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PLANNING

FOREST SCHOOL SCOTLAND
discover, develop, deliver



FOREST EDUCATION INITIATIVE





PLANNING A PROGRAMME

Every Forest School programme will be different depending on the client group or school – for example, the age and needs of the children, the context of their setting, and the wishes of the school staff/ organisation involved. The programme length and activities should be designed in liaison with each user group – however, in all cases, General Operating Principles should be followed – see Appendix 1.

Typically, a programme may last for 10 weeks. Activities may focus on conservation, education and personal development and will generally include shelter- building, fire-making, outdoor cooking, craft activities and woodland exploration activities. Hand tools and natural materials may be used throughout the programme.

A session planning template form is shown in Appendix 2.

Forest school leaders should aim to offer their client group the following:

- A planning session before each Forest School for Forest School and client group leaders
- Review sessions after each Forest School for the client group and leaders
- Feedback sessions with the client group at the end of each session.
- The opportunity for the client organisation to conduct full evaluations

"I think it takes confidence in yourself as a Forest School leader and confidence in your helpers to take a class out regularly to Forest School. There are so many different factors to take into consideration than when working in the confines of a classroom. However the benefits are immense, children develop skills which are difficult to develop in the classroom. They have to communicate with each other, and they become inter-dependant on each other. This leads to trust and respect for one another. Trust and respect for each other is fundamental in children's development."

Sheila Cairns, Nursery teacher, Coupar Angus primary school

Activities are meaningful for children only if they engage their curiosity and stimulate a desire to discover more. For children, play (expressed across all ages, in different forms) is a way to discover more about the world around them and themselves. Your programme must allow 'free time' – space for child-led play and discovery. The Forest School Leader must be responsive to their group and each individual within it, and structure and adjust their sessions accordingly. Be prepared with activities, but be just as prepared to drop them if the children's interest dictate otherwise!

If you intend to work with schools, the better you can integrate your Forest School programme with the school curriculum the more likely it can be sustained over the long term. Information on the Scottish curriculum is provided in the next section of this Handbook.

When working with a school, some approaches may include:

Explore opportunities to link Forest School activities with current class topics being followed in school. Children that have difficulty in engaging with classroom work may have their enthusiasm fired when this is applied outdoors in a stimulating session. For example, making wattle and daub fences in Forest School may bring classroom teaching about the Celts to life.

See Making Structures activities

Structure the programme carefully, gradually building up each child's confidence both in you as leaders and in their own capabilities, and with their new surroundings. Ice breaking activities and cooperative games can help to relax the group and break down barriers. Many of these activities can also help to reinforce learning in a particular area.

See Ice breaking and Building Confidence activities.

Develop Health and Safety guidelines and a code of behaviour in discussion with the children. Get them to do a simple risk assessment, identifying hazards at an early stage. Do not rush into the adventurous activities too soon. Introduce tools and fire slowly when the children are relaxed and know how to behave in the Forest School setting as they will find these particularly exciting!

See Establishing Boundaries, Activities with Fire and Campfire Games Activities

A Forest School Kit List and Tools is shown in Appendix 3

GENERAL TIPS

● Be flexible

Be prepared to alter your programme to accommodate a special find, a dead mouse, or fallen tree for example, or to allow children to develop further an activity they are particularly enjoying. On other occasions some activities may take less time than you allowed or you finish something early. Always keep a couple of games or short activities in reserve (carry any props in your rucksack) so that you are prepared for all options. Above all, support a child led approach and avoid being too prescriptive. An open minded approach is best - *"I tend to build up the plans as we go along"*

Wendy Gray, Central Scotland Education Officer, Forestry Commission Scotland

● Allow for individuality

Children perform tasks at different rates and enter a programme with different levels of confidence and abilities. What captures the imagination of one child may not hold another, and we know that they learn in different ways. To effectively meet the emotional and learning needs of each child you need to be flexible in your approach and have a high enough adult to child ratio to give you this flexibility to treat each child, as an individual.

