

FSA Forest School Provider Scheme: Self-assessment Checklist (August 2017)

This document is a self-assessment checklist to help you gather together the evidence required to support your application to become a FSA Introductory or Forest School Provider. It is purely an aid for your own use and will not form part of the application itself. However, the Forest School Association (FSA) would encourage you to make use of this tool as it provides you with an opportunity to review and ensure that your organisation is following the 6 Forest School principles on a practical level.

For each of the 6 principles which form the Forest School ethos (as approved by the FSA and shown on our website), you will find below a checklist that contains the following elements:

- FSA Forest School principle
- FSA criteria for good practice for each principle
- Associated questions that will help you to reflect on your own provision
- Evidence requirement for each principle including explanations
- An evidence-gap action list for you to use (optional) to record any evidence that is currently missing to help you plan any actions necessary before applying for membership.

We suggest that you take an initial read through the checklist which is presented chronologically, principle by principle. This will help you to understand the checklist process and give you an overview of the type of evidence we are looking for as part of application process.

Evidence requirements:

The evidence prompts ask you to demonstrate that you meet the requirement through the provision of relevant paperwork. It will need to be submitted in electronic form via <http://www.forestschoollassociation.org/join-the-fsa-as-a-school-and-organisation-member/>. The format and type evidence that would be accepted includes observations; interviews; questionnaires; feedback



forms/activities with learners, leaders, parents (e.g. open days, post its and/or index cards, circle time); informal chats; learner drawings and artefacts as prompts; notes, diaries and notebooks.

When gathering your evidence, you will see that some of the evidence relates to several principles e.g. session plans. You therefore do not need to provide the evidence twice.

You will also see that the self-assessment checklist below includes a column for you to make a note of any evidence-gaps you will need to produce before submitting your Forest School Provider application.

Self-assessment checklist:

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

Good practice criteria:

- Forest School 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 Forest School 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 behavioral boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.

Questions for reflection:

- 1) Are your Forest School sessions taking place with the same core group of learners over a sustained period?

Through consultation with members and the wider Forest School community, the FSA now acknowledges two categories of Forest School programme through the scheme:

1) FSA Recognised Forest School Provider: *defined as a long-term programme runs for:*

- *a minimum of 2 hours per session, for 24 consecutive weeks (or the equivalent of 2 full school terms) within 1 year, covering 2 seasons with the same core group of participants; or*
- *a minimum of 2 hours per session, for 12 consecutive weeks (or the equivalent of 1 full school term) in each of 2 years covering 2 seasons with the same core group of participants.*

2) FSA Introductory Forest School Provider: *defined as a short-term introductory programme runs for a minimum of 2 hours per session, for 6 consecutive weeks (or the equivalent of half a school term) within 1 year with the same core group of participants.*

If you offer both introductory and long-term programmes you can apply for to become a FSA Recognised Forest School Provider.

2) Are your two session plans chronological to show how individuals have progressed through observations, reflections and evaluation?

The FSA would like to see examples of two chronological sessions plans showing how individuals have progressed through the Forest School programme. We will require this for each of your Level 3 Forest School Leaders and different programmes.

3) Are your session plans structured to cover the following elements?

The FSA would suggest that a session plan should including:

- *the date, start and finish time*
- *session no. e.g. 3 of 7*
- *staff names and level of training*
- *staff to participant ratio*
- *age and developmental stage of group*



- *aims of the session – building on previous session/lines of development*
- *resources/kit required*
- *timings/activities for the session*
- *reference to risk/benefit assessments*

Reflection and evaluation:

- *observations, reflections and evaluations of the whole session and individuals (including their own reflections)*
- *link Forest School to wider experiences at home, work and/or school*
- *possible lines of development for next session*
- *evaluation of session covering what happened, what went well/what didn't and what to remember or change for future sessions*
- *future learning opportunities for participants.*

