

# Leafing the Classroom

Strategy for  
Forestry Commission Estate  
Education and Learning  
Services

Forestry Commission England  
2008-2012

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## Foreword

I am pleased to sign off this first English Strategy for Education and Learning and look forward to seeing the Forestry Commission estate in England, through a consistent national approach, leading the way in Forest Education, embedded in the communities we serve.

I believe it is important for future generations to understand the importance of forests and what they deliver as well as bringing and increasing knowledge to the adult population. The Forestry Commission estate is ideally positioned to use the Nation's woodlands, organisational expertise and passion to spread the message that trees and timber are a vital part of today's and tomorrow's England.

However delivering Education and Learning is by no means self-financing. Whilst we would all like to be in the fortunate position of being able to afford to expand the service to fully meet what is a growing demand you will understand why this is not the position we currently find ourselves in. I believe we can go a long way to meeting this demand by delivering more targeted messages, to more people within the same overall resource. To achieve this we will have to use a range of innovative delivery mechanisms and increasingly achieve our aims by working with partners. An essential part of this will be collecting and using quality data to continually inform, then allow us to modify what we do.

We now have in place the Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests which gives us a very clear steer as to how our forests fit into the government's wider agenda. I see that during the life of this Education and Learning Strategy 2008-2012 we must do everything we possibly can to support just the following three key messages:

- The role of trees and woods and forests in mitigating the effects of climate change;
- Wood as a sustainable material, including wood fuel;
- The ecological and environmental benefits of trees, woods and forests.

This will mean developing programs and resources, both ourselves and with partners, to demonstrate these three key messages. It will also mean modifying existing programmes and in some cases taking the hard decision to drop well loved programmes, which do not fit.

This strategy provides the platform for the Forestry Commission and its partners to develop and deliver an education and learning service fit for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It will be supported by materials, resources and programmes of the quality expected of a world-renowned national forestry organisation.



Simon Hodgson,  
Chief Executive,  
Forest Enterprise England

## Context

Forestry Commission England manages over 250,000 hectares of forests, woodlands and associated open habitats on behalf of the country. Some of this woodland is very close to where large numbers of people live; some of it is more remote from people and more difficult to access. **Nationally owned woods have played a part in outdoor education for many years and will continue to do so.** Long-standing relationships with other parts of the woodland sector, such as owners and timber businesses, provide even more opportunity for people of all ages and learning needs to access woodlands and learn about wood products.

The Government set out its policies for the delivery of sustainable forest management in a Strategy for England's Trees Woods and Forests. **ETWF's vision is that by 2050 England's trees, woods and forests will be helping us to cope with the continued challenge of climate change, and that they will also be valued because many more people will enjoy them.** Trees will not just be an important part of England's history, but will be an essential feature of a modern, sustainable society, which has significantly reduced carbon emissions.

**For this vision to be realised it is important to make sure the benefits of woodlands and wood products are relevant to as many people as possible.**

Education and learning can play a vital role in this action with schools and colleges through the Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto, Education for Sustainable Development, Eco-schools and the Sustainable Schools Framework. Life Long Learning programmes and international agreements to which the government has signed up, including the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and the European Union's Forest Action Plan present further opportunities to raise the profile of trees, woods and forests in everyday life.

Regional Forestry Frameworks set out priorities for partnership delivery of policy locally. It is therefore an appropriate time to review FCE's E&L policy, both nationally and locally, to reflect the new direction from Government and society to produce a relevant delivery mechanism to ensure success.

Sustainable development, quality of life and a learning community are key themes of central government policy. Education and learning are key elements of getting people to understand the international definition of sustainable development – ***“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”***

## Our contribution towards education and learning

Developing people's positive attitudes towards the environment is a vital component of a broad and balanced curriculum of both formal and informal learning. Our role will be in providing knowledge, skills and understanding that enable people to consider and act positively on environmental issues. Trees, woods and forests already act as a great source of inspiration for beneficial life experiences. **The Forestry Commission is extremely well placed to contribute and respond to the challenge of sustainable development, quality of life and active and strong communities.**

Learning opportunities from woodlands are endless. Whether they are for pre-school children exploring a forest for the first time, or for students calculating the mass of a tree or studying the effects of climate change on species, or even investigating the impact of tourism on local economies and conservation, woodlands can offer an outstanding learning resource. They can provide the backdrop for new and exciting delivery mechanisms with significant evidence that they can stimulate improved behavioural outcomes. For example in students, across the age range, participating in Forest School.



