

FOREST SCHOOL SCOTLAND: An Evaluation

Part 1

[Linking the Learning: Formal Education](#)

Part 2:

[Means to an End: Benefits of Forest School](#)

**Report to Forestry Commission Scotland
and Forest Education Initiative Scotland**

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Executive Summary

This report is in two parts reflecting the two distinct elements of the research.

- using evidence from two case study Forest Schools, and other collated data, to analyse and match the benefits of Forest School to the Scottish Executive's educational priorities, the formal curriculum and related government initiatives.
- exploring the benefits Forest School can bring to Forestry Commission Scotland in a strategic and policy context, and giving advice informing its future involvement with Forest School.

The findings and recommendations presented are based on field observations and data collection, desk research, interviews of key stakeholders in Forest School and the Forestry Commission Scotland, and discussion with practitioners and Scottish Executive advisers within the education community.

Part 1 Linking the Learning provides background to both Forest School - its origins, development in the UK, results of previous evaluative research in England and Wales as to its key features and impacts - and the research aims, and evaluation methodology used in this study.

- Forest School (FS) provides an innovative and particular context for outdoor learning that is different from other outdoor education programmes.
- FS provides enjoyable, experiential learning, based on regular visits to the same area of local woodland/forest for an extended period of time (at least 8-12 weeks). The site is near to the school involved.

An overview of the Scottish Executive's educational priorities (National Priorities) and current curriculum review process (A Curriculum for Excellence 3-18) is given, and its significance explained.

- The curriculum review means now is a good opportunity for obtaining support for piloting innovative approaches to outdoor learning

The benefits Forest School brings to both the current, subject-based curricula and cross cutting themes, and core skills are explored systematically - covering the Early Years Curriculum 3-5, Curriculum 5-14 and Higher Still core skills.

- Forest School strengths lie in its ability to deliver significant learning outcomes relevant to the whole breadth of the curriculum.
- Forest School has particular benefits for health and enterprise outcomes, as well as sustainable development and citizenship. These can be built on, and used for leverage of support and funds, especially from other departments/agencies within the Scottish Executive.

A number of teaching and learning issues are raised. Their significance for any development of Forest Schools across Scotland is emphasised, including:

- the importance of regular sessions over a period of time;

- access for all, rather than the excluded few;
- exposure to risk in a safe environment - ability to assess and make informed choices;
- teacher education and professional development needs to give teachers confidence to take children out of doors;
- quality assurance through action research (if only formalised evaluation), integral to Forest School delivery.

Recommendations: Part 1 Seven recommendations are presented for consideration by those involved with taking forward Forest School, in Scotland, including:

- encouragement to 'think big' - key requirements of advocacy and promotion, and engagement with the Scottish Executive and Local Councils;
- building partnerships based on the educational, health and social inclusion benefits;
- encouraging effective use of resources through integrating Forest School with other programmes and continuing research
- providing practical support on potential curriculum linkages for practitioners.

Part 2: Means to an End presents the findings relating to the benefits Forest School brings to FCS through existing strategy and policy contexts.

- Forest School outcomes meet several objectives within the Scottish Forestry Strategy and the FCS Woods in and around Towns Initiative, particularly in relation to recreation, health and community benefits and involvement.
- The creation of a Forest School partnership to facilitate its development is mentioned as an action in the FCS Woods for Learning: Education Strategy.

An analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of existing Forest School structure and practice helps identify the key challenges, including:

- how best to ensure the regular visits to Forest School over an extended period of time;
- the benefit of mainstreaming Forest School, rather than targeting - resulting in exclusion rather than inclusion;
- facilitating approaches to teacher education and action research enabling the expansion of Forest School centres and quality assurance for the future.

Recommendations: Part 2 Five recommendations are presented, to inform FCS options for future involvement with, and investment in, Forest School including:

- the key roles FCS and FEIS may play;
- using leverage towards partnership and long term funding;
- establishing the worth of Forest School within FCS and wider Scottish education and social policy circles;

- provision of practical support and high quality leader training - ensuring sustainable, effective delivery.

FOREST SCHOOL SCOTLAND: An Evaluation

Part 1

Linking the Learning: Formal Education

1 Introduction

Forest School represents an alternative teaching environment that is complementary to the traditional indoor classroom, or school grounds, and provides an opportunity for active learning in a woodland environment. It involves children visiting a local wood on a regular basis and over an extended period of time.

Forest School is establishing itself in Scotland, and is facing increasing interest from education professionals. Already, evaluation in England and Wales¹ has shown how the Forest School experience builds a child's confidence, self-esteem and improves their social integration. There is also anecdotal evidence that there is a positive impact on a child's academic performance.

This study sought to gather evidence not only to reinforce the findings elsewhere, but specifically to identify the opportunities Forest School offers in linking with the curriculum and teaching and learning priorities in Scotland. From the findings, we seek to demonstrate the added value Forest School presents as a context for effective lifelong learning.

2 Background

What is Forest School

Forest School is literally that – a school in the forest. It enhances mainstream education, offering a different approach to curriculum delivery, being both enjoyable and child, not content, led.

Forest School is a carefully structured, experiential, fun vehicle for outdoor learning, delivered through firsthand experience in a natural habitat. Although many children taking part often see it as 'playtime' the teachers, carers and parents involved are aware very quickly that it is much more than 'just playing' in the woods.

Forest School originated in Sweden in the 1950s as an approach to learning about the natural world. A retired soldier started to teach young people about the natural environment through songs, stories and practical hands-on experience. By the 1980s Forest School was an integral part of Denmark's early years programme.

In 2003, the government of Hungary demonstrated not only a capacity for 'joined up thinking', but also a long-term commitment to the value of outdoor learning, particularly Forest School. Every child now has to be given the

¹ *Forest School Evaluation Project: A Study in Wales 2003 and Such enthusiasm – a joy to see: An evaluation of Forest School in England 2005*, Forest Research and nef (New Economics Foundation)

opportunity to attend Forest School at least once during their primary education. A six-year programme is funded (600M HUF) through equal contributions from, and a signed Co-operation Agreement between, the Ministries of Education; Environment and Water; Children, Youth and Sports, and the Prime Minister's Office.

In the UK, in 1995 a group of nursery nurses and their lecturers from Bridgwater College, Somerset, made a study tour to Denmark. They experienced the benefits of Forest School for themselves, and brought the concept and ideas back with them. From this starting point, Bridgwater College has looked at how Forest School could be applied within the context of childcare provision in their own Early Excellence Centre, and how to demonstrate and promote its benefits to a wider audience.

The concept of Forest School is developing, as its practice has spread across the UK. There is potential for Forest School to meet the needs of all ages and abilities. It has been found to be an especially powerful approach with client groups who do not normally succeed in the traditional classroom environment. These learners are often the ones more able to learn through practical activity (kinaesthetic), rather than reading or listening.

Not only has Forest School targeted the learners, but also the leaders and the quality of provision for learning. There is an expectation that any potential Forest School leader, will follow an extensive process of training and gaining practical experience, before reaching a qualification standard (e.g. BTEC, OCN). The issues of, for example, disclosure, risk assessment and Health and Safety, First Aid, site selection and ecological impact assessment, continued learning and development of leaders and helpers are all assimilated within this training.

Forest School across the UK (excluding Northern Ireland)

In **England**, Forest School is used extensively with early years, and is now expanding to include other client groups, including adults with health problems (substance abuse), parents and families.

In **Oxfordshire**, it is now a stipulation that any new nurseries must be located within 15 minutes drive of a Forest School. The teacher/nursery nurse is also often the Forest School leader.

In **Wales**, Forest School has been used with a wider range of client groups and woodland settings.

Since start up in 2000, over 30 Forest Schools are now active, putting Wales at the heart of this innovative approach. Forest School leaders include woodland owners, teachers, youth leaders, craftspeople and early years specialists.

In **Scotland**, over the past three years, Forest School has developed an emerging network of leaders. There have been five Leader training courses in Scotland, since 2003, with another eight planned for 2006-2007. Like Wales, a wide variety of client groups (e.g. Nursery, primary and secondary schools, mainstream and additional support learners, young adult alcohol abusers) has been serviced, in a range of woodland settings, with positive, demonstrable success².

Who promotes Forest School

Initially **Bridgwater College** provided the catalyst for developing Forest School in England and Wales. They provided the initial training for people interested in being Forest School leaders. Once a Forest School is established, its promotion becomes organic locally, through the leaders, schools and community involved.

At a national level, the **Forest Education Initiative (FEI)**³ has played a lead role in developing Forest School, and its supporting networks, in each country. The **Forestry Commission** has played an important funding role, especially of pilots. Each country has developed differently, meeting their individual needs and building on existing structures in ways most effective in their own situations.

In **Scotland**, a national **FEI Steering Group**⁴ has recently been formed, and is now chaired by Learning and Teaching Scotland. A **Scottish Forest School Steering Group** has also been set up. This is made up of Forest School leaders. At present it seeks to provide practical support and sharing of good practice through networking events for these local practitioners. Part 2 looks at the options for alternative structures for delivering Forest School in Scotland.

About the two Case Study Forest schools

The two case study Forest Schools are supported by Forestry Commission Scotland employed Rangers, training as Forest School leaders. Both Forest Schools generated evidence from their groups of children, parents and teachers - representing different educational settings and different parts of the country.

² Personal communication - South Lanarkshire Ranger Service report on a pilot with Phoenix House Trust at Chatelherault with a client group of young adults

³ FEI promotes shared learning through a network of local cluster groups. These are partnerships made up of representatives from local forest industries, forestry, community groups, environmental agencies and voluntary organisations. Forestry Commission is a lead partner and funder.

⁴ FEI Scotland Steering Group - Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Central Scotland Forest Trust, Eco schools, Field Studies Council, Grounds for Learning, LANTRA, Royal Scottish Forestry Society, Tree Council, Woodland Trust, Scottish Enterprise, SportScotland, FEI regional co-ordinators, Forest School Scotland co-ordinator

Pilot 1 At **Fauldhouse Forest School**, the children are in mainstream Primary education (P6 and P7) from two local Primary Schools (Falla Hill and St John's Roman Catholic). The children from the different schools attend alternate weeks, for a full day. The children walk to the Forest School along a woodland path from the village. The Forest School is situated in an area of red alder plantation within a larger conifer plantation belonging to the Forestry Commission. There are two Forest School leaders working with 25 children in each class, plus their teacher and often parent helpers.

Fauldhouse is a former mining village, with a population of around 5000 – both schools involved are the same size, around 200 pupils. The village is dominated by housing estates of former colliery and council ownership. It is in a Social Inclusion Partnership area, with high unemployment and other signs of social exclusion.

Pilot 2 At **Clunes Forest School**, there is a 'classroom' and equipment store, within mature forest plantation and scrubland. The young people attending come from Fort William, and its rural catchment. The children from 4 feeder Primary schools (P5-7) and Lochaber High School students (S4/5) attend on different days, for half a day each week. There is one Forest School leader, a learning support teacher and /or children's services worker, and around 6 pupils.

The children (P5-7) are selected from those with additional support needs within the local school cluster – particularly vulnerable, and/or demonstrating unsociable behaviour, and/or other learning or socialising difficulties.

Fort William is currently undergoing a process of regeneration, becoming the 'Outdoor Capital' of Scotland, and is largely dependent on the tourism industry. For employment, the area has relied on the aluminium smelter and paper manufacturing industries in the past. With their closure, there is now high unemployment and the town is dominated by housing estates, with little easy access into woodlands. The young people are transported to the Forest School by minibus.

Both Forest Schools started up in the 2004/05 school session and agreed to go forward in the 2005/06 session. At Fauldhouse Forest School sessions began in mid-September 2005 on the same site; while at Clunes Forest School sessions were delayed until mid-November 2005.

3 The Evaluation Process

Research aims

- Does Forest School in Scotland demonstrate similar impacts and outcomes to those observed in England and Wales?
- Where are the benefits of the Forest School approach best able to match the current and developing education priorities and curriculum outcomes in Scotland?

So far no research has looked at Forest School's relevance to curriculum linkages, in either England or Wales.

Research Approach and Methodology

The project had three phases, combining a supported, participatory, self-evaluation process, with a more traditional process of field observation, interviews and discussion. There was also a literature review and desk study. More detail on the methodology – see **Annex 1**

Phase one involved engaging with the two case study Forest Schools pre-selected for this study, and gaining the agreement and confidence of the Forest School leaders, teachers, carers and parents (where involved) in participating in a self-appraisal, or other approach. By discussion with those involved locally at each of the Forest Schools it was possible to set up:

- a self-appraisal approach at Fauldhouse.
- a self-evaluation scheme⁵ for the pupils and at Clunes.

The pro-forma charts were simple to use and did not require very long to complete after each session. The habit of reflection after each session was harder to establish and support, given the short time frame of the study. However, the opportunities provided by planned reflection were revealed to both leaders and teachers/carers.

Phase two involved the collection and/or analysis of:

- field observations,
- self evaluation record sheets leaders' and children's diaries,
- parent questionnaire responses,
- photographs and other anecdotal evidence were collated, including feedback discussions with the Forest School leaders, teachers, learning support and welfare professionals; the parents involved; the pupils themselves, key head teachers and Local Authority managers.