● Practise your activities

All Forest School staff need to be confident with the activities and be able to lead by example. Ensure there is adequate time for staff training, and it's a great team building exercise to practise the activities together beforehand. Acknowledge that each adult may have different strengths and weaknesses and be prepared to learn from each other. Make sure you have tried out every activity beforehand and are aware of the pitfalls and limitations that children may encounter. Little hands may be less skilled than yours! Can you think of ways of simplifying the activity or explaining it in a different way? Be prepared to adapt activities to fit the context within which you are working.

BAD WEATHER

Planning &
Organisation

Good quality outdoor waterproof clothing and footwear will allow the children to remain warm and comfortable outdoors. Certain outdoor activities need everyone to be suitably equipped for safety. Parents and carers should be encouraged to recognise this. Some settings may have full sets of outdoor clothing or a pool of Wellington boots of different sizes for example, and will rarely need to cancel or curtail a session. However, even with letters home about

clothing required, children may turn up ill-equipped for bad weather or may be too fashion conscious to be sensible about what they wear. Jeans, for example, are not practical as they are cold and clinging when wet. However, Forest School is an opportunity to encourage children to take responsibility for their own physical comfort and well being. They will discover that it is 'cool' not to get wet and cold! However, the Leader has overall responsibility for the participants' welfare.

Suitable Clothing for Forest School is shown in Appendix 4



Forest School sites will vary in the type of shelter and protection they offer. Most have some form of cover, even a large tarpaulin strung between trees, which will be adequate for short bursts of rain. Always have a supply of bin bags and plastic bags in your rucksack for sitting on, wrapping things up in to keep dry, and if desperate - to wear! A hole in the top of a bin bag and two armholes makes a wonderful emergency waterproof coat.

Even if you are able to continue in the rain, many activities will need to be adjusted or abandoned. Don't use sharp tools in wet conditions as they can slip and cold, numb hands are likely to be clumsy.

Why not capitalise on the rain? Discover which trees provide most shelter, and where the ground stays driest. Try team games to see which group can collect the most water. Have a range of equipment available – tarpaulins, bin bags, string etc. Mud slides may be possible at some sites, but this is obviously determined by clothing and the attitude of accompanying staff!

If you think it is going to rain, and it is appropriate for your group, try and get a fire going early. Once it has got good heart it will keep going unless there is a complete downpour. Hot drinks and warmth are a good way to rekindle flagging spirits.

Consider carrying a memory jogger for games and quizzes – such as one of Joseph Cornell's books e.g. *Sharing Nature with Children*, and perhaps some sweet treats (preferably healthy ones such as dried fruits) or other rewards. Many of the games need little preparation and can be used as a 'filler' while you are huddled in a shelter waiting for the rain to ease e.g. 'Animal Clue game' and 'Mystery animal'. Use examples that are relevant for your woodland setting, and based on the children's experiences. To keep all types of learners engaged, keep clues short, quirky and preferably use some visual aids. For example, a collection of nuts and cones eaten by various animals can be used as an effective quiz.

See a Standard Equipment Checklist in Appendix 5

Story telling, relevant to the woodland or the activities they have been doing, can capture their interest. A story can be developed by the group, or led by one person. Chanting, drumming or using natural instruments can also help to rekindle flagging spirits.

[See Story telling and music activities](#)

If at all possible, book indoor space as a contingency. Ideally store some equipment for indoor activities there, and bring some natural materials – leaves, ferns, seeds and grasses – indoors with you. Some of the more fiddly natural craft activities are easier to do indoors – such as tissue lanterns, mask or banner making. These activities are absorbing and help to develop fine motor skills. They can help to reinforce children's appreciation of natural resources and celebrate their Forest school experience.

[See Natural Art & Craft activities](#)

Finally, in cases of high winds or extreme snow, or other extreme weather situations noted by your site risk assessment – **cancel! It is irresponsible to put children into potentially dangerous situations.**

Each planned programme session must adhere to General Operating Principles that you have drawn up.