**Woodlands can offer an accessible and safe, varied and stimulating environment for learning, play and adventure, for all ages and abilities.**

## Aim of Leafing the Classroom

**The trees, woodland and open spaces of England's national forests - and others' woodlands near where people live and learn - will be used to improve people's quality of life through education and learning.**

## Learning Objectives

**We should deliver a quality Education & Learning Service to:**

- encourage a greater understanding of trees, woods and forests, and their place in the wider environment, leading to respect, responsible behaviour and positive attitudes towards the environment as a whole and a sustainable future, supporting ETWF priorities;
- assist in the achievement of a number of related government targets not specific to forestry *e.g.* Actions on Climate Change, National Curriculum and pupil achievement, Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto, Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning objectives and the Global Plant Conservation Strategy;
- broaden the range of delivery including techniques, programmes and locations to ensure the widest possible audience;
- reach new or remote communities who may not have the means to travel to a FC site or where schools and communities do not have the capacity to access local woodlands;
- extend knowledge transfer to further and higher education groups and other lifelong learning opportunities.

**By:**

- providing sharply focused education and learning services in England that meet the needs of current and new audiences;
- bringing in income to offset the cost of delivering benefits, many of which cannot be quantified in terms of money.

**Responding to:**

- education and learning priorities set in the Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests Delivery Plan:
  - the role of trees, woods and forests in mitigating the effects of climate change;
  - wood as a sustainable material including wood fuel;
  - ecological and environmental benefits of trees, woods and forests.
- the Government's Core Education, Lifelong Learning and Education for Sustainable Development programmes;
- other government agendas and international agreements such as the Plant Diversity Challenge and Global Plant Conservation Strategy;
- actions in published Regional Forestry Frameworks.

## Where we are now

Forestry Commission England's Education & Learning Service is currently working in every region of England, delivering a huge range of opportunities. Our sites vary from internationally important and renowned arboreta, busy visitor attractions with classrooms to more remote locally important woodlands.

## Monitoring and evaluation



Many settings carry out a self-devised evaluation programme. Data captured in this way is difficult to analyse and is not uniform or consistent in approach. Overall it is not totally clear what we are delivering, to whom and with what results. Some core data can be captured through national systems for accounting and

personnel. Work has been started on creating a *Baseline* as the first step in developing a national system for consistently monitoring and evaluating delivery. The baseline data, while limited, gives us an indication of the current national picture, for the first time using consistent measures. This will be further developed during the life of this strategy.



## Our Service

We currently have 368 people, in 36 full-time equivalent posts delivering education and learning as part of their role. 72 are education specialists. Of these, 5 are full-time posts with 22 FTE covered by 67 individuals working part-time. Nationally a total of 296 Recreation and Community staff, Wildlife Rangers, Foresters, Forest Management Directors and others provide a further 9 FTE in delivery support. 209 (6.9 FTE) volunteers, both specialists and non-education and learning, deliver one fifth of the service. We also support the Forest Education Initiative by providing a full-time Co-ordinator covering the whole of England.