Phases 1 and 2 provided qualitative evidence to support, or otherwise, the research findings in Wales and England.

⁵ The RESPECT scheme also being piloted in England and Wales

Phase three involved a desk study and literature search to identify the potential curriculum links, be familiar with Forest School practice and previous evaluative research on Forest School.

Evidence was also drawn from discussion and correspondence with Learning and Teaching Scotland (Sustainable Development Education and Outdoor Education projects) and other education professionals, including those involved with individual initiatives e.g. Eco Schools, Active Schools, John Muir Award and outdoor education more widely.

All the evidence presented is qualitative and anecdotal. It needs to be followed up by a substantial research study. However, the findings are presented in good faith and form the basis of this report.

Key terms

Curriculum – means full range of learning opportunities provided within and beyond the school – covers formal and informal curriculum

Health – means physical, social, spiritual, mental and emotional well-being in relation to self, others and the environment

Learner – generally used in context of child or young person

Participant – generally used in the context of child, young person or adult

Practitioner – refers to professional educators – teachers, leaders, other contracted specialists

4 What we know so far

The fundamental value of outdoor education for personal growth, social interaction and environmental awareness is well documented, and simply summarised by Geoff Cooper in his book *Outdoors with young people: a leader's guide to outdoor activities, the environment and sustainability* 1998.

What we are concerned with here is identifying what the factors are that make Forest School different in its approach and, therefore, valuable as another tool in the outdoor education toolbox.

Research at Helsinki University (Bergstromm) has found that young children need outdoor space to achieve optimum brain development – this finding has already led to a change in regulations on outdoor provision for private nurseries in Scotland. Too much order in a child's life has also been found to inhibit some children's learning.
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The reports *Forest School Evaluation: A Study in Wales* 2003 and *An evaluation of Forest School in England* 2005 identified and refined the features of Forest School that contribute to its particular success – specific settings, activities, management and support.

Table 1-1 takes the features, summarised below (**Box 1**), and their benefits, and matches the insights provided by those involved with our two Case Studies.

In the same reports, they used the findings from the self-appraisal approach to explore and refine the personal and social impacts Forest School had on the participants – young people and adults. The key outcomes are described below in **Table 1-2**.

BOX 1 : PRINCIPLES AND KEY FEATURES of FOREST SCHOOL

- Uses a local woodland (therefore 'wild') setting
- Organised and run by qualified leaders
- Regular, frequent contact in the same setting over a significant period of time
- Provides freedom to explore using multiple senses/intelligences
- Learning can be linked to the curriculum
- Provides a low pupil : adult ratio
- Helps children to appreciate, understand and care for our natural heritage

" When my daughter came home with the news that Falla Hill primary school were planning to become involved with a Forest School pilot, I was immediately sceptical regarding the educational value of such an initiative.not only was I concerned about the educational merit of the pilot, but also the possibility of K returning home with missing fingers or pyromaniac tendencies. ... I couldn't have been more wrong. From the beginning I have witnessed the eagerness in K to become involved in the activities and her excitement in the build up to the next "Forest day".

Both my wife and I are firmly of the view that this scheme is very beneficial to the children and feel that the opportunity should be given to other children as part of their curriculum. We've seen first hand the benefits and my initial concerns are more than resolved. Plus, it's given me the opportunity to act like a big kid again! Parent helper, Fauldhouse Forest School

Table 1-2: A summary of the key Forest School outcomes

FOREST SCHOOL OUTCOMES	
Impact	Characterised by:
Confidence	Self-confidence and self-belief that comes from children having freedom, time and space to learn, grow and demonstrate their independence.
Social Skills	Increased awareness of the consequences of actions on other people, the acquired ability to undertake activities with others either by sharing tools and tasks, or by taking part in co-operative play
Language and Communication	Development of more sophisticated uses of both written and spoken language (vocabulary & syntax), prompted by visual and other sensory experiences of participating in Forest School. Conversation stimulated and inspired by experience between children who are otherwise reluctant to engage in meaningful dialogue with peers or adults.
Motivation and Concentration	Keeness to participate in exploratory learning and play activities; ability to focus on specific tasks and concentrate for extended periods of time. At home /school display positive attitude to Forest School and learning generally
Physical Skills	Development of physical stamina and gross motor skills – skill and coordination allowing free and easy movement around Forest School – as well as fine motor skills – effective use of tools and ability to make structures and objects (play and creative art projects)
Knowledge and Understanding	Respect for the environment and an interest in their natural surroundings, making observations and insights into natural phenomena – seasons, light and weather, wildlife. This can be reflected in academic achievement
New Perspectives	Teachers/leaders gain new insight into pupils innate skills and learning styles, informing later activity and assessment; develop different relationships as children see teachers in a different setting learning about and coping with challenges the same as them. Learn to trust each other more.
Ripple Effects beyond Forest School	Teachers gain new experience and skills to inform their teaching practice and adapt outdoor learning approaches. Enthusiasm of children can be taken home – change to out of school routines and behaviour – parents take them out more. Parental interest and experience can change their perception of e.g.risk taking and learning benefits in being outdoors in any weather.

5 Curriculum Linkages

"Debate showed that people want a curriculum that fully prepares today's children for adult life in the 21st century, be less crowded and better connected and offer more choice and enjoyment.

Our aspiration is to enable all children to develop their capacities as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society....

A Curriculum for Excellence is fully in harmony with the National Priorities and will provide an important impetus to achieving our vision for children and young people - that all children and young people should be valued, by being safe, nurtured, achieving, healthy, active, included, respected and responsible."

Ministerial Foreword to *A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE)*, The Curriculum Review Group

There will be no better time to promote the opportunities and benefits Forest School presents within the education community. The Scottish schools curriculum is currently under fundamental scrutiny and redevelopment (the *A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE)* process). It is moving more towards process based, learner oriented learning, with less emphasis on its knowledge content. The implementation of ACE has profound implications for teaching and learning processes and for the initial and continuing professional development of teachers.

This analysis seeks to illustrate the overarching benefits and potential Forest School can contribute to delivering both existing and proposed curriculum priorities - particularly through the cross cutting threads of health, sustainable development and outdoor education.

So long as ACE develops in this way the ethos of FS provides a close match to its purpose. A key principle on which Forest School delivery is based, is the importance of individual, learner centred, and directed, learning. Too rigid a 'curriculum jacket', particularly subject based, may prevent the development of the intended outcomes. One of Forest School's strengths, as with all outdoor education, is the flexibility of its programme on any day. Thus, able to adapt to any weather, spotting of natural finds and individual and group moods.

The skill and experience of the teachers and leaders is crucial to the success of optimising the outputs and outcomes of Forest School in curriculum terms. There also has to be effective lines of communication

connecting and empowering all those involved with enhancing the learning of all participants.

Most important, and currently lacking in both case studies, is the time and space for teachers/other professionals and Forest School leaders to discuss sessions in advance and to reflect on what has happened. This enables better planning - the teachers able to identify potential curriculum links, and for leaders to consider how best to build in those curriculum links, and into which activities.

In collecting and presenting evidence to support the hypothesis that Forest School can meet many of the Scottish Executive's priorities for education and the curriculum, it is acknowledged that no aspect of a child's education and development, or teaching and learning, takes place in a vacuum.

The possibility of using the Forest School approach as a teaching and learning tool will depend on the particular situation of a school - its geographical location, size, teacher skills and attitudes, and other resources and local support available. In Shetland there may be limited scope due to lack of woodland, however, there may be opportunity to transfer some of the principles to a different habitat offering similar wild character and challenges e.g. sand dunes and beaches. There is also debate between practitioners as to whether it is important for Forest School to be beyond the school grounds and/or in woodland. Some schools may already have suitable, mature woodland growing in their school grounds, and many urban schools are some distance from a suitable wood/forest.

Forest School is a useful tool that can be used to achieve many outcomes, relating to inclusive lifelong learning - knowledge and understanding, skills, and values and dispositions - in a different, stimulating, enjoyable, healthy and experiential way. The secret of its success is in the synergy between the physical woodland setting and the presentation and ethos behind the activities - the sum is more than the parts.

6 The Analysis

Table 1-3 illustrates the curriculum audit pathway used. The findings and supporting evidence are summarised below. The Scottish Executive educational priorities are set within what are known as the **National Priorities**, which are revised every 5 years. Delivery is through the formal curriculum, currently comprising Early Years curriculum 3-5, Curriculum 5-14 (P1-S2), Standard Grade (S3-S4) (being subsumed by Higher Still Access and Intermediate courses), and Higher Grade and Advanced Higher [CSYS] (S5-S6) (now within the National Qualifications structure – Advanced Higher and SVQs).

The analysis covers 3 parts:

- **Overview** – a review of the existing **National Priorities (1-5)** and the aspirations for **A Curriculum for Excellence 3-18**.
- **Subject Curricula** – a review of existing **Early Years Curriculum 3-5**, **Curriculum 5-14** subject national guidelines and **Higher Still** core skills, since ACE is still in the early stages of development.
- **Cross Cutting Themes and Scottish Executive Initiatives** – a review of existing cross cutting themes and Scottish Executive Initiatives such as health/Active Schools, ICT, personal and social development, citizenship, and enterprise in education/ Determined to Succeed. Environmental and development education have both largely been merged within sustainable development education, in turn until recently, located within Citizenship.

In taking the opportunity to review the entire school curriculum, Ministers have recently set up a number of special review groups looking at 'new' opportunities. The two relevant to this study are *Outdoor Connections – taking learning outdoors* (outdoor education) and *Sustainable Development Education*. Both are managed by Learning and Teaching Scotland. The significance of Forest School to these initiatives is also reviewed under the last section.

Overview

The current **A Curriculum for Excellence** process is looking at the entire schooling age span, from age 3 to 18. The curriculum 3-18 will continue to match the needs of a set of **National Priorities**.

EXISTING NATIONAL PRIORITIES 2000-2005

In the discussion accompanying the promotion of the National Priorities for Education, Ministerial support was given in the detail of delivery:

- Importance in school education to balance academic achievement with foundation and life skills
- Need for pupils to learn respect for themselves and others, citizenship and principles of sustainable development, and about learning how to learn – raising the self confidence, skills and aspirations of young people

- Importance of joint working with other agencies - ensuring the education of the whole child - supporting teachers and enhancing school environments. This sounds like a promotion of 'process' rather than 'content'.

Forest School delivers on all the above. .

Attention to the process of lifelong learning is one of Forest School's strengths. Fundamentally, all the evidence points to the fact that taking part in Forest School raises the self-esteem and self-confidence of many children, and this provides important ingredients for the motivation to learn.

Motivation and success are common outcomes of outdoor learning - an upward spiral results - motivation also affects self- esteem, self- respect, and confidence, and in turn effects improved attitudes to others and the environment.

"My child has become more independent, with a lot more confidence. We can now suggest a walk without a major battle, unlike before. Loves the outdoors now. It has become the best day of the week."

P7 parent, Falla Hill Primary

NATIONAL PRIORITIES IN EDUCATION Scottish Executive

- **Achievement and Attainment**

To raise standards of educational attainment for all in schools, especially in the core skills of literacy and numeracy, and to achieve better levels in national measures of achievement, including examination results.

- **Framework for Learning**

To support and develop the skills of teachers, the self discipline of pupils and to enhance school environments so that they are conducive to teaching and learning.

- **Inclusion and Equality**

To promote equality and help every pupil benefit from education, with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, and to Gaelic and other lesser used languages.

- **Values and Citizenship**

To work with parents to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society, and to teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society.

- **Learning for Life**

To equip pupils with the foundation skills, attitudes and expectations necessary to prosper in a changing society, and to encourage creativity and ambition.

National Priority 1 - Achievement and Attainment

To raise standards of educational attainment for all in schools, especially in the core skills of literacy and numeracy, and to achieve better levels in national measures of achievement, including examination results.

"One of the boy's teachers had expressed concern about him missing a maths lesson. We used the building of a willow hut to impress upon the children the use of maths in the field. We measured the circumference and diameter of our hut and calculated how many willow stems we would require if we planted at 200cm intervals. The boys made the holes to plant the willows. The problems we met with rocks meant we had to solve problems to keep as close to the plan as possible. The result was a full circle of willows drawn into the centre, with willows woven horizontally through the verticals."

Children's Services Worker, Clunes Forest School

Children lead very sheltered lives today and often have limited life experiences. Lifestyles have separated people generally from the natural world, and even in rural areas, children may not go out into local woodland or countryside, as they did in the past. Although Forest School may not directly require pupils to read, or to calculate equivalent fractions, the child's experiences and activity in the forest provides a context for comparison, and material to work with. They have something to write about in their diary. They can see the importance of accurate measurement in cutting equivalent lengths of timber for their den.

"On sledging I also learned that if you keep your legs up you will go faster. Marty went the fastest, Darren got the furthest. We had great fun."

P6 pupil, Falla Hill PS

It is well known that we learn better when we are enjoying ourselves. When asking what makes Forest School different to school for learning, a constant response from adults, parents and children is "*because it's more fun*", or alternatively "*it's enjoyable, it's not like school*".