● With schools

Increasing numbers of teachers and practitioners are being trained as Forest School leaders in Scotland, and some schools have integrated Forest School into their programmes either as a trial or as a regular feature. However, Forest School will still be a new concept for some schools and teachers. This may reflect the range of professional experience, understanding and confidence in taking learning and teaching outdoors. Many schools will take their classes out of school for trips or use their school grounds or local area for learning and teaching. Embarking on a Forest school programme, involving regular trips by small numbers of pupils, is very different and requires a great deal of commitment by the school. Forest school may be led by one practitioner within the school, and their colleagues may still have to be convinced on the merits of becoming involved. Practical logistics of suitable sites, teacher cover and transport will have to be addressed.

Promoting Forest School to schools in your area

Working with your local FEI cluster group is a good way to find networks and promote Forest school in a new area. Consider twilight or in-service opportunities to present information about Forest schools to a school or school cluster, and in liaison with the local authority education services.

A good understanding of the requirements of A Curriculum for Excellence and cross curricular initiatives is vital to ensure Forest School supports and complements the Scottish curriculum. Staff with responsibility for particular initiatives such as the Eco schools programmes, outdoor learning, citizenship, or enterprise may be useful 'warm' contacts. The next section in the pack provides more information on the Scottish curriculum.

▶ When planning a project, consider timing – the school, academic year, and term dates (which vary between the 32 local authorities in Scotland). Check for any major events in school (e.g. St Andrews' day) and avoid busy examination and test periods, or the lead-in time to Christmas or end of term activities. Try and find out what other initiatives are planned - for example, sporting events, transition projects or cultural/ arts festivals – to avoid clashes and maximise joint learning opportunities. By doing so, demonstrate that you can add value to the curriculum, not overburden the school and its staff with 'another initiative'.

▶ Organising a Forest school programme will present different challenges and opportunities in these different situations.

▶ **The school sectors and contacts**

School contact details can be accessed through the individual local authority websites, or via Scottish Schools On-Line <http://www.scottishschoolsonline.gov.uk/index.asp>. It can be difficult contacting teachers particularly if they are class committed so try before or after school or during break times. Phone the school and find out the best means of contact – some teachers prefer e-mail.

▶ The local education authority is a useful source of advice and information. They have specialist staff that may be able to suggest schools or members of staff with a particular interest in a Forest School project. They have policies and procedures on child protection and out of school activities, and may administer Disclosure Scotland checks and forms for work with schools within their authority. Contact details for your local education authority outdoor education advisor can be found on:

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/takinglearningoutdoors/about/outdoorsafety/advisers.asp>

▶ **Pre-school** settings will include stand-alone nursery schools or nursery classes attached to a local primary school. Since 2002, part-time pre-school education has been provided free for three and four year old children in Scotland. Pre-school provision will include local authority and 'partner-provider' settings – that is, private settings that include places provided by the local education authority. Early education and child care workers work alongside nursery and infant teachers.

► In a **primary** school, classes range from P1 (approximately 5/6 years) to P7 (10/11 years approximately). Up to P3 however, the children are regarded as 'early years' and approaches to learning and teaching may be more play based. The Head teacher should be the first point of contact. In Scotland primary schools and their communities vary depending on their geographical location. They range from large urban primaries with multiple classes for each year from primary one to primary seven, possibly under a shared campus with a nursery class and adjacent High school, to small remote rural schools with composite classes managed by one or more teachers.

► In a **secondary** or High school, classes go from S1 to S6, and there will be much larger numbers of pupils in each year group, who have generally come into High school from the feeder primaries within each secondary catchment area. The Head teacher and/ or Faculty heads should be the first point of contact. Support for Learning staff may also be interested in the opportunities provided by Forest School.

► **Roles and responsibilities**

Where members of school staff are involved with Forest School sessions, take time beforehand to explain the ethos of Forest School, and roles and responsibilities. It is the schools responsibility to ensure that Local Education Authority guidelines are adhered to. In particular guidance on adult to child supervision rates and Disclosure Checks should be followed. Who will be responsible for pupil's behaviour? What will the staffing ratio be? Health and safety issues, transport and liaison with parents need to be discussed. Leaders need to have their Disclosure and up to date First Aid certificates available.