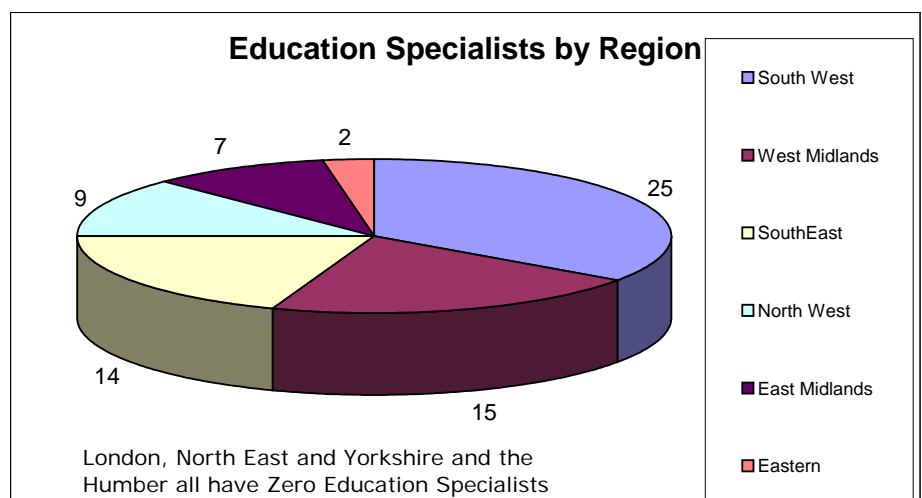
- 368 people, 36 FTE posts
- 72 Education specialists (27 FTE)
- 5 FT, 67 PT (22 FTE)
- 296 (9 FTE) non-ed people
- 209 (6.9 FTE) volunteers - specialist and non-ed
- Plus FEI England Co-ordinator FT

More than one third of our specialists have recognised delivery qualifications for education and learning. Within the team there is a wide range of skills and experience, and teaching subject areas. More than half of delivery staff identified a lack of Continued Professional Development for delivery of education and learning. This indicates a risk of a reduction in the value of qualifications held.



Our specialist education staff are based in 6 out of the 12 Districts, covering 6 of the 9 Government Office Regions. 75% of these are based in 3 Regions. However a great deal is also being achieved by non-specialist staff across the country delivering exciting new activities, which would not have been seen traditionally as *Environmental Education*. Our staff are widespread and

located in teams of varying size and make-up. In many settings our staff are working in generalist roles across the recreation, education and community engagement activities within local delivery structures that have evolved over time. The flexibility, within teams, to manage these very compatible but distinct activities is seen as a strength by local managers.



## Our audience

We work with communities from affluent schools in rural and suburban areas through to disadvantaged communities in former coal mining and other industrial areas. More than 170,000 participants benefit from our delivery per annum. The learning stage of our audience covers all ages from pre-school to University of the Third Age. Primary schools make up 65% of our total current audience. Led visits make up 51% of total delivery accounting for 62% of staff time. Primary school children on school trips form the largest audience for led visits at 36% of the total. Facilitated visits, to the FC estate, by known groups on self-led activities, including education events, make up 30% of the audience.

- 170,000 total participants
- 65% of total under 11 years of age
- 36% of total audience is primary schools on led visits
- 51% of total on led visits = 62% of time
- 30% on facilitated self led activities = 3% of time
- 19% on high impact partnership programmes

Activities outside of the FC estate can and do achieve results far beyond the scope of the FC's traditional role. 12% of our delivery is carried out in schools or colleges or within communities using local sites. Examples include:

- work within the South Yorkshire Coalfields community woodland sites where our Education Rangers support Community and Recreation Rangers to encourage local communities to use woodlands on reclaimed land close to where they live, and in many cases within walking distance;
- a number of settings where temporary classrooms have been established in local woodlands for local schools to use.
- projects with community safety teams, alternative curriculum activities and probation and other groups with an aim to improve understanding and respect for each other and the environment.

Working with outside partners our delivery teams can achieve far more across a range of targets than by just using the Estate alone. We have many examples of effective partnerships, increasing the above to 14% of delivery. Partnerships include RSPB, probation and alternative curriculum groups, and FEI, where thousands of individual learners, are exposed to environmental messages, using both FC land and their own local sites. Evidence collected during our baseline exercise has shown that partnerships are a highly effective and efficient method of expanding our audience. For example partners raise 80p for every £1 invested by the FC, and for every hour of FC staff time partnerships add a further 11 hours.

Where we are working at a strategic level the FC is recognised as a valuable partner and this is reflected in financial and political support locally. Forestry Commission England has used the woodland grant system to expand criteria for applications to include Forest School in woodlands and for other access and community development, all with the aim of increasing understanding and value of woodlands to local people.

## Our delivery

The FC estate invests just over £1.4m per annum in our Education and Learning Service. In addition to the financial resource we also have 25 forest classrooms providing a space to learn and a base from which to explore the forest.