"Although M is severely dyslexic and it is difficult to read his writing, he is always keen to write up his Forest School Diary, he has so much he wants to write about!" **Class Teacher, Fauldhouse Forest School**

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence suggesting the motivation to learn at Forest School is greater. This is because the learning provided is meaningful and in the 'concrete', providing tangible results. Activities are offered as achievable and often open ended tasks

The children benefit from feeling that great sense of achievement in completing a task, and can transfer this back to the classroom.

There is now research evidence proving outdoor learning improves academic achievement as well as physical, social, and emotional development - the combination of confidence, high motivation, enjoyment and fresh air seem important ingredients for raising academic achievement. (ref from ALavery)

National Priority 2 - Framework for Learning

To support and develop the skills of teachers, the self discipline of pupils and to enhance school environments so that they are conducive to teaching and learning.

Forest School is highly structured in the learning it facilitates while appearing altogether playful. Forest School gives teachers, leaders, and other practitioners, new perspectives and understanding of the children, as they observe them in a different environment. It provides an opportunity in seeing 'the whole child', rather than only the 'classroom portion'. This enables particular strengths to be picked up on and built on back in the classroom, or on the next visit.

"The routine of Forest School each week for half a day, and within that time is important for the Primary boys at Clunes Forest School -it keeps the boundaries comfortable. The most troublesome boy has difficulty in obeying simple instructions, with low self-esteem and high independence. He would walk off...this was a major safety risk...became an issue he needed to think about in relation to others in the group. Another day he went to go off and lead others off as well. I called him back and fully expected him to whinge and protest, but he looked me right in the eye, took on board the safety issue and returned without another word. I take encouragement from his small success".

Children's Services worker, Clunes Forest School

Several children at Falla Hill PS mentioned how they had also come to view their teachers in a different light, and of trust in their leaders and peers.

The teachers expressed feelings of renewed motivation, satisfaction in learning new skills, and a better understanding of using the outdoors for children's learning, from sharing in Forest School.

Parents and carers can also gain new insights as the children demonstrate or tell them about what they have done and become more aware of.

"It's refreshing (to see) where as parents we have reservations about our children playing in the woods and worried about their safety that the children are given this opportunity to learn, show that they can be responsible, and more importantly do this while having fun. I know that my daughter K would never have had the opportunity to build 'a den', as I did when I was a child, otherwise."
P7 Parent, Falla Hill Primary School

Wee J surprised me. He is the smallest and generally coped less well working with the others. But I found he is a 'grafter' - he didn't stop until the task was finished. Cutting up the brashings for the fire, he was cutting away, concentrating hard, working out how best to cut them up. Some really big pieces were really difficult for him, but he solved the problem, and sometimes it was very hard work using those loppers. He is well coordinated and enjoys being physical."
Children's Services Worker, Clunes Forest School.

National Priority 3 - Inclusion and Equality

To promote equality and help every pupil benefit from education, with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, and to Gaelic and other lesser used languages.

Forest School is adaptable for most ages and abilities. It is particularly useful in tackling learning and social inclusion issues – learning and behavioural difficulties, cultural and language differences. However, it is not so well suited for use with children who have physical and mobility difficulties, in a school context. Generally, there are just too many hazards in the forest for these children, given the number of visits involved.

L's family life continues to impact on his behaviour at school, but his Children's Services Worker wrote this about his progress through Clunes Forest School :
"L decided to refer himself back into school, as he felt he had gathered enough confidence in his self control to allow him to take maths and French with the rest of his classmates.....I have worked with this boy in a lot of social skills settings and I saw him come into his own at the Forest School. It gave him time to think about his future."

S was observed at Fauldhouse Forest School over 3 visits. She had been selected for observation because she was very much a loner, and had English as a second language, which she had learnt only for two years.

On her first visit her teacher records 'no change' for either low self-esteem or motivation to learn, but she did finally join a group to build a den. Para
On the second visit, the teacher records 'dramatic change' in self-esteem and confidence.

continued

That day the group had been shown how to light a fire and to select suitable sticks as fuel. S had joined in with enthusiasm and 'taken charge' watching over the fire, explaining to the other children as she did it, that in Pakistan where she came from they cooked using wood fires and she had helped her Grannie many times- she was confident in managing a wood fire, and demonstrated to the others her pride in her skill compared to the others. The other children listened and were amazed themselves at her skill.

On the third visit, some of the other girls asked S to be in their group, something they hadn't done before. They had recognised her good fire building skills. This really boosted S's self- confidence and willingness to work with others.

'Dramatic change' was recorded once again, recognising further improvements in confidence and willingness to work co-operatively with others. **Observer analysis**

National Priority 4 - Values and Citizenship

To work with parents to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society, and to teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society.

Many of the outcomes of Forest School for individuals may not be evident for several years. There are other outcomes that may impinge on the wider community without direct contact

It is probably no coincidence that during the time that Forest School has been running in the Fauldhouse Forest there has been much less dumping and no deliberate fire lighting.

Some Fauldhouse Forest School children recognised that they had learnt:

"how to be a responsible person"

"that my actions effect the environment"

"about forests in Scotland and how important they are"

"to work with people I would not normally work with"

Eco Schools

The number of schools signed up for the **Eco Schools** programme is one of the Performance Indicators for *Values and Citizenship*, monitored by local authorities.

There are a number of schools that have adopted the deeper purpose and ethos of Eco Schools, and have been involved for several years. Some are looking for new challenges. The new Eco Schools **Biodiversity Unit** recognises both this, and the need to involve the wider community. It enables an opportunity to take sustainable lifestyles and lifelong learning, back to the home and beyond.

Forest school, based in a local woodland/plantation habitat, has considerable potential to be integrated into a school's Eco Schools **Biodiversity Action Plan**, making links between the local environment and wider community.

National Priority 5 - Learning for Life

To equip pupils with the foundation skills, attitudes and expectations necessary to prosper in a changing society, and to encourage creativity and ambition.

Forest School and its setting provides a host of opportunities to develop, experience and discuss a variety of life skills – health, recreation and leisure pursuits, work opportunities associated with woodlands and forest, global issues, citizenship and volunteering and more.

"Forest School has been of great benefit to my child. They are learning new skills every week that will be with them for life; things that we took for granted as kids." P7 Parent, Fauldhouse Forest school

A particular strength of many of the tasks and activities the children take part in is the need for problem-solving, and creative solutions. In addition, children are introduced to skills that will last a lifetime – nature watching, craft skills, using tools safely, and their horizons are widened.

A head teacher says of D, who has Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, *"He is impossible on a normal day, but at Forest School he has learned that there is something in the world for him, and acknowledges his medication is helping too. Forest School suits him well because he needs to move around and stretch. He has built good relationships with the adults and boys."* The Forest School leader also comments that D hardly spoke in the early sessions and gave little eye contact. *"He was amazed that this was a place he can come out with school time. He has learnt all the names of the trees and how to plant and care for young seedlings. He is now very talkative and interacts well with the other boys, and is always very polite."* **Observer analysis**

A CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE (3-18) from 2007

"A Curriculum for Excellence sets out a very ambitious agenda for shifting the balance of the curriculum from a highly content-based system to one which concentrates on outcomes for young people"

Peter Peacock, Minister for Education and Young People, 2005

The recent curriculum consultation, leading to the Scottish Executive Education Department's publication *"a curriculum for excellence"* (2004), outlines the aspiration for every young person in Scotland – to develop four capacities. Here we give 'snapshots' of how Forest School may contribute to this curriculum. How it effectively complements the contribution by the school, family and community to every young person's learning.

FOREST SCHOOL AND A CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE 3-18

Successful Learners

With

- Enthusiasm and motivation for learning
- Determination to reach high standards of achievement
- Openness to new thinking and ideas
-

And able to

- Use literacy, communication and numeracy skills
- Use technology for learning
- Think creatively and independently
- Learn independently and as part of a group
- Make reasoned evaluations
- Link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations

Forest School provides a setting that is 'wild but safe'. It exposes learners to a different environment and challenges them with new perspectives of their local area. Here children can explore freely, together or independently. It sets learning in a different context. For some children, learning suddenly becomes fun and new knowledge and ideas of interest.

They can:

- *engage in a range of practical activities, think creatively and carry out small achievable and/or 'real' tasks.*
- *explore new ways of communicating and reflecting, and connecting and applying their knowledge and skills, including language and numeracy, to real problems.*
- *explore the safe use of tools and taking risks e.g. making and managing a fire for cooking on, finding out the way others work and earn a living in forestry.*

Low achievers in a classroom can suddenly blossom and outshine those more academic, less kinaesthetic, learners. These children are now recognised as high achievers, and are viewed differently by their peers and teachers, as well as by themselves.

Confident Individuals

With

- Self respect
- A sense of physical, mental, and emotional well-being
- Secure values and beliefs
- Ambition

And able to

- Relate to others and manage themselves
- Pursue a healthy and active lifestyle
- Be self aware
- Develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world
- Live as independently as they can
- Assess risk and take informed decisions
- Achieve success in different areas of activity

Confident Individuals continued

Forest school helps children develop confidence and become more independent. As they gain confidence, this can impact on children's self-awareness, self-esteem, and general emotional and mental well-being

At Forest School children are active a lot of the time and their motor skills and stamina visibly improve over time. It may provide the basis of a lifelong outdoor hobby, or healthier lifestyle for all the family.

Those unfamiliar with woodlands and green spaces can become confident in using them. A sense of place and ownership develop, and concepts of high standard, quality and ambition are nurtured e.g. through competition between den builders.

Children taking part naturally learn to assess risk and are encouraged to make sensible and informed decisions about how to deal with unfamiliar or unpredictable situations. E.g. by exploring unknown territory, climbing trees, using tools to make dens

Responsible Citizens

With

- Respect for others (and the natural/cultural heritage)
- Commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life

And able to

- Develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland's place in it
- Understand different beliefs and cultures
- Make informed choices and decisions
- Evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues
- Develop informed, ethical views of complex issues

At Forest School children meet new people and work with their teachers in a different setting, building trust and giving each other new perspectives

They experience:

- *a range of different and new situations, hear people expressing different opinions and in turn are asked to develop and share/test their own, in a non-threatening setting - in this way developing informed and ethical viewpoints.*
- *forests firsthand, learning about the forest industry in Scotland, the uses of forests and timber, and explore the role of the forest in the natural world.*
- *sharing in activities demonstrating care and respect for others (adults and children) and for the natural environment, and see how they benefit from this themselves.*
- *meeting and learning about other people and organisations involved in caring for and managing forests and why they do it.*
- *practical, conservation activities and seeing how they can be involved by contributing their time and new skills as volunteers.*

Effective Contributors

With

- An enterprising attitude
- Resilience
- Self-reliance

And able to

- Communicate in different ways and different settings
- Work in partnership and in teams
- Take the initiative and lead
- Apply critical thinking in new contexts
- Create and develop
- Solve problems

Forest School helps children develop their team working skills and also learn to become more independent thinkers. At all times they learn to look out for the well being of each other and of the environment around them.

Most activities are carried out alone, in pairs or small groups, where different roles are tested out, and individuals can take the initiative and /or learn by making mistakes.

They learn:

- *to speak and share ideas with a range of adults and peers, developing their talking skills and vocabulary;*
- *to think positively and creatively to solve problems and cope with new situations*

Forest School occurs in all weathers (except very extreme and/or windy weather) and children have to adapt and persevere in less comfortable conditions. Over time they develop a physical and mental resilience (and sometimes enjoyment) to being out of doors in any weather.

Forest School nurtures an enterprising attitude both to self-reliance and making a living - the worth of timber/forest as a natural resource, or used for recreation or conservation.

Subject Curricula

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION 3-5 now to start of ACE (2007)

Forest School has been traditionally and successfully used with nursery schools and children in the early years age group 3-5. In England the majority of Forest Schools facilitate this age group. The Worcestershire Initiative Forest School partnership (County Council, National Grid Transco, Surestart [Early Years and Childcare initiative]) has produced an illustrated report *A Taste of Forest School in Worcestershire* that demonstrates the principles, aims, activities, areas of learning and outcomes of Forest School.

The benefits of Forest School to the Early Years are clear. See Table 1-4.

Table 1-4 Early Years 3-5

3-5 Curriculum Areas	Outcomes	Forest school contributes
Emotional, Personal and Social Development	<i>Forming positive relationships with other children and adults</i>	●
	<i>Making and expressing choices, plans and decisions</i>	●
	<i>Work co-operatively, take turns, share resources</i>	●
	<i>Care for the environment and other people in the community</i>	●
Communications and Language	<i>Pay attention to information and instructions from adults</i>	●
	<i>Use their own drawings and written marks to express ideas and feelings</i>	●
	<i>Use language for a variety of purposes</i>	●
Knowledge and understanding of the world	<i>Recognise patterns, shapes and colours in the world around them</i>	●
	<i>Be aware of change and its effects on them, and how to describe/measure time</i>	●
	<i>Develop an appreciation of natural beauty and a sense of wonder about the world</i>	●
	<i>Understand some properties of materials</i>	●
Expressive and Aesthetic Development	<i>Investigate and use a variety of media and techniques</i>	●
	<i>Express thoughts and feelings in pictures</i>	●
Physical Development and Movement	<i>Increasing fine movements</i>	●
	<i>Be safe in movement and using tools and equipment</i>	●

It is arguable that, if Forest School were applied as in Denmark for the Early Years - if such an initiative were available to every very young child in Scotland, whether many of the behavioural problems and learning difficulties faced later by Primary and Secondary Schools might be significantly diminished.