► School staff bring with them experience and knowledge of the children, but it is important to treat Forest School as a new experience for all, so avoid pre-judging pupils based on classroom reports.

► The ethos of Forest School is to create a positive learning environment tailored to individual learner's needs. The programme develops pupil's self-esteem and confidence by introducing managed risks, achievable tasks and new ways of working. For this reason it is essential that Forest School trained leaders are responsible for the management of the group, discipline and safety. In the initial stages this will require teaching staff to hand over elements of responsibility to trained Forest School leaders. Teaching staff are encouraged to discuss any concerns about how this will work and the specific roles of the adult helpers before the start of the programme. Teachers have the opportunity to see how children may flourish when learning out of the classroom, and their feedback is valuable.

● With parents

"I have spoken to several of my parent helpers and they all thoroughly enjoy helping at Forest School. One parent said it is a "win, win" situation. The children have exciting motivating learning experiences and the helpers do too. He said that it is heart warming to see children having the opportunity to be outdoors in safety in an open place. Parents feel they benefit from forest school too. It gets them out in the open. They feel good after a session outdoors too.

Sheila Cairns, Nursery teacher, Coupar Angus primary school

Parents and carers can provide valuable input to the evaluation of any forest school programme for those children who have taken part. Parents and carers are in a unique position to observe any behavioural or emotional change and to hear anecdotes from the child who may need time to absorb and review their own experiences. Communicating with parents and carers also helps to raise awareness about forest school within the wider community. Parent and carer involvement is one of the ten critical success factors identified as necessary for a successful Forest School (see above, and nef report, 2003). Learning Teaching Scotland provides some useful pointers on ways to communicate with parents <http://www.curriculumforexcellencescotland.gov.uk/about/parents/suggestions.asp>

● With the wider community

Running a Forest School programme is an excellent way to inform and engage the wider community about the ethos and values of Forest School and benefits to participants. Be aware that issues like lighting fires may cause concern, and woodland activities like den building and coppicing may be misinterpreted.

Take care to inform the general public who may use the same woodland for recreation, the reasons behind these activities, and consult the relevant stakeholders. A Forest School 'taster' event for the community on site with demonstration activities may be a good way to involve and inform local people about your Forest School.

● With Countryside Agencies

FEI cluster groups are local networks of people with an interest in woodland or timber-linked education. Members may be able to advise on suitable sites, tool kit suppliers and other kit available locally at competitive prices. Your local cluster group can be found on the FEI Scotland website <http://www.foresteducation.org/country.php?ctry=s>.

The national FEI partners include a range of agencies based in Scotland. Their website links are listed under <http://www.foresteducation.org/country.php?page=4&ctry=s>.

In Scotland, the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) is the regulatory body for any forestry operations. To help protect Scotland's forests, a felling licence from Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) is required to fell trees. It is an offence to fell without a licence, unless an exemption applies. There are no regulations for coppicing. However any felling of coppice areas would be subject to FCS Felling Licence Regulations, which are described in detail on the FCS website.

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland>

A licence is not required for lopping, topping, pruning or pollarding. In a typical Forest School set up, it is unlikely a licence is required for the normal range of activities that require hand tools, as long as the volume of timber taken is within quantities specified by the Forestry Commission.

Your local Forestry Commission Scotland community officer or ranger or local authority Countryside Ranger services may also be able to suggest suitable sites. If your site is a Forestry Commission property then they can advise you about its natural and cultural heritage aspects. Find your local FCS District office

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/HCOU-4U4HZK#anchor849818>

When in doubt, a land information search should also be carried out. A link is available from the FCS website. The Land Information Search (LIS) is a map-based tool that allows you to search for details about a chosen area of land. It highlights where features such as Special Protection Areas or Woodland Grant Schemes are already in place. The local planning authorities must also be consulted to see if they have legal controls in place in the proposed felling area, such as Tree Preservation Orders, or trees within a conservation area. Historic Scotland can advise on any aspects of archaeological or cultural heritage interest.