Evidence requirement	Have I got this?	Notes for self e.g. evidence gap you need to action before applying
<p>Evidence Requirement (1): Provide 2 Chronological Session Plans for <u>each Level 3 Forest School Leader practising and actively leading programmes within the last year</u></p> <p>This Evidence Requirement also relates to Forest School Principle 2, 3, 5 and 6</p>		
Staff to participant ratios	Yes/No	
Play activities that use natural resources	Yes/No	
Opportunities for participant-led learning	Yes/No	



All learning preferences and dispositions catered for							Yes/No	
Observations, reflections and evaluation of each session							Yes/No	
Case-studies of two of your participants including observations, reflections (by practitioner and participant) and evaluation of individuals.							Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (2): Provide details of your Forest School programmes both short-term and/or long-term. <i>See Q1 in Questions for Reflection above for definitions of these types of programme.</i>								
Programme name	Name of Level 3 Forest School Leader	Same core group? Yes/No	No. of hours per session?	No. of consecutive weeks group attends?	Run over 1 or 2 years?	Covering which seasons?	Yes/No	

Principle 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.

Good practice criteria:

- Whilst woodland is the ideal environment for Forest School, many other sites, some with only a few trees, are able to support good Forest School 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 Forest School programme constantly monitors its ecological impact and works within a sustainable site management plan agreed between the landowner/ manager, the forest school practitioner and the learners.
- Forest School 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.
- Forest School uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and to encourage intrinsic motivation.

Questions for reflection:

1. Is your Forest School programme taking place in a woodland or other natural environment setting?

2. Is the site and programme you are running suited to the needs of the learners?

For example, how do you adapt your site or access for those with additional needs?

3. Have you considered the impact of your Forest School on the woodland habitat for each site you use? Where there is a site plan is this impact included to ensure that sites are conserved and managed? If you collaborate with another landowner, do you have an agreement(s) in place with the landowner(s) of the site(s) you use to provide Forest School?

4. Have you developed a communications strategy/pack to ensure that staff, the learner and wider community develop a long-term, sustainable relationship with the natural environment?



The FSA suggests that producing a communications strategy/pack that covers all the relevant stakeholders could potentially help you to engage interested parties with the Forest School approach, the value of play and participant-centered learning as well as helping them to understand the long-term relationship with the natural environment.

5. Do you use natural resources through play to inspire ideas and motivate participants?

The use of natural resources to inspire play is key to the Forest School ethos. The FSA would therefore wish to see examples of what natural materials are used as part of any play activities and how they are gathered in a sustainable way e.g. are materials brought in or gathered from the site?

Evidence requirement	Have I got this?	Notes for self e.g. evidence gap you need to action before applying
Evidence Requirement (3): Provide 2 Chronological Session Plans for <u>each Level 3 Forest School Leader practising and actively leading programmes within the last year</u>		
Provided as per Evidence Requirement (1) above.	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (4): Site Management Plan(s) and collaboration with other landowners		
If you are applying to be an Introductory Provider offering 6 weekly programmes, you only need to answer the first 4 questions below:		
Please provide a photograph of each site where you run a Forest School programme.	Yes/no	
Have you considered the impact of your Forest School provision on the woodland habitat for each site(s) you use?	Yes/No	
Describe how you care for the woodland habitat of the site(s) you use for Forest School provision.	Yes/No	



Note: you can provide this information as a separate evidence document.		
Declaration: “Our School or Organisation take steps to conserve and manage the sites we use for Forest School provision”	Yes/No	
For 12 weekly programmes or more, is there a site management plan in place for each site and does it cover the impact of Forest School provision?	Yes/No	
If you collaborate with another landowner to use their site(s) for Forest School provision, do you have an agreement(s) in place with them to do so?	Yes/No	
Declaration: “Our School or Organisation hereby declares that we have an agreement in place with the landowner to use it for Forest School provision”	Yes/No	
If you collaborate with another landowner and do not have agreement(s) in place, please describe the nature of your partnership with the landowner Note: you can provide this information as a separate evidence document.	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (5): Communications with the wider community/stakeholders		
Please provide information that shows that your communications are helping the wider community (parents/carers, staff, wider stakeholders) to understand the Forest School ethos e.g. importance of participant led learning; connection with the natural environment.	Yes/No	



This could be in the form of a Communications Strategy or pack, flyers showing taster days for parents/the community, information leaflets, website information.