CURRICULUM 5-14 now to start of ACE (2007)

Forest School appears particularly effective with 8-12 year olds. During this period of their physical and emotional development, this age group particularly thrives on doing things together and being challenged physically.

The Curriculum 5-14 comprises national guidelines for **5 subject areas** (English Language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies – Society, Science and Technology, Expressive Arts, and Religious and Moral Education) and **3 cross curriculum themes** (Personal and Social Development, Health and ICT). In addition, there are other **cross cutting themes** schools are encouraged to encompass for which separate discussion papers, or action initiatives have been

introduced relevant to this research, including Citizenship, and Determined to Succeed (Enterprise in Education), Active Schools.

Table 1-5 looks at the 5 main subject areas, where it is identified Forest School has a significant contribution to make, or where it also may be useful, but more peripheral.

Table 1-5 Curriculum 5-14 Forest School contribution: significant ● peripheral ◆

5-14 Subject areas	Knowledge & Understanding	Skills	Dispositions
Language			
talking	●	●	●
listening	●	●	●
reading		◆	
writing		◆	
Mathematics			
Problem solving & enquiry	●	●	●
Information handling	◆	◆	
Number, money and measurement	●	●	●
Shape, position and movement	●	●	●
Environmental Studies			
Science – Earth and Space; Energy and Forces; Living things and processes of life	●	●	●
Social Subjects – people in past, place & society	●	●	●
Technology – Needs, resources, processes; Planning, creating, testing	●	●	●
Expressive Arts			
Art and Design	●	●	●
Drama	●	●	●
Music	●	●	●
Physical Education	●	●	●
Religious & Moral Education			
Christianity	◆		
Other World Religions	◆		
Personal Search – natural world, relationships and moral values, ultimate questions	●	●	●

In 2001 a circular on flexibility in the 5-14 curriculum was issued to schools. It encourages them to take more innovative and flexible approaches to the curriculum; identifying the need of the individual learner as being at the heart of the curriculum. This gives schools the all-clear to deviate from existing curriculum guidelines where a clear educational benefit for pupils results.

Forest School provides a perfect real life context for learning, and provides learners with the opportunity for making the links between subject areas - linking their thinking.

Forest School offers an approach, with time and space for individual learning styles to be recognised and nurtured. The carefully crafted sessions, activities and fun factor provide some learners with the purpose and motivation that is missing for them in the classroom. For others, the physical activity and practical hands on component is provided, that their learning style demands.

There are a myriad of ways just being out of doors, in a green woodland space, can inspire young people at every level of achievement.

HIGHER STILL now to start of ACE (2007)

Forest School can make a significant contribution to achieving the 5 Core Skills identified by the Higher Still programme - see **Table 1-6**.

Being realistic, given the examination pressures in S3-6, it is only likely that selected pupils will have the opportunity to take part, for example, low academic achievers, or those with additional support needs, as witnessed at Clunes Forest school. However, this is a divisive rather than an inclusive approach, with the inherent weakness of increasing the young person's feeling of being different and excluded, as a consequence.

There are other opportunities for engaging senior pupils (S5/6). By looking at the citizenship (volunteering)/ vocational opportunities Forest School can provide. Students could either train to be a leader/helper, or regularly attend a local Forest School voluntarily, as peer group mentors or helpers.

Table 1-6 Higher Still Core Skills FS contribution: significant ● peripheral ◆

Higher Still Cores Skills		Forest School contributes
Communication	<i>oral</i>	●
	<i>written</i>	◆
Numeracy	<i>Using graphs</i>	◆
	<i>Using numbers and measurement</i>	●

Problem Solving	<i>Critical thinking</i>	●
	<i>Planning and organisation</i>	●
	<i>Review and evaluation</i>	●
Information Technology	<i>Using computers and software</i>	◆
Working with others	<i>Working cooperatively</i>	●

Cross Cutting Themes and Scottish Executive Initiatives

The place of the cross cutting themes listed below is secure within the developing 3-18 structure. It is more likely that they will have greater importance than currently, because of their inherent 'connective' nature.

- **Personal and Social Development**
- **Citizenship** (including Sustainable Development Education in 5-14 context)
- **Enterprise in Education/Determined to Succeed**
- **Health Education/Health Promoting Schools**
- **Information and Communications Technology**
- **Outdoor Education /Active Schools⁶**
- **Sustainable Development Education** (3-18 context)

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

"Personal and social development is a fundamental aspect of the education of the whole child. It is essentially concerned with the development of life skills. All aspects of a child's experience at home, in school and outwith school contribute to personal and social development."

Curriculum 5-14 National Guidelines: Personal and Social Development

All the evidence from research on the outcomes of Forest School point towards the benefits it has for personal and social development, and how it helps nurture the whole child. (Forest Research/nef reports 2003 and 2005 – see references)

In many cases a school might help set up a Forest School for the opportunities to foster these benefits alone, other curriculum spin offs would be a bonus. In areas of social deprivation where there are multiple family problems and a pervasive atmosphere of 'failure', Forest School has much to offer in strengthening a positive attitude to health, lifestyle and learning. See **Table 1-7**.

⁶ Active Schools is also associated with Physical Education (encompassed within Expressive Arts) and Health Promoting Schools.

Table 1-7 Forest School and PSD Forest School contribution: significant •

5-14 PSD	Knowledge & Understanding	Skills	Dispositions
<u>Personal Development</u> Self Awareness – self respect, self control	•	•	•
Self Esteem – cope with challenges, confidence, making mistakes, helps learning, positive attitude	•	•	•
<u>Social Development</u> Inter-personal relationships - roles and relationships, opinions & values, tolerance, positive attitude	•	•	•
Independence and interdependence – tackle problems, seek help, making choices, assisting others, set & review personal goals	•	•	•

"We went sledging me and J was too scared to at first, but then we went together and then individually. It was brilliant we done it on bin bags."
P6 diary, Fauldhouse Forest School

"(Has Forest School been of benefit?)... Yes, she has more energy, more understanding of outdoor life, and more inquisitive about surrounding areas."
Parent, Fauldhouse Forest School

CITIZENSHIP including Sustainable Development Education

"Many, if not all, of the learning outcomes can be located within existing subjects and programmes of study, there is continuing challenge for schools to create learning opportunities that make these connections in memorable and enjoyable ways". p 11 Education for Citizenship in Scotland: a paper for discussion and development (2002 Learning and Teaching Scotland)

Education for Citizenship in Scotland: a paper for discussion and development (2002 LTS) identifies the key 'aspects' of a capable citizen and relates these to a set of broad categories of learning outcome - knowledge and understanding, skills and competencies, values and dispositions and creativity and enterprise.

It stresses that these four 'aspects' need to be fostered in ways that ensure the development of their integrative ability. Young people need to see and learn to make use of the connections between the aspects – in other words, acting locally, thinking globally; or applying what they may have learnt at home or school to Forest School, or the wider world.

Forest School provides a valuable 'real life' context for those kinds of learning opportunities – it is also memorable and enjoyable.

Children experience the available examples of forest management (in Scotland), for conservation through to commercial purposes, and the reasons why we manage forest differently.

There is the opportunity to introduce the concept of 'volunteering' to older pupils, as a means of expressing their commitment to local or global conservation issues, as responsible citizens. This activity could link with **Project Scotland**, launched in 2005, to engage young people and provide volunteering opportunities.

The extended exposure of children to the forest environment provides them with tangible reminders, thinking time and space, and reinforcement of ideas and values that are often not available in school or the classroom.

Many of the practical and thinking skills relevant to sustainable development education are inherent within the umbrella of Citizenship, encompassing as it does global, national and local perspectives and contexts for learning.

ENTERPRISE IN EDUCATION - <i>Determined to Succeed</i>

<p><i>"Encouraging enterprising values in our schoolchildren is not just about producing the business people and entrepreneurs of tomorrow. It is the route to a more enterprising Scotland, where all our people understand the contribution they can make as citizens, both to society and the economy...it is also central to our goal of a more inclusive Scotland."</i></p>
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<p>Ministerial Foreword to <i>Determined to Succeed</i></p>
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Determined to Succeed (2002), The Scottish Executive's strategy for Enterprise in Education aims to encourage a 'can do – will do' attitude amongst Scotland's young people. Key learning outcomes being aimed for include creativity, confidence and ambition. In turn, helping young people to take responsibility for their own learning and development, become effective communicators, innovators and team players.

The evidence from Forest School so far is that it can make a significant contribution to developing confident and creative thinkers, with a positive and healthy attitude to lifelong learning and a culture of enterprise. It helps everyone benefit from success.

"I was working with G sawing and lopping down broom and young Scots Pine, clearing the ground for our new shelter. I talked about making slingshots when we were young. It didn't take him long to apply his enterprising streak and the loppers. I looked around a while later and he had made and lined up half a dozen forked stem slingshots, and he thought it would be a good idea to sell on the small Scots Pine we had taken out as Christmas trees – the only thing that stopped him was how to transport them back to town!" Clunes Forest School

Falla Hill Primary School won an Enterprise in Education award for their Forest School work, in recognition of the enterprising skills it promotes - working together, problem solving, creativity, risk taking, and because it wasn't based on making and selling a product (although this is also possible in Forest School!)

HEALTH EDUCATION/HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS - *Being Well and Doing Well*

"Learning and health go hand in hand. Good health of children and young people is a prerequisite for educational achievement. Good health of teachers is important to the development of effective school. Health promoting schools aim at empowering students, staff and parents to actively influence their lives and their living conditions"

Education and Health in Partnership: European Conference, 2002

Table 1-8 summarises an analysis of where Forest School contributes to the Health Education 5-14 National Guidelines. Forest School makes links directly with each of the strands.

Many children, and the teachers, commented on their enjoyment of being outside and away from stuffy, overheated classrooms. They are aware their stamina and physical strength has improved with the walk to/around Forest School, using tools and other activities. They learn to care and share emotionally and socially and that rights come with responsibility.

Table 1-8 Forest School and Health Education: 5-14 Guidelines

5-14 Curriculum		Forest School contributes
Physical Health	Explore physical factors in relation to our health and looking after ourselves	●
Emotional Health	Explore emotions, feelings, and relationships and how they affect our mental well-being	●
Social Health	Explore interaction of the individual, community, environment in relation to health	●

Forest School provides the opportunity for teachers and pupils to build up trust and develop relationships that the classroom setting does not. The pupils learn that although their safety is the concern of others, the responsibility and choice to act responsibly is theirs. The adults expressed surprise at how responsible the children were. Perhaps a poor reflection on how few opportunities, as adults, we offer young people to take responsibility.

"The behaviour change in school is not so identifiable, but in the group I can see definite benefits to the boys, building relationships and taking some limited responsibility for each other. Failure at tasks is almost non-existent."

Children's Services Worker, Clunes Forest School

"R put a crisp packet into the bin without encouragement. This was a small but positive step, for which praise was given" Observer, Clunes Forest School

Scotland has been part of the European Network of Health Promoting Schools since 1993. The values (wisdom, justice, compassion, integrity) that underlie health promoting schools are deep seated, and in schools set in context the importance of creating an inclusive ethos of care, respect, participation, responsibility and fairness for all (pupils and staff). The Scottish Executive has set the target that every school should be a health promoting school by 2007.

Forest School fits very well with the aspirations and characteristics of a health promoting school.

In *Being Well - Doing Well: a framework for health promoting schools in Scotland (2003)*, the characteristics of a health promoting school are outlined.

These include:

- leadership and management that respects health and well being of pupils, staff and the wider community;
- working in partnership with parents and key agencies;
- curriculum and approaches to learning and teaching providing challenge, participation and support for all pupils, with a positive effect on their health, and personal and social development.

"I enjoy Forest School as a teacher... because I have time to talk and listen properly to the pupils, I have formed different relationships with some of them - they will tell me things (about family issues or problems) they would not have confided in school, I am learning new skills myself, and being in the fresh air just makes you feel healthier." Class Teacher, Fauldhouse Forest School

The ethos and operation of Forest School mirrors the above in many ways. The safety of the pupils is paramount and all activities are rigorously assessed and implemented in ways assuring pupil awareness of the risks and expected safe behaviours.

All children undertake a session on **basic First Aid** and what to do in the case of an accident. There is a **Safety code** – all children are instructed in the safe use of tools and lighting fires.

"Yesterday we learned to use tools. If you are using a bow saw you put your hand through the saw. If you are using a pair of loppers you cut down the way, if the branches are above you, you must wear a helmet"

P6 diary, Fauldhouse Forest School

"The children even tell the adults off and how to use the tools correctly, if they spot you...." Parent, Fauldhouse Forest School

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Forest School stimulates imaginative and creative thinking, providing ideas, images and enabling the collection of data. This can all be taken back to school and transformed by applying ICT skills in word processing, building data bases and designing 2D and 3D structures, and producing Powerpoint presentations using words, music and images.

