

Forest School Association Guidance Notes

FSA Forest School Provider Scheme: Forest School Principle 1 – Long term programme (August 2017)

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Forest School ethos has six principles, which were agreed by the UK Forest School community in 2011.

1.2 Principle 1 states “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.”

1.3 The purpose of this guidance note is to clarify what constitutes ‘long-term’ Forest School which can be recognised by the FSA as adhering to Principle 1 of the Forest School ethos. We hope it will then help you with your application when applying for our Forest School Provider scheme. The definition of ‘long-term’ Forest School as opposed to ‘short-term’ introductory programmes and one-off taster sessions has been the subject of a consultation with FSA members and the wider Forest School community over the last few months. This guidance note has therefore been amended to reflect the conclusions of that consultation and related discussions with the FSA Board of Directors.

1.4 Depending on whether you have been approved as an Introductory or Recognised Forest School Provider, we strongly suggest that the relevant separate guidance note on marketing is read:

“Guidance Note on Forest School Providers: Marketing Your Introductory Forest School Provision” (August 2017); or

“Guidance Note on Forest School Providers: Marketing Your Recognised Forest School Provision” (August 2017).

This guidance advises FSA Introductory or Recognised Forest School Providers on how to appropriately market their Forest School programmes.

2.0 The benefits of delivering Forest School as a long-term programme

2.1 There are several benefits that the same participant/core group of participants will receive from attending Forest School over a period of regular, long-term sessions:

- It provides the opportunity to undertake detailed observations, reflection and evaluation of their holistic development (socially, emotional and physically); this in

turn allows future session plans to be adapted to the need of the individual/group to lead to the other benefits cited below.

- It gives a suitable amount of time to develop a long-term relationship with the natural environment; encountering seasonal changes helps to embed this relationship providing an opportunity to gain an understanding and impact of change;
- It builds and develops social relationships and communication skills with other participants and the Forest School Leader(s);
- It allows children to develop confidence and take managed risks;
- It allows children to develop specific skills such as use of tools using fine motor skills;
- It improves in holistic wellbeing (social, emotional and physical);
- It improves academic attainment;
- It improves home and school life.

3.0 Recognising the difficulties affecting Forest School provision

3.1 The FSA is aware of the difficulties in delivering 'true' Forest School to meet the long-term programme requirement of Principle 1 which we define below in 5.2 (1). We are aware there are budgetary pressures that make shorter courses attractive and that they do fit naturally within the school term. However, the FSA considers that short-term programmes do not provide adequate time to allow for ongoing observations, reflection and evaluation of participants to aid their holistic development in line with the Forest School ethos.

3.2 Therefore, as the professional body for Forest School in the UK, the FSA's role is to help the Forest School community achieve Forest School so that participants reap the wellbeing benefits from attending Forest School regularly over a long period of time.

4.0 Differentiating between different types of Forest School provision

4.1. As mentioned, typically it is the issue of long-term provision that is the sticking point for recognising an activity as Forest School. The FSA is aware that Forest School provision is being delivered in several different ways over a range of different timescales.

4.2 It is important to note that the FSA does acknowledge the value of other types of programme and experiences but we cannot recognise them as Forest School under Forest School Principle 1. However, they do offer a great opportunity for participants to be introduced and experience Forest School at first-hand. We have therefore developed terminology that defines these other options in two ways – short-term programmes as an "introduction to Forest School" and one-off experiences as "a one-off taster of Forest School." We would however encourage providers delivering Forest School programmes to aspire to develop long-term programmes as this fits with the true ethos of Forest School in line with the 6 Forest School Principles.

5.0 Defining different types of activity

5.1 The FSA has chosen to define the following activities:

5.2 (1) **The FSA 'recognises' and defines 'Forest School' as 'a long-term programme'** abiding with Principle 1 of the Forest School ethos. To help providers understand what is sufficient to meet the long-term criteria, we define the minimum 'long-term programme' as

- **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.**

If a provider is approved, long-term Forest School programmes are **'RECOGNISED'** by the FSA Forest School Provider scheme.

5.3 (2) **The FSA does not recognise a 'short-term programme' as Forest School** as it does not abide with Principle 1 of the Forest School ethos. However, we do acknowledge the value of this length of programme as **'an introduction to Forest School'** and define the minimum 'short-term introductory programme' as:

- **a minimum of 2 hours per session, for 6 consecutive weeks (or the equivalent of a half term of school) within 1 year with the same core group.**

If a provider is approved, short-term introductory Forest School programmes are acknowledged as **'INTRODUCTORY'** provision by the FSA Forest School Provider scheme.

The FSA would always encourage 'introductory' providers to aspire to delivering long-term, recognised programmes in the future to meet the long-term ethos of Forest School.

5.4 (3) **The FSA does not recognise a 'one-off experience' such as a taster session, one-off holiday club attendance, parties as Forest School** as this does not abide with Principle 1 of the Forest School ethos. However, we do acknowledge that this type of provision allows participants to experience Forest School as a one-off experience that may lead them to try a short-term or long-term programme.

One-off Forest School experiences do not form part of the FSA's Forest School Provider Scheme.