

Forestry Commission, East of England.
Forest School Woodland Improvement Grant Challenge 2007/08.
Progress report.

1. Forest School East¹ is an initiative to help Forest Schools develop in the East of England, giving participants in the region the opportunity to explore and learn in their local environment.
2. This is supported by the Forestry Commission's Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) Challenge Fund. The WIG offers private woodland owners, schools, sport, youth, environmental charities and other organisations the opportunity to apply for a capital grant which will support setting up a Forest School site.
3. Forest School East also offers training for teachers to investigate and lead their own Forest Schools. This is supported by the Green Light Trust; an environmental charity based in Suffolk that offers training in the region allowing participants to train and learn in their local environment.
4. The Forestry Commission East England Conservancy secured £100,000 Challenge funding for Forest Schools in the East of England for two years. Funding is being used to support the infrastructure and has included items such as:
 - Wet weather gear
 - Gates
 - Fencing
 - Training
 - Transport
 - First Aid equipment
 - Kelly kettles and potato peelers
5. The Challenge was promoted through the press, through the Forest School East Forum and by working with Schools, and NGOs
6. For the second year of the grant (2007/8) we received 24 applications, seeking funding for approx. £91,000. Applications ranged from individual schools, environmental charities, NGOs and Local Education Authorities. A judging panel of Forestry Commission and independent members judged all applications and approved 23 schemes, awarding £56,000.
7. Applications were of an extremely high standard. These included provision of Forest School sessions to school children, youth groups, excluded children, special schools, transition groups (pupils who are identified as requiring extra support to prepare for Secondary School) and a SEN project directly targeted at children with Special Educational Needs. As examples, three case studies are provided in **Annex 1**.
8. Geographically, we received at least one application from the 6 counties within the East of England and one application from the unity boundary of Peterborough ensuring an even spread of Forest Schools in our region.

¹ www.forest-schools-east.org

11. As this is a pilot, it is important that we carry out a full evaluation to enable the mainstreaming of funding for Forest Schools. The independent evaluation will focus on the marketing of the grant, the scheme process, outputs & outcomes, wider benefits and the cost and value of developing this specific grant. The evaluation will be complete in July 2007.
12. A Forest School East forum has established. The first forum was held in February and was attended by last years successful WIG applicants and potential second year applicants. The forum will provide a platform for sharing best practise, discussing issues and progressing Forest School East.
13. The Forest School East website will be further developed to support the needs of Forest School Practitioners in our region. The website will contain up-to-date information on Forest Schools and a forum where practitioners can share best practise.
14. After two successful years of Forest School East work is being done to promote the programme to regional partners. Information on Forest School East has been provided to the Government Office for the East of England – who are carrying out a mapping exercise on behalf on DFES. They have particular interest in Forest School East as an example of initiative and good practise as part if the Sustainable Schools programme. The East of England Regional Assembly are also keen to use Forest School East as a case study in the review of the Regional Social Strategy.

Sunny Singh
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Annex 1. Case studies

Applicant A. Peterborough City Council

Peterborough City Council in partnership with the Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Forest School East have been working for the past year to set a vision for 5 Forest School sites throughout Peterborough City. 2 members of the Peterborough City Council Early Years and Childcare Team are qualified Level 3 Practitioners and one member of the Wildlife Trust is undergoing training.

5 sites have been identified, each site links into a number of schools and pre-schools. It is estimated that 22 schools will benefit from Forest School sessions.

WIG funding will provide money for equipment such as waterproof coats and trousers, First Aid kits, water carriers and tarpaulins. WIG funding will also enable 3 primary schools teachers gain their Level 3 Forest School Practitioners Award.

Applicant B. Seevic College, Benfleet, Essex

Seevic College, Benfleet Essex is the largest XIth form college in the UK, located in the Thames Gateway. The Essential Skills section of the college have been successful in obtaining Forest School WIG Challenge funding to develop Forest School sessions for it's pupils.

The Essential Skills section works with students between 16 and 21 years old with special educational needs (SEN) and moderate learning difficulties many of whom have autism.

WIG funding will enable a member of the teaching staff to gain his Level 3 Practitioners Award and will provide equipment for the students to take part in Forest School sessions.

Applicant C. John Bunyan and John Ray Infant Schools

John Bunyan and John Ray Infant School are urban schools situated in the town of Braintree, Essex. For the past 6 months both schools have been working with Daws Hall Environmental Centre (last year successful WIG applicant with qualified Level 3 practitioners) who have been delivering Forest School sessions to pupils at both schools.

The Children at both schools have now attended 13 sessions run by Daws Hall at a local woodland. The teachers noted changes in the children's attitude toward learning, confidence and motivation.



The schools have been encouraged by the parents support to Forest Schools as historically the school has had great problems engaging parents' in their children's learning. The school is in a area of social deprivation; it has a high percentage of free school meals and of children with special educational needs. In March the school invited parents and carers to a Forest School session. All of the carers of all but two children attended Forest School.

The schools have seen the benefits of providing Forest School sessions and have been successful in obtaining WIG funding to allow 2 teachers to be Level 3 trained and 2 teaching assistants to gain their Level 1 qualification. The schools have also been successful in obtaining funding for items such as wet weather gear, bow saws, first aid kits, tarpaulins and ropes.