The significance of Forest School is in providing an exciting and stimulating real and natural world context for their inspiration and learning.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION – *Active Schools*

"Outdoor Education can have tremendous benefits in the physical, personal and social development of children of all ages, providing an important setting for young people to discover more about themselves and the world around them. I want more young people to experience the far-reaching benefits of outdoor education. Not only can it enrich their school life, it can help pupils develop skills and interests that will stay with them for the rest of their lives."

Peter Peacock, Minister of Education and Young People, 2004

Schools have a major influence on a child's physical activity through the formal (physical education, fieldwork) and the informal (play) curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Only the family has more effect on a child.

In a long term programme to address obesity and lifestyle issues for children, the Scottish Executive has recognised the important role outdoor education plays in helping young people discover more about themselves, to engage physically and intellectually/emotionally with their environment, and to develop a lifelong interest in outdoor opportunities and pursuits. Learning and Teaching Scotland are currently taking forward a development programme for outdoor education.

Forest School is a valid and valuable approach within outdoor education. Within this context it contributes to two key areas of the curriculum identified by the Scottish Executive as crucial for the *Curriculum for Excellence* to address – health and sustainable development.

In order to be Health Promoting a school will have to be an Active School. **Active Schools** was launched as part of the National Physical Activity Strategy in 2003. It is a partnership initiative under the Healthy Living Campaign, being implemented on the ground by **sportScotland**. The term is given to all schools in Scotland that provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to get active, to the extent that it makes a positive contribution to their health e.g. formal and informal sports, active travel, active play. One of the targets is to provide a minimum of two hours physical education a week for every pupil by 2008.

At Forest School participants, on average, are physically active for over 75% of the time (by observation) – walking, running, standing, bending, stretching, pulling, jumping – and refining their motor and co-ordination skills.

Whether half a day a week, or a whole day a fortnight, adopting Forest School will fulfil the target of two hours of physical activity a week, apart from anything else they do.

<p><i>"I saw smoke from the campfire, I heard people macking (sic) their dens, I felt comfortable, warm, active, freedom"</i> P6 diary, Fauldhouse Forest School</p>
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The new (2005) Scottish Executive outdoor education initiative *Outdoor Connections – taking learning outdoors* is drawing together all the threads and benefits of outdoor learning from outdoor activities through to fieldwork, including programmes like Forest School and the John Muir Award.

Forest School obviously has a lot to contribute as a vehicle for outdoor learning, but also in demonstrating a range of good practice – learner centred ethos, structure and delivery, and activities.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION

"Concepts of sustainability are at the heart of our vision for future education. Clearly, school education has a key role to play in helping to shape the attitudes of young people towards sustainable development. This will provide the basis for better action into the future and the positive societal transformation we need..... and I invite you to participate in the process, and help to build some of the new contexts for the future delivery of schools education."

Minister of Education and Young People, launch of a five point action plan for schools education – part of UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development launch, June 2005

The five point plan involved three relevant to Forest School:

- Embedding sustainable development within the school curriculum as part of the *Curriculum for Excellence* programme – the single most important thing.
- Increasing the number of schools involved in the Eco Schools and other awareness-raising programmes.
- Providing quality learning and teaching opportunities for young people in schools – improving support and making the best use of the spaces beyond the classroom.

Forest School holds a unique position in its ability to demonstrate, through first hand experience, the sustainable nature of forestry in environmental, social and economic terms. It can help develop the knowledge of ecology and social, economic and political systems; essential personal, social and thinking skills, and foster a feeling of belonging to the natural world - all essential in educating for a more sustainable society.

Research has shown that children's senses are stimulated by nature. Also that early experiences with nature form future relationships with natural areas, often remembered into adult life (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989).

A presentation developed for Forestry Commission Scotland for delivery to MSPs, looking at the benefits of Forest School for the curriculum for excellence and to sustainable development education is included as a CD Rom accompanying this report.

SUMMARY

There will be no better time to promote the opportunities and benefits Forest School presents within the education community. In an advocacy context, it is advised that the benefits of Forest School should be placed within A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE) and the developing 3-18 curriculum framework and the National Priorities. ACE is moving more towards process based, learner oriented learning, with less emphasis on its knowledge content. Forest School can provide a valuable contribution to matching the declared

aspirations for young people. – successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.

However, within the short term, and at a local level in schools and local authorities, teachers' priorities will remain seated on the existing National Priorities, and within the existing Early Years/5-14/Standard Grade/Higher Still structure. Their concerns will be in meeting the needs of the associated guidelines and learning outcomes. Forest School promotion in some schools, therefore, may need to be promoted in the context of what it can deliver for schools within existing structures, as well as, how it meets the needs of ACE.

This may be most effective (and less time consuming) if an emphasis is placed on highlighting the contributions Forest School makes to the National Priorities and cross curricular themes of PSD and Health Education, and cross cutting themes which are attracting additional funding and/or interest e.g. Health Promoting and Active School initiatives, Enterprise in Education, Eco Schools and Sustainable Development Education, and Outdoor Learning.

7 Learning and Teaching – some issues

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

One of the key features, that sets Forest School apart from many other outdoor education approaches, is that children attend on a regular basis, over an extended length of time:

- Enables children to become used to the outdoors and woodland setting in their own time – for some it may take several weeks to acclimatise – this allows them then to develop confidence and new skills e.g. working/playing with others, in their own time.
- Routines are learnt and carried out week after week - provides stability, a structure for activity and a sense of security, important for effective learning.
- Teacher has the opportunity to observe pupils in a different learning environment - observe the different ways individual pupils react and learn, reappraise the capacity for pupil's learning and achievement.

*"I have been surprised that the reaction from the children has **all** been very positive, I may have expected some to have expressed some negativity When I visited Forest School I did not anticipate J to demonstrate the characteristics he did. J is all 'into bother' in school, here I found him working together with his peers, problem solving, and then taking a lead in working out the sizes and lengths of timber required to build the shelter. Leadership skills I would not have expected of him." Head Teacher, Fallahill PS*

Forest School offers an additional approach to outdoor learning, which may or may not suit your particular situation. However, if you have accessible woodland within walking distance of your school its value as regular venue for learning and teaching (based on the principles of Forest School) may be worth exploring.

MAINSTREAM OR SELECTION

There was strong reaction from the teachers at Fauldhouse and Clunes that Forest School is valuable for **all** children, of **all** abilities.

At Fauldhouse, where children with additional support needs attend with their class group, the individuals have adapted well, learnt new coping strategies in the outdoors, and generally been recognised in a different light by their peers.

At Clunes, where the children have been selected out of their class, a sense of 'being different' has been reinforced – it goes against the current trend of inclusion. This has led to some disruptive behaviour on return to school, and their peers, in some instances, 'playing up' in an attempt to be selected for Forest School. Bad behaviour is seen as being 'rewarded' by going to Forest School. The head teachers, learning support and Children's Services Worker believe that if a mainstream approach was adopted, those with additional support needs would succeed in the same way, and be seen to achieve their goals by their peers, and be seen then in a different and positive light.

On the ground it is important that parents and the whole teaching staff are involved from the beginning, in order to understand what Forest School offers and involves. Open days and celebration days are one way of doing this. At Clunes, it is proposed that each P6 pupil takes their class and teacher to Forest School for half a day, taking responsibility to plan and show everyone what happens there.

RISK TAKING

Children need to be able to learn to take risks within a 'safe' environment. Forest School demonstrates that effective routines and measures can be taken to reduce and manage risk to an acceptable standard of safety. Understanding risks and knowing how to cope with risk is an important part of the Forest School ethos and process.

Concerns about danger and liability, from parents and school managers, have reduced many opportunities for outdoor learning over recent years, as well as lack of funding and pressures to meet curriculum targets. As a result, not only have we reduced the opportunity for children to learn basic skills in recognising and coping with risks, we have also denied some children a chance to engage their innate curiosity by getting close to nature.

The Scottish Executive has now recognised that this reduction of outdoor experience can be detrimental to children's development and are encouraging a greater emphasis on using the outdoors for learning, as described earlier (p35).

Children need to be able to explore their 'boundaries' and to test themselves with a challenge, and take a risk. There are everyday risks in moving about woodland and using tools, but at Forest School this risk is managed. Children are taught about the hazards tools and the environment present, they are taught safety procedures and respect for both tools and the forest, and learn to take on responsibility in applying these skills. A degree of trust is exerted and returned in kind.

" Observer: *What surprises did you have?*
Head teacher: *trust - how much you can trust these children.*
Leader: *Their idea of risk is quite mature.*"

TEACHER EDUCATION

For teachers to be expected to become involved with Forest School, and/or become leaders, they need to have an enthusiasm for the outdoors, and be confident in taking children out of doors.

In order to recognise the benefits outdoor learning brings to the effectiveness of their teaching, and for their learners, requires experience in and exposure to good practice - either when they were pupils themselves, or during their education/professional development as teachers.

Unless specialising in outdoor education, it is likely that most trainee teachers have had minimal exposure to teaching practice outdoors - the practicalities, the possibilities or the benefits. As a consequence the majority of practicing teachers do not have confidence in taking children outdoors, especially for a Forest School experience.

In every local authority area, there is a core of teachers and outdoor education specialists who have the skills and/or the capacity and enthusiasm to become Forest School leaders and mentors.

Within the current reorganisation of CPD, Chartered Teacher and Initial Teacher Education it may be possible to offer Forest School Leader training as part of these individual's development plans, and in this way support the wider delivery of Forest School.

Many of the Forest School leader skills and activities are transferable to school grounds - to practice or demonstrate them here would be a real achievement alone.

Forest School has to be brought to the attention of teachers. It has to stand out amongst all the other 'good' initiatives they are bombarded with. A co-ordinated campaign of awareness within the Institutes of Teacher Education, and Local Council Education Services - resource centres and schools, is required.

ACTION RESEARCH

The self-appraisal approach taken by the leaders and teachers who participated reported that it was both useful and not onerous.

If the case study groups could have come together, there would have been additional benefits. They would have been able to learn from each other about the benefits and problems of running and evaluating Forest School. The recording practitioners gained a sense of ownership of their findings. The leaders recognised the opportunities for future planning of sessions, and the teachers - building on the results of their pupil profiles, and the curriculum opportunities of the activities back in the classroom.

This approach is very much based on the principles of action research - bringing together the participative processes of planning, action and reflection to inform improved performance and more effective outcomes. Not only this, but it also provides a formative evaluation tool for the teachers. They can assess and better understand their pupils in a way that acknowledges that reliance on their classroom and academic performance indicators may tell 'only half the story'.

Evaluation should be integral to the Forest School process. It needs to be built into the training of Forest School leaders, and encouraged with all practitioner participants from the start of establishing a Forest School.

In gaining support for Forest School it is significant that the use of action research in teaching is a fundamental element of the Chartered Teacher process - a teacher could use Forest School as the context for their thesis. It is also a guiding principle for the delivery of A Curriculum for Excellence (ACE).

In this context, **the ACE register of interest is currently seeking schools/centres to register their action research project to promote an innovative approach and its outcomes (e.g Forest School).** Projects to start in August 2006, the register is still open (Feb 2006) and funds may still be available to support writing up.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

1 Think big - build on educational and social potential - Forest School benefits children in a variety of ways. More children should be given the opportunity to experience this integrated, outdoor learning 'programme' nationally. There are demonstrable, multiple, impacts of this outdoor experience on children's:

- physical, social and emotional development,
- their relationship with and understanding of the natural world and sustainable living,
- their health and attitude to learning, lifestyle choices, and activity in the outdoors,
- their creativity and enterprise.

The challenge, its widespread delivery poses, deserves an integrated (i.e. joined up thinking) response - perhaps along the Hungarian model (see **Background** section). Forest School provides an excellent opportunity to pool resources and expertise across all Scottish Executive departments, agencies, and initiatives benefiting from the investment for example, including.:

- Education and Young People/Learning and Teaching Scotland (Sustainable Development Education/ Outdoor Education);
- Health (Active Schools);
- Enterprise & Lifelong Learning (SE/HI E/Determined to Succeed);
- Rural Affairs (SNH/ SEPA/ Waste) and the Sustainable Development Unit;
- Forestry Commission Scotland

2 Engage with Local Authorities - Local Council Education/Children's Service support is crucial for an effective delivery of Forest School on the ground.

Neither of the Case Studies had really engaged Local Council managers, beyond immediate line managers. Directors of Education and Children's/Social Services need to know the potential benefits Forest School can deliver.

In the light of current curriculum change Forest School offers an innovative and exciting tool, already packaged, as a demonstration of good practice in delivering a good proportion of the outcomes in the four aspects of *A Curriculum for Excellence*.

FEI local cluster groups already involved in promoting Forest School may take a lead locally, exploring such partnership working through the Association of Directors of Education and Social Services. Successful examples should be promoted widely between Local Councils.

3 Maximise Health and Social Inclusion Benefits - It is important to recognise the potential Forest School has to contribute to the health and personal and social development curriculum

It stimulates physical and mental development especially of younger children through encouraging activity out of doors, and with resultant implications for lifelong health.