The range of delivery includes targeted education and learning on the Forestry Commission estate and through local partnerships including:

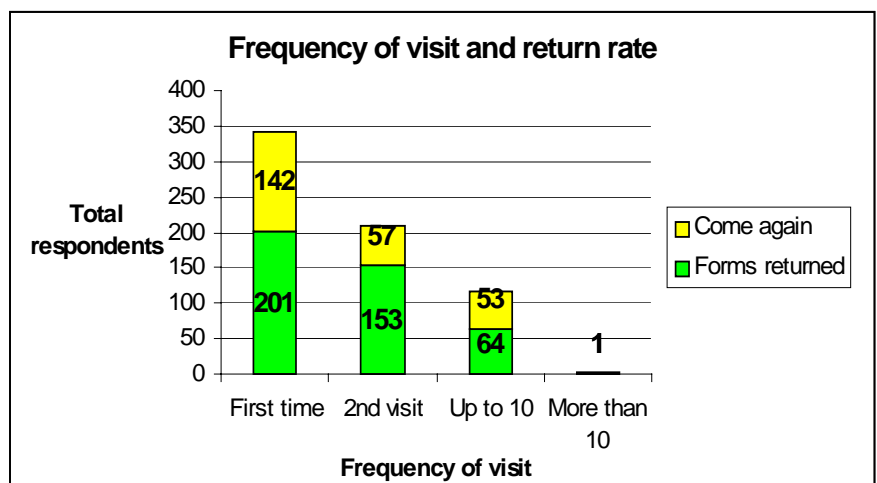
**Formal** - schools, colleges and institutions using formal curricula;

**Non-formal** – constituted and other groups with agreed learning purpose (e.g. University of the Third Age, Cubs);

And **Informal** – voluntary groups and the public involved in participatory and interpretative activities.

Much of the quality of delivery and audience development is unclear. Often, outside of our better-resourced main education centres, local staff have little time to develop new programmes or carry out market research. Much of the delivery is carried out through long-term links with local schools who book the same activity for the same year group year on year. This approach develops a valuable relationship with the school. Evidence shows that while this approach is better than no visit at all, regular, repeated contact with individual learners leads to greater long-term impact on both learning and behaviour.

From returned evaluation forms we know that 37% of schools are visiting for the first time and that 70% of these will come again. Those using the service for a second time form 28% of the total, but only 37% of these would come again. A core of 12% use the service more regularly and these are likely to want to come back with 83% stating they will come again.



From a range of evaluation questions 73% of respondents rated the service as great, with a further 3% rating it pretty good and 18% satisfactory. The reason for these results is unclear, and invites further investigation.

For schools and other learning groups to be encouraged to repeatedly use our service there is a need to invest in products which are relevant to emerging national education and learning priorities. For the FC to continue to play a part in outdoor learning these products will have to also meet the aims of ETWF.

Programmes include traditional outdoor education, for example pond dipping and mini-beast hunting, which are more targeted for primary school day visits. Where teams are less well resourced they will often rely on more innovative delivery such as community education outreach from Haldon, encouraging capacity building with the learning community. Higher input products such as the Forest Experience at Sherwood include den-building, fire making, outdoor cooking and other activities leading to an OCN recognised qualification. Participants need to build their own shelter over a 6 day course and spend a great deal more time in the woods than on a single one day visit.



In addition to the well-established and extremely popular programmes, new products continue to be developed at some settings. Development of new products and markets varies across the country according to available resources and the abilities and interests of local staff.

Where new activities are developed they are outstripped by demand and resources to deliver. Long-term, in-depth products such as Forest School, careers development, GCSE studies and A Level research are being used as a means to extend the range of activities beyond traditional delivery.

Curriculum-based activities such as science, geography and the wider personal, social and health outcomes are delivered through a host of mechanisms. These include: on-site led visits; on-site self-led visits; Forest School; educational queries; Vocational Skills development; outreach and community programmes and those delivered through partnerships. Individuals, families, less formal groups and children also benefit from a range of informal learning initiatives, such as special events and on-site interpretation. Development of products to serve the emerging 14-19 Diplomas has yet to begin in earnest.