If you are applying to be a 'Recognised' Provider, please submit your Communications Strategy showing your identified stakeholders and methods for communicating with them.

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

Good practice criteria:

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

Questions for reflection:

1. **Do your session plans link Forest School to wider experiences at home, work and/or school?**



2. Do your session plans offer opportunities for the learner, where appropriate, to develop holistically e.g. physically, socially, emotionally.

Through planning your programme and running your Forest School sessions, the FSA would encourage you to question and reflect upon your approach. Does your approach develop participants in a holistic way? Are there opportunities for the participants to freely choose what they want/need to do and is there an option for self- and practitioner reflection? Do the sessions help to promote self-esteem, emotional intelligence, creative learning?

Evidence requirement	Have I got this?	Notes for self e.g. evidence gap you need to action before applying
Evidence Requirement (6): Provide 2 Chronological Session Plans for <u>each Level 3 Forest School Leader practising and actively leading programmes within the last year</u>		
As provided for Evidence Requirement (1) above. You do not need to submit them more than once.	Yes/No	

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

Good practice criteria:

- Forest School 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 Forest School experience follows a Risk–Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.

Questions for reflection:

1. Does your programme and session planning help to positively develop the participant’s interests and motivations?

2. Where appropriate, do your sessions offer the opportunity to use tools appropriate to a Forest School programme?

With regards to the use of tools for any session, the FSA would suggest that a risk management process should be adhered to for each situation and that the use of tools and how to use them safely is clearly demonstrated prior to use.

3. Where appropriate, do your sessions offer the opportunity to facilitate higher risk activities appropriate to a Forest School programme and learners?

With regards to facilitating higher risk activities such as making a campfire, working at height (tree climbing, rope swings and structures, tree houses) and wild food foraging, the FSA would expect the Level 3 trained member of staff to be responsible for these activities with any supporting members of staff and/or competent individuals supporting these activities under the discretion and supervision of the Level 3 Leader.

4. Do you have a dynamic risk-benefit and emergency planning process in place?

Part of the ethos of Forest School is that participants are encouraged to take part in activities which contain an element of managed risk. This helps develop their self-confidence, self-esteem and risk awareness. However, it is important that we are mindful of the risks involved in these activities and that reasonable steps are taken to minimise them. The FSA would expect relevant risk-benefit assessments and emergency planning procedures to be in place for all Forest School activities.

5. Is the staff to participant ratio appropriate from an emergency planning perspective for the client group?

Please see Q.5 under Principle 5.

Evidence requirement	Have I got this?	Notes for self e.g. evidence gap you need to action before applying
Evidence Requirement (7): Higher Risk Activities:		
Please provide evidence showing that you offer higher risk activities which contain an element of managed risk such as making campfires, working at height or wild food foraging to help develop self-confidence and risk awareness? Suitable evidence to provide here includes copies of risk assessments or session plans.	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (8): Risk-Benefit Assessments:		
Please provide risk-benefit assessments covering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - seasonal site risk assessment - daily site risk assessment - activity risk assessment - and describe your approach to dynamic risk assessment. 	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (9): Emergency Planning document:		
Please provide a copy of your Emergency Planning document showing that you have emergency planning process in place and have enough people to support an accident/incident (staff to participant ratio)	Yes/No	

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

Good practice criteria:

- Forest School is led by qualified Forest School practitioners, who are required to hold a minimum of an accredited Level 3 Forest School 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 pediatric (if appropriate) and outdoor elements.
- Forest School is backed by relevant working documents, which contain all the policies and procedures required for running Forest School and which establish the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.
- The Forest School leader is a reflective practitioner and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too.