Scottish Natural Heritage's role is to look after the natural heritage, help people to enjoy and value it, and encourage people to use it sustainably. <http://www.snh.org.uk/> Your local SNH area office can provide information about woodland sites and their staff can advise on designated areas and conservation management. Find local SNH office contact details on this website map <http://www.snh.org.uk/offices/>

The above contacts may be able to set up local agreements between you and the landowner as well as offering advice on issues such as site location, safety, management, natural and cultural heritage designations and felling permissions.

SNH's TeachingSpace website offers a useful tool for looking for sites in your area. It includes a map based search facility for different types of sites with educational support, including a dataset of woodland sites

<http://www.snh.org.uk/teachingspace/map.asp>

"A parent said that at first it seems such a risky environment with saws, fire, nettles, etc, but with careful support from the adults the children build up their confidence and skill base to be responsible. Parents all agree it was good to see children being able to take risks and make decisions in the woods."

Sheila Cairns, Nursery teacher, Coupar Angus primary school

You should ensure that your procedures for your Forest School programme cover the following issues:

- ▶ Health & safety policy
- ▶ Child protection policy
- ▶ Equal Opportunities policy
- ▶ Risk assessment form and guidelines
- ▶ Excursion Document
- ▶ Safe Use of tools
- ▶ Consent Forms/ information for parents
- ▶ Accident & emergency procedure
- ▶ Local Council Education department policy



See an example of Emergency Procedures in Appendix 6

See First Aid Notes in Appendix 7

Learning Teaching Scotland's website provides useful links on outdoor safety
(See <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/takinglearningoutdoors/about/outdoorsafety/index.asp>).

The Children's Act 2003

- ▶ The Act provides for a list of individuals considered unsuitable to work with children ("the list") to be established and maintained by the Scottish ministers and for those on the list to be banned from working with children. An individual who knows that he or she is listed commits an offence if he or she works in child care position (within the meaning of the schedule) while listed.
- ▶ Organisations are required to refer people who are or have been working in childcare positions for inclusion in the list if they harm a child or put a child at risk from harm and, as a consequence, are dismissed or transferred from those positions or where their employment is otherwise terminated in such circumstances. Individuals convicted of an offence against a child (within the meaning of section 10(9) (b) may also be placed on the list at the discretion of the courts.
- ▶ An organisation commits an offence if it offers work in a child care position to an individual whom it knows is listed or does not move such an individual from a child care position. The information that an individual is on the list will be released as part of a disclosure check carried out by Disclosure Scotland (part of the Scottish Criminal Record Office) under Part V of the police Act 1997 (c.50).

Local Authority Guidelines for Trips

The Scottish Executive Education Department has useful safety guidance for educational excursions (see <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/12/20444/48943>). This has been turned into specific 'codes of practice' issued by individual local authorities. Local outdoor education advisers are members of the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education (SAPOE), and advise Local Authorities on outdoor education matters. A link to access the advisor contact for each local authority can be found at <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/takinglearningoutdoors/about/outdoorsafety/advisers.asp> Most have a very good knowledge of a Local Authority's Code of Practice for Educational Excursions and Adventure Activities. They can offer advice and support to teachers taking young people out of school on adventurous or environmental activities, and can address any safety concerns.