Forest School is an effective and innovative way (not based on sport, but outdoor education), that schools might meet the requirements of a Health Promoting School, as an Active School. It could act as a performance indicator, in a way similar to how Eco Schools acts for the Educational National Priority 4.

Where funds are restricted, criteria could also be developed to decide which schools in particular areas would gain most from the experience - schools in disadvantaged areas, who have little contact with, or experience of woodland environments can be favoured.

4 Improve Advocacy and Promotion - Successful examples of Forest School should be promoted widely, by Forestry Commission Scotland and its partners - to Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive forums, Local Councils, parents and teachers and their associations and networks, education practitioners, health, enterprise, and environmental professionals within local councils, relevant agencies and organisations. In this way, people will get a better understanding of how Forest School operates and impacts on the children and their learning.

5 Support Research - More research should be encouraged to try and quantify and understand the curriculum benefits better. Also, tracking the longer-term benefits (2-5 years on) of Forest School. This might include an assessment of the minimum time a participant must have contact with Forest school to make an observable/quantifiable difference, how long it takes for some outcomes to become visible, and how long any difference lasts.

6 Benefit from Integration - there are alternative ways to draw benefits from existing outdoor education activities and programmes. For example, the potential link with Eco Schools has already been mentioned, delivery of the Biodiversity module may also be supported by the work of the school grounds organisation **Grounds for Learning**. The **Institute for Earth Education** has programmes and activities (Earth Rangers, Earth walks, Magic Spots) that have already been adopted. In addition, the **John Muir Award** (award scheme focused on wild places - discover, explore, conserve and share) run by the John Muir Trust was used at Clunes Forest School, successfully, as a challenge and measure of achievement.

7 Provide curriculum support for leaders and teachers – the system of leader training and ongoing support is the weakest link in the delivery of Forest School in Scotland. The potential is not being realised, in the context of this report, because positive links are not being made with the Scottish curriculum, back in the classroom.

There is a lack of support and consistency of support beyond initial leader training, from the trainers because they are overstretched. There is also a lack of practical, hands on, support available to both leaders and teachers – from activity descriptors with outlines of curriculum links, lists of equipment sources, health and safety updates, advice on managing group dynamics outdoors, to how to do critical evaluation. Within Scotland there is a need to share experience, good practice, ideas, enthusiasm and motivation between leaders and with teachers. Although a practitioners network exists in Scotland, this might be widened to include Forest Schools across the UK.

ANNEX 1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY - BACKGROUND

The approach taken in this research was based on the belief that this report should not try 'to reinvent the wheel', but build on the approach and findings of existing research by Forest Research (FR) and New Economics Foundation (nef). They had already established a pilot methodology with Forest School Wales, using a self-appraisal approach, to evaluate the process of Forest School and its outcomes. A further, longer term, project was being written up as this research began, based on a refinement of the self-appraisal method, with Forest Schools in England.

When evaluating by observation the way children participate in Forest School, it is the teachers, leaders, support workers and parents and carers involved, who are best placed to collect information. They are the ones who are most likely to notice and understand the more subtle changes taking place.

This is why FR/nef focused energy on developing and encouraging the use of a self-appraisal toolkit and why this research followed a similar approach.

It allows the practitioners to measure not only *if*, but also understand *how* and *why* what they are doing brings about the positive outputs/outcomes they believe it does. This approach is as much about improving, as it is about proving – it is an action research approach.

Due to the time constraints to both set up and carry out this research, the time available dictated the extent to which these tools could be introduced and used for data collection – the results lack objectivity, but they still demonstrate their value.

A field visit was made to Fauldhouse Forest School to familiarise ourselves with the setting, meet the participants and make some initial observations. A half day workshop was organised with those involved with Fauldhouse Forest School (2 leaders, 2 teachers, 1 parent) for discussion of the context of the study; to identify their propositions as to the impacts of Forest School, and the collecting of evidence using the charts for the self appraisal, photographs and diaries. The self-appraisal charts were completed by one teacher, and one leader, over the period.

Further support and observation was provided at a second field visit, and a final joint gathering was organised for the hand over of the evidence, and a review of what they thought had been happening, what they had learnt and what surprises there had been. Informal interviews with the head teacher and a telephone conversation with the Head of Education Services followed.

At Clunes Forest School it proved impossible to gather all those involved together for a session, and given the delay (mid November) before Forest School started, it was decided to discuss with the individuals the purpose of the study, and the ways they might gather evidence. They decided a preference to pilot the RESPECT forms for the pupils to use for self-assessment, and otherwise provide anecdotal evidence.

Further support and observations were made through three field visits.

A final round of interviews took place to gather anecdotal evidence with the Forest School leader, a head teacher, support staff and a telephone conversation with the Head of Education Services.

Additional feedback was collected by the evaluation practitioners, wherever possible, from parents, teachers and the children themselves, in the form of field observation, conversations and informal interviews, telephone and e mail discussions, photographs, diaries and questionnaires.

It is impossible in a snapshot study like this to be able to derive with any certainty that the pupil's reactions were due to the impact of Forest School; one can only go on the feedback from those who have known and are with these children for longer.

ANNEX 2 SOCIAL AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT POLICY CONTEXT

For Forest School to be successful in broadening its appeal to schools and local authorities across Scotland, it needs to find the most effective 'hooks' to hang it on, within policy and practice arenas.

It may be helpful in seeking the policy 'hooks' to be aware of the extensive background of educational, social and health related policy initiatives relevant to the development of children and young people.

This policy context illustrates the fit for purpose 'package' Forest School offers to those responsible for implementing associated strategies and initiatives. Some additional national documents are listed below, and those referred to elsewhere in the report are listed in the References section. This listing does not try to be comprehensive, but merely to indicate the range of potential policy connections.

The effective development of multi-interest partnerships delivering Forest School on the ground, contributing wholly/partly to, for example, health Promoting/Active Schools, would help in achieving many of the 'milestones' set out in these documents

European Convention for the Rights of the Child (1989)

Article 24 of the Convention emphasises the right of every child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health. It places a duty on all parties to ensure that all segments of society, particularly parents and children, are kept well informed, have access to education and are supported in using basic knowledge on child health and nutrition.

Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000)

For the first time, education legislation recognises that pupils have educational rights and must be seen as partner in the school. The Act sets out a framework for improvement. Education authorities are directed to provide school education developing the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential.

A teaching profession for the 21st Century (2001)

This report prompts a re-examination of the role of teachers and promoted staff in the organisation and work of schools. Although no explicit mention of sustainable development or outdoor education is mentioned, there is an opportunity for schools and local councils to build health promotion into the new arrangements.

Moving forward - Additional Support for Learning (2003)

A Scottish Executive paper outlining plans to develop the education system in line with the principles of inclusion, rights of the pupils and their families to be heard and respected, being responsive to the needs of child and family, improving standards for all children, and delivering integrated services responsive to local needs.

Let's make Scotland more active - A strategy for physical activity (2003)

This strategy encourages people of all ages to be more physically active, with national targets. It acknowledges partnership as the only way forward to bring effective and sustainable change. Whole school approach promoted through the Active Schools initiative, supported on the ground by Active School (Primary) and School Sports Co-ordinators.

FOREST SCHOOL SCOTLAND: An Evaluation

Part 2

Means to an End: Forest School Benefits

1 Introduction

Forest School is establishing itself in Scotland, and is facing increasing interest from education and forestry professionals. This report is the second part of a two- part study looking at the benefits of Forest School in Scotland, for education and forestry.

This part of the study looks at the benefits Forest School might bring to the national Forest Strategy and other associated Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) policy outcomes. It also addresses the challenge of national promotion and local delivery. Priorities for action in improving co-ordination and effectiveness of effort are also considered.

The *OpenSpace and Social Inclusion: Local Woodland use in Central Scotland* research in 2002⁷ claimed as its key finding - the central importance of childhood experience. The research found that, whether and how often people visit woodlands as adults, is predetermined by the frequency of childhood visits. This raises questions about access to open space generally, and woodlands in particular, for those who do not get the opportunity to experience such places as children. This is a clear context within which Forest School raises its benefit stakes for the FCS.

2 Background

What is Forest School

Forest School involves children visiting a local wood on a regular basis and over an extended period of time. It represents an alternative teaching environment that is complementary to the traditional indoor classroom, or school grounds. It provides an opportunity for active learning in a woodland environment, with benefits for education, enterprise and the natural heritage.

Forest School originated in Sweden in the 1950s as an approach to learning about the natural world. A retired soldier started to teach young people about the natural environment through songs, stories and practical hands-on experience. By the 1980s Forest School was an integral part of Denmark's early years programme. In the UK, in 1995 a group of nursery nurses and their lecturers from Bridgwater College, Somerset, made a study tour to Denmark. They experienced the benefits of Forest School for themselves, and brought the concept and ideas back with them. From this starting point, Bridgwater College has looked at how Forest School could be applied within the context of

⁷ See reference list - *OpenSpace and Social Inclusion: Local Woodland use in Central Scotland*, 2002, Ward Thompson, Aspinall, Bell and Findlay

childcare provision in their own Early Excellence Centre, and how to demonstrate and promote its benefits to a wider audience.

The concept of Forest School is developing, as its practice has spread across the UK. There is potential for Forest School to meet the needs of all ages and abilities. It has been found to be an especially powerful approach with the very young and client groups who would not normally engage in such outdoor, forest-based, activities. Forest School enhances mainstream education, in offering a different approach to curriculum delivery – context rather than content led. It is particularly successful with learners who are often more able to learn through practical activity (kinaesthetic), and often put off by classroom – based learning, and those otherwise socially excluded, with low self-esteem. It is also having significant success with older teenagers and young adults with learning difficulties and/or a history of substance abuse.

What makes Forest School different and successful (from other outdoor education programmes):

- **The forest/woodland setting** (therefore 'wild' and challenging) – considered important for the biodiversity and habitat diversity offered, its robustness, its green cover with 'mystery' and opportunity for imaginative play and physical challenge – lots to do and see.
- **The leader training provision and support** - considered essential for delivering a quality experience by trained and experienced Forest School leaders
- **The attention given to learner-led, flexible, hands on activities** within a recognised, organising routine ensuring safety and participation; providing for those with learning styles better suited to practical, hands on activity and building self esteem and confidence of others. High potential for motivation towards lifelong learning
- **The regular contact over an extended period of time** - enabling acclimatisation (which may take several weeks) to the ethos and setting; reinforcement of learning and extension through progressive challenges
- **The 'fun and freedom' factor** – giving some learners their first taste of independent or group 'play' in a challenging outdoor environment, managed for safety; enabling new relationships between learners and with teachers
- **The low young person:adult ratio** –allows a greater degree of freedom for individual/groups of children to engage in hands on tasks and play activities that are challenging for them, without putting them 'at risk' in a safety context. Allows practitioners to get to know children's ability, characters and their learning styles more quickly and to then tailor activities.

The FCS and the Forest Education Initiative Scotland (FEIS) have been instrumental, nationally and locally, in promoting and facilitating Forest School in Scotland - providing funding and support in kind - since 2003. Most Forest Schools (over 20 in all) have been run as a means for those undergoing the

accredited training as Forest School Leaders. Local Forest Schools have been delivered through FCS Rangers, non-governmental organisations e.g. Borders Forest Trust and private organisations. A Forest School Steering Group has been established, bringing together and acting as a networking vehicle for those involved as Forest School Leaders, or undertaking the training.

This is an appropriate time now, with ongoing and practical experience of running Forest School in Scotland, to review its wider benefits for forestry in Scotland.

3 The Evaluation Process

Research Aims

- What and where are the benefits Forest School brings FCS, in delivering its educational and social policies and strategic objectives?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities of the current Forest School structure?
- What are some practical and strategic options for FCS to consider, informing their ongoing involvement with Forest School?

The project had two phases:

Phase 1 – involved a desk study of FCS website and a literature search to gain familiarisation with relevant Forestry Commission Policy and Strategy documents and research reports. Then, identify particular educational and social objectives Forest School would meet and bring added value to. The most relevant documents with matching education and social objectives were found to be:

- *Forests for Scotland : The Scottish Forest Strategy* (2000)
- *Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT) - Policy* - (2002?)
- *Woods for Learning - Education Strategy* - (2006)

Phase 2 – involved collecting evidence through a variety of individuals within and outwith FCS; Forest Education Initiative (FEI), and other organisations involved with the delivery of Forest School, nationally (UK/Scotland) and locally. This was undertaken by contacting FCS/FEI S recommended individuals/ organisations, mostly by e mail and follow up telephone conversations, based often on sets of pre-prepared questions. For a full list of those contacted – see **Annex 1**.

4 Policy and Practice: Forest School Benefit

"Scotland will be renowned as a land of fine trees, woods and forests which strengthen the economy, which enrich the natural environment and which people enjoy and value." Vision, Forests for Scotland, Scottish Executive 2000

FCS is a large and well-established organisation. It is, therefore, inevitable that there is a range of viewpoints on how much resource effort should be put in to achieving educational and social objectives. The evidence presented here, seeks to persuade those who might be sceptical of the very real and varied benefits Forest School can bring to FCS. By contributing to the delivery of its vision. Also, by achieving this through meeting its guiding principles of sustainability, integration, positive value, community support, diversity and local distinctiveness.