Questions for reflection:

1. Does your programme and session planning help to positively develop the participant's interests and motivations?
2. Where appropriate, do your sessions offer the opportunity to use tools appropriate to a Forest School programme?

With regards to the use of tools for any session, the FSA would suggest that a risk management process should be adhered to for each situation and that the use of tools and how to use them safely is clearly demonstrated prior to use.

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5. Is the staff to participant ratio appropriate from an emergency planning perspective for the client group?

Factors the FSA would suggest you need to consider in determining the ratio:

- *that it is based on your risk assessment and emergency planning process;*
- *it is reasonable and applicable to any given situation;*
- *takes account of the type of activity being undertaken e.g. a higher risk activity will require a higher number of staff;*
- *considers the needs of the learner e.g. whether they have special needs;*
- *safety such as remoteness of location and use of tools which needs to be reflected in the emergency planning procedure.*

The benefits of having a higher staff to participant ratio is that it:

- *allows for greater, more accurate and supportive observations;*



- *promotes appropriate risk taking by participants;*
- *builds significant relationships and emotional dialogue;*
- *allows for the opportunity to undertake riskier and often creative activity; and*
- *allows for more emotional and learner-centered dialogue.*

Evidence requirement	Have I got this?	Notes for self e.g. evidence gap you need to action before applying
Evidence Requirement (10): Forest School Training Certificates for all Level 3 Forest School Staff practising and actively leading programmes		
Please provide Forest School Training Certificates for <u>all</u> level 3 staff. If a member of staff has passed their Level 3 qualification but is awaiting their certificate, an email from their trainer confirming details of the course and when they passed it will be accepted.	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (11): Provide 2 Chronological Session Plans for <u>each</u> Level 3 Forest School Leader practising and actively leading programmes within the last year		
As provided for Evidence Requirement (1) above. You do not need to submit them more than once.	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (12): Safeguarding policy and procedure		
Please provide a copy of your safeguarding policy and procedure (this should include reference to DBS checks)	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (13): First Aid Qualifications:		



Please provide copies of First Aid Certificates for all qualified Forest School staff member(s) included in this application	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (14): Your Forest School Operational Handbook:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Please provide a copy of your Forest School Operational Handbook. - This should be in line with statutory requirements and good Forest School practice covering, for example, health and safety including risk-benefit assessments; safeguarding; confidentiality; behaviour and anti-bullying; complaints. - Please also ensure your complaints procedure is submitted with your application. 	Yes/No	
Evidence Requirement (15): Continuous Professional Development (learning activities) log for all Level 3 Forest School Staff and certificates of attendance		
Completed separate Continuous Professional Development (learning activities) log form for each level 3 Forest School practitioner and copies of certificates where supplied.	Yes/No	

6. Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning for schools and early years settings

Good practice criteria:

- A learner-centered pedagogical approach is employed by Forest School 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 Forest School learning process, and play is recognised as vital to learning and development at Forest School.
- Forest School 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 Forest School pedagogy. Observations feed into 'scaffolding' and tailoring experiences to learning and development at Forest School.

Questions for reflection:

1. Do your Forest School sessions include:

- **participant initiated learning based on their motivations and interests?**

In line with the Forest School ethos, the FSA would suggest that participant initiated learning should take place in all sessions allowing opportunities for participants to express themselves freely and to give them a degree of control over the

content and intent of the session. For Early Years and school settings, session planning should come from children's motivation and interest and this should be shown in reflective practice.

- **play as a key element?**
- **cater for all learning preferences and dispositions? e.g. special needs**
- **reflective practice to aid future sessions?**
- **practitioner observation?**

2. As the practitioner, do you 'model' the Forest School approach e.g. through your session planning, dialogue?

Evidence requirement	Have I got this?	Notes for self e.g. evidence gap you need to action before applying
Evidence Requirement (16): Provide 2 Chronological Session Plans for <u>each Level 3 Forest School Leader practising and actively leading programmes within the last year</u>		
As provided for Evidence Requirement (1) above. You do not need to submit them more than once.	Yes/No	