Feedback from our staff has identified the need for quality Forestry Commission teaching materials. Many of our existing resources are produced locally which has the strength of being very individual. However, the quality is often lower than can be expected of a national organisation. There is a great deal of repetition when producing materials across the country and often within the same unit. The quality of the learning message is often reduced by the lack of professional quality material.

## What next?

All Districts should develop and present local strategies and delivery plans to a consistent standard. This will allow for local implementation which can be measured and compared nationally.

For this to happen we recognise we need to do more in the following areas:

- better data collection, management and reporting;
- allocation of sufficient time to generate new and targeted programmes;
- develop new and lasting relationships with local schools and education establishments to foster long-term benefits for individual learners;
- develop proactive and targeted approaches to local schools, education establishments and communities;
- the development of consistent, high quality resource material, that supports ETWF while reflecting local demand and curricula need.

## The Challenges

We have evidence from our teams that the demand for education and learning services is growing at a rate that far outstrips our current capacity to deliver. Therefore Districts will need to take steps to improve how we deliver the service to meet this growing demand without losing the quality of provision.

Feedback from our Education Staff suggests that they would benefit from greater use of networking, both with each other and with our partner organisations. With 36% of delivery carried out by generalist or non-education specialists this is seen as vital in generating new ideas, moving towards consistent approaches and improving standards. Consistency should also recognise local distinctiveness and unique conditions while at the same time achieving national and regional goals.



Feedback also suggests that a sizeable minority of our staff do not see a valued, long-term career path with the Forestry Commission for specialist education posts. This is reflected in the high turnover of staff seeking a further career outside the Forestry Commission. Specialist posts are often not replaced and duties are absorbed into generalist roles. A team with clear focus and responsibilities is required. Staff need professional recognition and development (both personal and career). A strategy for local delivery, which is agreed by those delivering it, is essential for a robust Education and Learning Service fit to meet the challenges ahead.

There is pressure to widen the remit of our services to deal with more varied audiences, whilst continuing to provide a quality service and maintain or increase numbers of participants. We will rely more on partnerships such as the Forest Education Initiative and other projects to be able to deliver these growing areas. The Forestry Commission will have to learn to 'come out of the woods' and go into the communities it wants to reach.

Opportunities for Education and Learning Service participation in a national Affiliation Scheme currently under development, should present themselves in the near future. This could allow schools and community groups to sign up to a more formal agreement with Forestry Commission England for longer-term relationships.

## The Journey we need to take

With focus on value for money we will also need to introduce a more robust system of monitoring and evaluation. The Monitoring and Evaluation System must measure both the quantitative and qualitative impacts of the Education and Learning Service and how it meets the aims of our participants. We must ensure that a balance is always struck between the need to maintain numbers of people accessing our service and the quality of their learning experience. Local Education Strategies will be produced and national targets will be set from these.

For monitoring and evaluation purposes a greater awareness of the separation between programmes designed primarily for recreation, education and community activities will need to be understood. Above all the M&E System must prove we are communicating what we say we are and that the E&L Service is making a difference. Measuring what we do and achieve will be reported against agreed Learning Outcomes and the overall objectives.

## Learning Outcomes

1. Increase in knowledge and understanding about trees, woods and forests.
  - People will understand more about trees, woods and forests, their ecology and their importance to life.
2. Evidence of enjoyment, inspiration and creativity increasing people's use of forests.
  - Learning will help people to enjoy forests and inspire them to visit and use outdoor spaces or to get involved in their local woods.
3. Increase in skills for everyday life.
  - Woodlands will be used as a setting for people to develop their skills for everyday life such as literacy and numeracy, co-operation and communication.
4. Change in attitudes or values towards trees and the environment helping people to impact less on the planet.
  - Through trees, woods and forests, people will understand their impact on the planet and take steps to modify their behaviour to protect the Earth's resources.
5. Evidence of activity or modification of behaviour, which will help improve society, local communities and the environment locally and globally.
  - Woodlands will be used to help people understand about their role in society to help reduce anti-social behaviour and increase people's positive contribution to their community.

Our Learning Outcomes were developed from work on generic learning outcomes by The Research Centre for Museums and Galleries for the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries (MAL).