In this analysis, three key Policy/Strategy documents have been selected. They contain educational and social objectives whose delivery will most benefit from Forest School, directly or indirectly.

- **Forests for Scotland: the Scottish Forestry Strategy** (2000, under review)
- **Woods In and Around Towns** (2005)
- **Woods for Learning** (2006)

FORESTS FOR SCOTLAND: THE SCOTTISH FORESTRY STRATEGY Scottish Executive 2000

The Strategy proposes five Strategic Directions for Scottish Forestry. The three directions most relevant for Forest School to contribute are highlighted in italics below.

- Maximise the value of the wood resource
- Create a diverse forest resource of high quality
- *Ensure forestry makes a positive contribution to the environment*
- *Create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests*
- *Help communities benefit from woods and forests*

The Strategy also identified **Priorities for Action** and identified ways of delivery. The whole Strategy is based on **five guiding principles**:

- **Sustainability** – At Forest school participants get firsthand experience of our most sustainable primary industry – based on a renewable resource with potential to provide environmental, social and economic benefits – and how it works.
- **Integration** (should fit well with other rural activities) - Forest School represents an educational aspect of FCS's roles within recreation and

tourism. FS presents an ideal opportunity to explain the management principles FCS follows in managing the national forest resource where it takes place in FCS owned woodland/forest.

- **Positive value** (contribution to people's well being) - Forest School demonstrably contributes to children's personal and social well-being and will have social and economic spin offs in terms of promoting personal confidence and inclusion, future employment, and/or lifestyle choices e.g. visiting forests for exercise and nature watching, or taking part as a volunteer, supporting conservation.
- **Community support** - a key aspect for several schools participating, and local Forestry Commission Ranger involvement, in Forest School, is for its entry into the wider community. It enables contact with parents and families and encourages their support and even participation as helpers. Also, involving communities in developing their own Forest School site within their local Community Woodland (or in an FCS or partner-owned forest). Forest School enables different sectors of the community to be reached. Especially important has been reaching those who would not otherwise have been easy to engage with.
- **Diversity and local distinctiveness** (different forests providing different benefits and suit different places) - no Forest School should be the same. Every type of woodland should be explored for its own potential, but not at the cost of it being damaged. Forest School sites can be used to add that element of local distinctiveness, as well as develop children's sense of place. Hopefully, this in turn will have benefits in improving respect for the forest and reduce vandalism, fly tipping and fires.

By supporting and facilitating Forest School, FCS clearly demonstrates its role in contributing to meeting the Scottish Executive's priorities, on which the Forest Strategy was originally built. (*Building a Better Scotland 2005-2008 Spending Strategy*)

- Growing the economy
- *Delivering excellence in Public Services*
- *Supporting strong communities*
- *Developing a confident, democratic Scotland*

The Forest Strategy priorities are in the process of being revised: 2005-2006, under the five Strategic Directions. **What is the potential for adding a Forest School based priority, or at least building 'education' into one of them? For example - 'increase forestry's contribution to education'?**

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: Ensure that forestry in Scotland makes a positive contribution to the environment

PCE6 Contribute to a radical improvement in the quality and setting of urban areas

Many communities are being encouraged to create Community Woodlands around their settlements, on otherwise underused ground. There is an opportunity, particularly in the Central belt, for Forest School young people and the wider community to be involved from the beginning in planning and planting out a Forest School site within a Community Woodland. The best scenario would be a Community Wood that neighbours the community or local school. In the future, many of these schools can have an improved wooded outlook, their own access to a Forest School site, and a green network to explore, without the need for transport.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4 : Create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests in Scotland

ETWF1 Provide woodland recreation opportunities near towns

Forest School is proving itself as a wonderful way of introducing woodlands to children for play and recreation, as well as learning. This boosts their confidence and creates opportunities to explain, demonstrate and practice a **responsible right of access**. Several Forest School children have brought their families back to visit their Forest School woodland when out of school, or have been encouraged to visit other woodlands.

ETWF2 Improve information about the availability of opportunities

Identifies using FEI to raise awareness of opportunities woodlands have as a **teaching resource** - action point here for promoting Forest School to Local Councils, local nurseries, schools and organisations that might like to run a Forest School e.g. local environmental organisations, women's action groups.

ETWF3 Increase forestry's contribution to tourism

One of the curriculum benefits of Forest Schools is to develop enterprise skills. There are plenty of existing examples where, especially in rural communities, the local school has applied these skills in organising an event, developing tourist routes and guides, designing postcards of locally distinctive features, running a campaign, and other value added products.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5: help communities benefit from woods and forests

CB1 Create wider employment opportunities

Promote skills training - in essence Forest School is a springboard for this particularly for pupils with additional support needs, but also for bright sparks with innate practical skills.

CB2 Increase opportunities for community consultation

What needs to be done – add 'involve young people in consultations' – Forest School will develop a cohort of young people who have views on forest in their local area – we need to build on this interest and investment in young people.

CB3 Provide opportunities for greater community involvement

Help build capacity – Forest School gives an opportunity in reaching and raising awareness of parents, family and friends of how they can benefit and contribute to their local forest and woodland. There is immediate impact on the young people involved, and this may develop into a lifelong interest and wish to contribute as a volunteer, or as a profession. Both education and training are required.

As previously mentioned, recent research carried out in Scotland has found evidence that the frequency of childhood visits tends to determine how often people visit woodlands as adults. Forest School provides regular, repeat visits to the same woodland, over an extended period of time. It has, therefore, immediate benefit in helping communities in the future benefit from their local woods and forests, as the children participating become young adults.

WOODLAND IN AND AROUND TOWNS (WIAT)
Forestry Commission Scotland /Scottish Executive 2005

"We want communities to feel a sense of ownership of their local woods and to become involved in looking after them as well as using them more. We are committed to working in partnership with local communities to help woods in and around towns deliver real and lasting local benefits."

The WIAT Initiative follows a ministerial request to FCS in 2003 - to bring woodland expansion and forestry benefits closer to where the people of Scotland live and work. It supports Partnership Agreement priorities on social justice, quality of life, enhancing urban landscapes and encouraging healthier lifestyles. It also links directly with three Priorities for Action in the Scottish Executive's Forestry Strategy.

- Contributing to a radical improvement in the quality and setting of urban areas (PCE6)
- Providing woodland recreation opportunities near towns (ETWF1)
- Providing opportunities for greater community involvement in forestry (CB3)

The WIAT Initiative is designed as a focus for developing FCS 'health and well-being' priorities in urban Scotland.

- *Providing more opportunities to access woods for learning, activity and enjoyment*
- *Increasing the contribution of woodlands to the quality of life in Scotland's urban and post industrial areas*
- *Increasing opportunities for communities to be involved in and benefit from, management of their local woods.*

In this way WIAT aims to balance improving the quality of place with the enabling of communities to take part, through working with others, stimulating on the ground activity and direct activity managing national forests and/or buying land for new woodland.

Forest School is a prime example of a vehicle that can be used to promote the use of local greenspace, especially forest and woodlands. It also directly benefits an individual's and community's, health and learning.

The Forest School at Fauldhouse was used as an early example of action for the published policy document about WIAT. Here FCS has facilitated the setting up and running of a Forest School for local schools. It exemplifies the above points, and the outcomes are particularly promising.

The children have developed:

- greater awareness of their local surroundings and a sense of place,
- greater understanding and serious sense of ownership of their local woodland and concern for its future;

The teachers and parents are increasingly aware of the benefits to their:

- children's fitness and stamina,
- sense of personal responsibility,
- confidence and greater interest in their learning and environment;

The local foresters have noticed:

- a significant drop in instances of fire lighting and vandalism nearby.

For some families it has opened up recreational opportunities and access to the outdoors. Forest School has increased children's confidence in using the outdoors, and sharing their discovery of new interests - in nature, orienteering, walking, mountain biking, or just being out in the fresh air.

Forest School can be particularly beneficial where it's site is accessible and within easy walking distance of the local school/s (about 20-30 minutes walk, between 1-2Kms), as at Fauldhouse. *Research has found that 90% of Scotland's schools are within one kilometre of a woodland/forest, and 8% of this resource is owned by Forestry Commission Scotland.*

There are five key objectives for the WIAT initiative. There are several actions for which Forest School would bring mutual benefit for FCS, in meeting its objectives

Objective 1 - Increase recognition of benefits

1.3 lead on establishing exemplar projects using woods to deliver community, education and health benefits

This is the context FCS has used to facilitate Forest School to date - establishing pilot, exemplar projects. This is a particularly important function in terms of demonstrating good practice and the consequences to others, within new geographical areas. This is still required across many areas of Scotland. The challenge is then in finding ways to sustain the momentum once FCS support, direct or indirect, is withdrawn.

Objective 3 - Improve quality

3.1 Facilitate development of local capability to manage urban woodlands and the delivery of public benefits from them

3.2 Provide funding support through the SFSGS WIAT Challenge Fund for the high-quality management of urban woods and woodland based services

3.3 Work with partners to increase use of urban woods as recreation, education and health resources

There are a number of local, community and/or woodland based groups and woodland owners that have an interest in education, and particularly working with schools. WIAT provides these groups with an opportunity to deliver Forest School, with part funding from the Challenge Fund. Such initiatives provide FCS with a way into certain communities and client groups it would otherwise be difficult to engage with. New partners and partnerships open up new networks of contacts and access to different professional skills that may benefit FCS in a number of unexpected ways.

Objective 5 - Value for money

5.2 Work with partners to develop funding bids for major WIAT projects

Forest School is a distinct entity with clear boundaries both geographically and in its timing. It can provide a funding bid that is termed in outputs and outcomes. It is possible to identify measurable outputs and outcomes for Forest School, beyond the less than meaningful output of 'how many children and adults taking part'. This in turn makes the monitoring and evaluation of the project, beyond the bid, much easier and more effective.

Importantly, there is an associated grant based **Challenge Fund**, which can be used to support pilots or time limited initiatives. This Fund can be used to

support Forest School at a local level, and be geared to bring wider health and community benefits.

WOODS FOR LEARNING - Education Strategy
Forestry Commission Scotland/Scottish Executive 2006

The recently launched Education Strategy targets young people, in primary and secondary schools, and outside school. It is a cornerstone from which FCS intends to develop lifelong learning programmes, especially through recreation and health. Its purpose is twofold - to contribute to improving the life chances of young people and showing how forestry is a sustainable industry.

Again it supports Partnership Agreement priorities on social justice, quality of life, enhancing urban landscapes and encouraging healthier lifestyles. It links directly with several Priorities for Action in the Scottish Executive's Forestry Strategy, under:

- *Create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests*
- *Help communities benefit from woods and forests*

The Strategy identifies four objectives, of which the one (in *italics*) has been identified as most relevant to Forest School

- Increasing the use of forests in education, by promoting Local Woods for Learning
- Working with priority school age groups
- *Providing opportunities for education professionals to use woods for learning*
- Increasing the recognition of woods as a learning resource

Objective 3 : Providing opportunities for education professionals to use woods for learning

Part 1 of this report outlines the considerable benefits Forest School can bring to current educational priorities in Scotland. Already schools directly involved with Forest Schools are providing evidence of the difference Forest School has made for pupils generally, and for particular individual learners. Not all pilot Forest Schools in Scotland have been led by FCS Rangers, and loose local partnerships already exist. There are also key organisations who have not been engaged with fully, or formally, within the environmental sector, e.g. SNH, NGOs e.g. NTS, RSPB, JM Award, or the health and community sectors.

We will work with partners to create a Forest School Scotland partnership to support the delivery of more Forest Schools

There is no inclination (or requirement) for FCS, on its own, to deliver Forest School. A partnership of interests is the realistic and appropriate alternative. Facilitating the funding and support to deliver a Scotland-wide programme of

Forest School. If quality assurance is to be sustained, then partnership has to be at both a national and local level to be effective, especially where other woodland owners are involved.

At a **national level**, as well as those already involved in the Forest Education Initiative Scotland, representation may be offered to other potential partners, including, for example – Scottish Executive/agencies responsible for health and community education, CoSLA, John Muir Award and Scottish Countryside Rangers Association. At a **local level** there are a wide range of community action groups and individuals (retired professionals, freelance educators) that may be interested in running/contributing to a Forest School, in addition to those usually involved.

In order to inform the process of drawing together these national and local partnerships, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and challenges of existing Forest Schools and their support are explored in the next section.

The key benefits FCS will receive from continuing involvement with Forest School are:

- **external publicity and accolades for the success of Forest School** and recognition that FCS and the national forest are providing effectively for health and learning about enterprise, society and the natural environment – rather than being viewed merely as a timber industry
- **understanding within and outwith the Scottish Executive and the organisation** that FCS has succeeded, at a local level, in meeting a number of its key objectives through using a single vehicle – Forest School – both effectively and efficiently.
- **certainty that most children exposed to Forest School will have developed an emotional attachment to trees and woodland**, and will continue to access and use woodlands and forests for a range of interests into adulthood, and with their own families.
- **certainty that some children will pursue future learning and employment connected with forestry and forest management**, as a direct consequence of their experience using tools and being in touch with the forest at Forest School.
- **certainty that many children exposed to Forest School have a better understanding and awareness of forest and woodland in Scotland**, its importance ecologically, economically and socially, and therefore its relevance to sustainable development.
- **job satisfaction and improved motivation** from those staff involved on the ground in delivering successful Forest Schools - either directly or through facilitation, and seeing the difference it makes.