Health & Safety at Work Act 1974

This Act applies throughout Great Britain: Scotland, Wales and England (not Northern Ireland apart from minor provisions). Part 1 contains the most relevant detail for all people at work. The Act details its objectives or general purposes and how these objectives should be achieved. In general, your employer's duties include:

1. To make the workplace safe, without risk to health.
2. Ensuring safe systems of work are set and followed
3. Ensuring equipment is moved, stored and used safely
4. Provide adequate welfare facilities
5. Provide information, instruction, training and supervision necessary for health and safety

Employers are required to take reasonable care for the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. Employees must take care of themselves and others they work with, and follow safe practice and guidance. In the Forest School context, the Leader can be viewed as 'employer' and their client group as 'employees' in the following table:

Employer (practitioner)	Employee (child/ student)
Make sure the systems of work are safe and without risk to health	Take reasonable care of him/herself and anyone who might be affected by their acts
Handling, storage and transport of articles must be done safely	Co-operate with leader
Information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure Health & safety	Not intentionally or recklessly misuse anything provided for them
Place of work ensured safe and not creating any risk to health	Co-operate with leaders and follow instruction
Access to place of work as above	Co-operate with leaders and follow instruction
Place is safe and arrangements are made for welfare	Do not behave recklessly and follow instruction

See also the Government's Health & Safety website for further information.

Risk assessments

A Forest School site and any associated activities must be assessed in order to evaluate the risk and hazards they pose.

A hazard is anything that can cause harm. In other words - what are the potential problems in the chosen setting? For example, where the client is a primary school group, a hazard might be tree root that cause a trip hazard in a woodland setting. Another hazard may be fungi that may be poisonous if ingested or handled.

A risk is the chance, high, moderate or low, that somebody will be harmed by the hazard. In other words - how likely is the potential for harm? For example, the risk of tripping over a tree root is low if due care and attention is taken when walking through woodland, and if the children are warned that the woodland floor is uneven. The risk may be higher/moderate if the young person is running.

The fungi hazard would be low for an informed primary group. In contrast the risk may be higher for an Early Years group who may put objects into their mouths. The risks would be kept low if this group is well supervised.

For more information see 'General Operating Principles for Forest School' in Appendix 1

A template for a Daily Risk Assessment is provided in Appendix 8

An Activity Risk Assessment Recording Form is provided in Appendix 9



In Scotland, everyone has the right to be on most land and inland water providing they act responsibly. 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.

Your access rights and responsibilities are explained fully in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which can be accessed here <http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/>

In addition to 'knowing the Code', when choosing a new Forest School site, it is important to consider the following questions.

1 Is the site or any part of the site designated for its natural heritage, landscape or cultural interest? These designations range from local or community interest such as local natural reserves or community woodland to national designations like Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or European designations such as Special Area of Conservation (SAC) or Special Protected Area (SPA), and many others.

2 Will the site, or activities around the site have any adverse effect on any of the following?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| ▶ People | ▶ Access |
| ▶ Archaeology | ▶ Flora |
| ▶ Soil | ▶ Recreation |
| ▶ Landscape | ▶ Water |
| ▶ Fauna | |

3 Does the site have hazards that could be described as dangerous?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| ▶ Litter | ▶ Dangerous plants |
| ▶ Dog mess | ▶ Busy public access |
| ▶ Dead wood in upper canopy | |



If the Forest School activity is going to have a major impact on any of the above in 1 or 2 or problems in question 3 are beyond your control, it may be better to look for an alternative site.

Information and advice on site designations, selection and management can be given by the organisations listed in 'working together successfully ...with countryside agencies' described in the previous section.

EVALUATION

Evaluating your Forest School sessions should be an integral part of your work. It is an essential tool for improving the quality of your programmes, ensuring that they meet the objectives set, obtaining feedback from all involved and also giving the written evidence that is needed to support funding applications for future projects or to sell the benefits of Forest School programmes to unfamiliar audiences such as new schools or local authority services.

There are many levels at which this is done, from simple feedback sheets or drawings that children complete in school encouraging children to keep diaries throughout their Forest School programme.

A Forest School leader's review of each session is shown with the session plans of Niddrie Mill Primary School. See their programme example shown later in this handbook.

Ideally get written feedback from teachers and parents by working with the school. Verbal feedback from the children, parents, teachers and carers is also valuable. Note down relevant comments during and after each session. The quotes are really useful for demonstrating the value of Forest School but check you have permission to use them.