As a first step for delivery of this Strategy, Key Development Areas have been identified and agreed by the Education Staff Development Network and the Forest Enterprise England Management Board. It was recognised that not all KDAs would be equally appropriate in every area. It will however, be important to demonstrate that any KDA not achieved was due to local circumstances and then identify where possible future developments could be made to meet them.

Each of our delivery units should, through Local Education Strategies and Delivery Plans, set their own targets for how they will meet the Key Development Areas. This may be achieved across their whole delivery area rather than trying to meet them on each individual site. The delivery area will vary locally between region-wide delivery, several separate settings under a single cost centre or through area based partnerships such as Community Forests or Growth Areas. Local strategies should identify these distinctions.

## Key Development Areas

1. Our role as facilitators of education visits for example through self-led resources, teacher training and local capacity building
2. Providing led educational visits for schools and other groups
3. Developing expertise, for example knowledge and understanding of trees through work at the National Arboretum, Forest Apprenticeship schemes, attendance at seminars and exhibitions and through high quality publications, materials and web-based resources.
4. Working with partnerships, including the Forest Education Initiative (FEI) and local education and training partnerships.
5. Engaging with new woodland communities, Community Forests, the National Forest and where land has been regenerated to new community woodlands in programmes such as Newlands and Growth Areas.
6. Embracing new delivery programmes, for example Forest School and 14-19 Diplomas.
7. Delivering a quality service to individuals from disadvantaged or excluded sections of society as well as to people from other backgrounds.

To meet the Key Development Areas there may need to be a shift in emphasis in work. The challenge will be to maintain and even increase the number of people participating in some form of led visit while also increasing activity in the other areas. All of this while maintaining the highest possible quality across the Service.

This is likely to require some adaptation of existing programmes and ceasing activities that do not meet the education and learning priorities of the ETWF delivery plan:

- the role of trees, woods and forests in mitigating the effects of climate change;
- wood as a sustainable material, including wood fuel;
- trees, woods and forests as functioning and sustainable ecosystems.

To meet a national and consistent level of delivery, teaching resources will need to be developed accordingly. Additionally there is likely to be a training and development need for the team to meet the challenges ahead. Opportunities for personal and professional development will have to be built into the service.

Education and Learning staff will form a team through their Staff Development Network and will be fully engaged in the development of resources and programmes to meet the themes of England's Trees, Woods and Forests and wider government Learning Outside the Classroom targets. Smaller themed working groups will be established to develop ideas and feedback to the whole ESDN. The work of the team will be promoted through local and national outlets to ensure that the Education and Learning team are recognised at the highest levels of FC policy making as a vital part of delivery for sustainable forestry, land management and species protection.

# Appendix

## Definition of terms used in this document

**Education and Learning Services** – Forestry Commission England’s national and local<sup>1</sup> delivery mechanism. *Education* is input, being activities where the primary aim is the delivery of information to increase understanding, knowledge or skills, or change behaviour through direct contact, materials or interpretation. *Learning* is an outcome, being an increase in skills and knowledge, or change in behaviour or attitude as a result of education but more commonly through self led or facilitated activities and might include interpretation.

**Recreation Services** – Forestry Commission England activities including leading groups or providing facilities for self led activities where the activity is primarily for the purpose of outdoor recreation, health and well being. There might be an element of *learning* but the activity is not principally *education* (both as defined above).

**Community Services** – Forestry Commission England activities specifically to encourage and engage communities to use FC and Partner services. Primarily focussed on facilitating and attracting people to participate in the Education and Recreation services. May also develop links between communities and FC Staff responsible for land management, recruitment and employment, Grants and Licences and also provide opportunities for volunteering.

The **Forest Education Initiative (FEI)** - is a GB partnership consisting of the Forestry Commission, Field Studies Council, ConFor, BTCV, Groundwork, Tree Council, Timber Trade Federation and England's Community Forests. The partnership aims to increase young people's understanding and enjoyment of timber, trees and forest environments and the important role these play in sustainable lifestyles. At a local level FEI works through its network of 30 plus cluster groups. These are independent groups, managed within their local communities and attuned to local needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Could be Public forest estate, partners woods, private woods etc.