was established in 2012 – to provide the professional voice for Forest School in the UK to ensure quality assurance and provide central co-ordination and information.*