"today was brilliant" (parent quoting child);

"J...learnt about boundaries around fires, eating & tasting new things, knowing about different trees...favourite activity was toasting marshmallows. A great activity for them. please continue." (parent)

"1. we found a big green box and we had to find the key and we learnt to play one, two, three where are you. 2. we made a journey stick, I fell off a tree trunk and hit my ear 3. When we went into the wood we saw a mouse. When we got to the den we went in pairs and one got blindfolded and got led to a tree. We made a big fire and cooked marshmallows". (pupil G.)

"G really enjoyed the forest sessions" (parent)

Feedback from parents/children of the Dunning school sessions (see primary programme examples later in this pack)

See an example of a Parental Feedback Request Form in Appendix 10.

Evaluating the progress of participants and involving them with this review is also a key part of the Forest School process.

It is worth exploring Dr Roger Greenaway's approach to experiential learning and the reviewing process. He provides a thorough definition of the review process (ref: http://reviewing.co.uk/_review.htm);

"Reviewing is learning from experience - or enabling others to do so. Reviewing helps you get more from work, life and recreation - especially if you have the reviewing skills to match your ambitions. Reviewing is any process that helps you to make use of personal experience for your learning and development. These reviewing processes can include:

- ▶ reflecting on experience
- ▶ analysing experience
- ▶ making sense of experience
- ▶ communicating experience
- ▶ reframing experience
- ▶ learning from experience

The New Economics Foundation (nef) devised a structured approach in their research on Forest Schools from 2003 using pilot projects in Wales (Forest School Evaluation project Nef, 2003) and also subsequently in England (Murray, R and O'Brien L, 2005). Their draft Self Appraisal Tool Kit aims to evaluate the whole planning and implementation process by looking at the 'World before and after Forest School'.

Recording and evaluating progression in each individual's learning, emotional development and positive behaviour is important, as well as how your sessions progress over the programme. It will be important first to record individual's behaviour at the start of your Forest School programme.

See a template for Behaviour Observation Baseline Information in Appendix 11

A template form for recording observations of individual pupils by session is shown in Appendix 12

A session review template is shown in Appendix 13

Engaging others as helpers (with appropriate Disclosures) is a valuable way to create links with the wider school community. Equally, it is important to evaluate their experience of Forest School too, as well as your own. This can be done verbally or more formally.

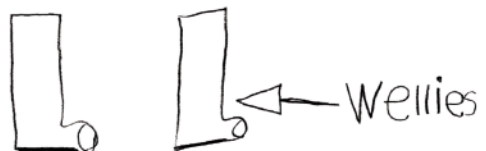
See Forest School Leaders/ Helpers Feedback Form in Appendix 14

Some important points to consider that arose from an evaluation workshop at the FEI and Forest Schools Scotland Network event 2007 were:

- Scoring systems- get children to evaluate their own behaviour (on a scale of 1-3 or 4). They can move up or down scale.
- Evaluate behaviour out of Forest School. Carry out follow up evaluation with parents/ teachers/support workers. (i.e. how do participants behave out with or after FS? Is there notable change?)
- ‘Anecdotal’ evidence should be recorded as an outcome (e.g’s given- Johnnie could never speak out but now he will give talks at assembly.)
- The NEF evaluation criteria are a useful framework for measuring behaviour change.
- Measuring other criteria such as reduction in litter and vandalism or increased use of a site could be relevant.
- Agree evaluation outcomes and methodology with partners who are running the project with you and get them to share the responsibility of carrying it out.
- Don’t always lead- take time out to observe individuals and how they are behaving.
- Evaluation should be a mixture of techniques to cover different learning styles and abilities.
- ‘Active’ reviewing, using games and activities, is useful for encouraging groups to communicate in a less formal way.
- Some written evaluation is useful as it provides good evidence. However, it might not be appropriate to all groups.
- On a wider scale, there is a need to evaluate whether the FS Scotland movement is achieving, politically, what it set out to achieve.

Forest Schools—Children's Kit List

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Forest Schools Kit List