5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and challenges

Table 2-1 and Table 2-2 provide summaries of comments from respondents, both directly and indirectly involved with Forest School. In regard to the potential and challenges that delivering Forest School across Scotland poses.

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT)

Table 2-1: SWOT Analysis of Forest School (FS)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants connect with site, value it, leads to respect and changed behaviour • Enhances potential for personal and professional development - children and adults • Positive use of woodlands - helps getting community involved, healthy activity, & recreation • Leaders and schools are motivated and enthusiastic, not all FCS employed - it works • Packaged neatly for woodlands and provides for outdoor learning in a 'safe' environment • Each Forest school is bespoke - no standard package • Comes with a good 'pedigree' - assuring its value, from Scandinavia and UK (England and Wales) • Provides an easy model for other organisations to adapt to their own woodland sites • Meets a variety of SEED educational priorities for 3-18 age group • Works particularly well with otherwise disadvantaged/excluded groups of young people • Positive use of national forest resource and Council owned woodlands - FCS leverage - other woodland owners- grants • High adult:pupil ratio - significant benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of strategic overview/plan across Scotland (& the UK) • Lack of dedicated resource/funding in Scotland - delivery 'patchy' • Lack of clear remit for Scottish FS Steering Group • Lack of effective information sharing and support network (Scotland) • Limited exchange with other regional Forest School (across Wales and England) practitioners • Lack of geographical consistency in delivery across Scotland • High:adult:pupil ratio - difficult to sustain • No current means of assuring (high) quality delivery - lack of standard evaluation methodology • Lack of trainers for leader training in Scotland • Lack of trained leaders and dependence on interest of individual staff/organisations • Lack of equipment sources/ information • Huge amount of additional preparation and planning - risk assessments, managing site, no standard support package • Lack of a clear understanding of what FS truly is - i.e. not just a one-off visit • Lack of FS remit in job descriptions of FCS staff and planned CPD targets

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many hooks to catch interest on - can use it to meet both social benefit/inclusion, health and education targets - • Marketing FS to potential partners - FCS, SNH, SEED/Scottish Exec, Local Councils/CoSLA - funding streams • More formal partnership - for funding /support - joined up thinking • Improve strategic effectiveness of Forest School Steering Group and establish network support • Setting up an accredited system of leader training and continuing support & mentors • Sharing good practice - other organisations can adapt to own sites • Using FCS grants and sites to facilitate delivery of Forest School • Using FCS staff who have run Forest Schools as mentors & for quality assurance in future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low promotion of FS concept definition • Reliance on staff/leader goodwill for delivery • Lack of trainers for leader training in Scotland • Lack of funding and support • Lack of trained leaders • Continuing H&S constraints on school visits - making schools hesitant • Internal perception within FCS that Forest School/ education is an optional extra • Internal perception that FCS has to deliver, rather than facilitate Forest Schools on the ground

The selection of respondents from within and outwith FCS was not objective, and within FCS was steered towards those with existing knowledge of Forest School within Scotland and the UK. However, even from this small, biased sample, it is clear that there is considerable support for Forest School at every level of the organisation. The response from schools and teachers has been described in **Part 1** of this report. The value and benefits of Forest School to children, society and to FCS are widely recognised.

Challenges

What then are the real challenges for establishing Forest School in schools across Scotland? This is not to ignore the obvious potential Forest School has for other client groups e.g. substance abuse, anti-social behaviour etc., but to narrow down the scope of this report.

Vision

Every child living in Scotland will have the opportunity to attend Forest School within a single school session (equivalent of at least 12 full days) during their nursery/primary school years.

Challenge 1 - Think big - mainstreaming Forest School

*Personal communications with those involved with Forest School constantly reinforced the above vision - that **Forest School should be accessible to more young people in Scotland, and ideally every one.***

By so doing, the aspiration is that many of the problems schools, society and young people face today, for example, obesity, lack of self respect, respect for others, and boredom, will no longer be such difficult issues to tackle. This is because of the belief that experiences gained at Forest School will have built a secure foundation for young people to build on. For example, in developing confidence, trust and self-esteem, and an appreciation of the natural environment and the importance of learning for life.

One respondent reflected they had not been looking forward to attending the 5 day Forest School training, seeing it as having 'limited value', but then revealing that the course had changed their views by the first morning. They have changed some of the ways in which they work, thus the experience has effected the way they deliver other educational programmes, as well as Forest School - particularly in increasing self esteem towards better learning.

Outdoor Learning - There is currently a Scottish Executive Education Department /Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) led initiative looking at the benefits of and opportunities for outdoor education. This is particularly in relation to physical activity and health, and in promoting the development of skills supporting enterprising and responsible citizens, aware of the needs of sustainable development.

In this context, FCS/FEI has a very real opportunity to promote the benefits of Forest School, gathering support to influence the decision-making process of curriculum reform taking place, over the next year or so. Only by convincing civil servants in the Scottish Executive Education Department, Learning and Teaching Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Schools (HMI e) of the value of Forest School will it ever be accessible to all.

Joined up Thinking and Learning - The real strength and benefit of Forest School is that it meets the needs of several strands of learning and living - health, inclusiveness, enterprise, natural environment and sustainable development as well as learning. It provides a '**real world**' context for joined up thinking and learning for its participants.

Forest School also offers the Scottish Parliament and Executive an opportunity to demonstrate **joined up thinking** in supporting its delivery for all the young people of Scotland.

A **combined fund**, with contributions from those departments that are likely to benefit, not only education - particularly health, enterprise and environment and

rural affairs, would provide the necessary dedicated resources over a reasonable period of time (5 years) to establish Forest School within the system. In those areas with insufficient tree cover to offer e.g. Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles, coastal sand dunes and beaches might provide an alternative habitat.

Advocacy - There is a need for advocacy at a high level within FCS and FEI Scotland. Also, by FCS/FEIS partners to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Executive, and other agencies and organisations, targeting :

- *Environment, Health, Social inclusion and Enterprise - e.g. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)⁸, Scottish Enterprise/Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Sport Scotland, Health Education, Scottish Countryside Rangers Association*
 - *Teachers' Associations - e.g. the Association of Primary and Secondary Head Teachers,*
 - *Teacher Education - e.g. General Teaching Council for Scotland and Chartered Teachers, Initial Teacher Education establishments*
 - *Local Councils - e.g. Association of Local Authority Heads/Directors of Education Services, Active Schools Co-ordinators*
 - *School and Parents - e.g. local clusters, Scottish Parent Teacher Association*
- The etc. to promote the concept of Forest School, and a partnership for its delivery in Scotland.*

There is a need to continue and expand the current publicity being given to Forest School in industry and education publications - raising awareness of what it is and how it benefits learners, and to a wider public audience.

CHALLENGE 2 - demonstration and delivery

In the short to medium term, this equality of opportunity to access Forest School is realistically unlikely. Therefore, it will be important to establish and promote a **network of pilot Forest Schools across Scotland**, which are geographically accessible, well documented and able to demonstrate the key features and benefits of Forest School to others.

The current pilots, and the case study Forest Schools do not appear to be secure enough to serve this purpose at present. Documentation is a real need. As with evaluation, this has largely proved too much of an additional burden for the Forest Leaders involved, given all the other demands of Forest School training and delivery.

FCS roles - Most FCS respondents expressed support for FCS, at a **national level**, to provide some, if limited, **pump priming resources**. To enable demonstration/ pathfinder projects to be set up in a number of key areas across

⁸ Forest School, as a vehicle for first hand experience of the natural heritage and outdoor learning, fits well within the SNH Education Strategy and grant guidelines.

Scotland. They all agreed that FCS does not have the resources (or remit) to sustain a 'roll out' of Forest School pilots, or programmes, across Scotland. There is a lack of available staff on the ground and competing priorities for cash resources.

At a **local level**, it was intimated Forest District staff can be asked to facilitate Forest School, by helping funding bids being put together, and releasing internal/external grant monies e.g. WIAT Challenge Fund, or Heritage Lottery Fund; providing sites, and providing advice on site management. Within this process, there is an opportunity for some Forest Districts to be involved directly, where there is enthusiasm and opportunity for FCS Rangers to be Forest Leaders, but this is unlikely to be the norm. Where it is, however, this role should be recognised within **job descriptions, and support for related CPD needs**.

Targeting FS delivery - A careful **national targeting exercise** will have to be undertaken. FCS may or may not choose to take the lead, it has the advantage of its GIS facility, or it may be a partnership exercise.

'**Priority screens**' may have to be used to identify the target groups and/or geographical areas of focus for FCS support locally, across Scotland.

For example, priority given to Forest Schools:

- where the users are within 1-2kms of their woodland.
- offers children from areas of social deprivation access to woodlands, and meets FCS health and social inclusion objectives.
- with locally based, trained and experienced leaders.
- for children with learning and behavioural problems in Special Schools (where these children are included in mainstream schools, the feeling seems to be to not extract them).
- for the very young (3-5s) and, primary age (8-12s), although it also works with young people and adults.

High adult: child ratio

Wherever Forest Schools develops it is '**people intensive**'. The bottom line is the need for sufficient local Forest School trained and experienced leaders. Hence the need to encourage local teachers and educators within/outwith schools to take on the challenge. The need for a high adult: child ratio is both a strength and a weakness, since it requires schools to be able to resource, or encourage family/ friend/student support. This can be inhibited by the increased demands for **disclosure** procedures.

CHALLENGE 3 : <i>Partnership, coordination and resources</i>

There is an advantage of Scotland being behind Wales and England in its widespread delivery of Forest School. We can learn from what has happened there, and find a 'third way' that will suit best the conditions in Scotland.

Partnership and co-ordination

Wales- Experience from Wales shows how the synergy between FEI Wales (FEI W) and Forest School has been important in its coordination, dissemination and delivery on the ground. In Wales, FEI W is almost entirely funded by Forestry Commission Wales (FCW). The FCW has supported Forest School through FEI W and through national promotion and practical support at a local level. In Wales, there appears to be strength in diversity, whereby Forest Schools have developed either self sufficiently, using internal leaders – teachers, nursery nurses, youth leaders, or through external, self employed Forest School leaders. Local education authorities are now beginning to take strategic decisions e.g. Caerphilly is aiming for a Forest School leader in every Primary School. The setting up of a separate charitable organisation does not seem to have been particularly sustainable.

England - Experience from England is very different, not unexpected when comparing the geographic size and population of the countries. In England, Forest School although coordinated by the FEI England, has largely been funded and promoted through the local authority education departments. The target audience has also mainly been Early Years – children in nursery education.

Scotland - FEI Scotland could play an important advocacy and co-ordinating role for Forest School in Scotland. Recently, a **FEI Scotland Steering Group** has been set up. It is likely that a series of focused **sub-groups** will be established to concentrate efforts on particular themes, of which one might be, Forest Schools. Representation will be from the main steering group. Others can be co-opted from organisations not currently represented, but whose interests may be crucial to promotion and delivery locally e.g. CoSLA, Health Education.

It appears that, in Scotland, the parliamentary climate is such that it may be important to appeal to **more than just education departments/services** when seeking **national and local government funding**. However, there is a real opportunity to influence curriculum reform at present and this should be capitalised on. Whichever line is taken, it will be time consuming to achieve.

At present, 5 out of 11 FEI Cluster Groups in Scotland have expressed interest and have Forest School as one of their action projects. The potential here for expansion needs exploring. Greater FEI involvement might be forthcoming, given further centralised support and resources?

Clunes Forest School has not had any support through the Highland FEI. In some areas of Scotland, traditionally, geographical separation has tended to foster a 'go it alone anyway' attitude, which is commendable but can be even more isolating.

Resources/Funding

Forest Schools, in both England and Wales, are hoping to/have benefit/ed from funding resourced through the Big Lottery Fund. **Lottery Funding** may also be an avenue to explore in Scotland - bidding for resources to support a 3-5 year plan to establish Forest School across Scotland. As already mentioned, matching funding might be made available through FCS and/or SNH, or other Scottish Executive funds.

However, putting a bid together and seeking matching funds takes time. It **needs dedicated resources for a concentrated period of time**, and a commitment to a high level of advocacy. The current provision within the job descriptions of the FEI Co-ordinator, or for the Forest School Co-ordinator of 1 day/week is not sufficient for this task, along with everything else. A small focused team drawn from a FEI S Forest School sub group, with a dedicated and supported Forest School project officer, would be a practical solution to achieve this task, with assistance from FCS grants staff.

Strategic Planning resource - Several respondents from the Forest School Steering Group (set up to network practitioners who are undertaking/had undertaken Forest School training and were leaders) expressed the opinion that the lack of co-ordination at a strategic level, and at a practical support level was draining their energy, if not their enthusiasm. The training alone is a serious undertaking and time commitment. To retain quality assurance and to be sustainable it requires the provision of co-ordinated, practical support (probably internet based) and management commitment and support to make it easier and more attractive, to already busy people.

One of the purposes of this report is to address this current weakness. The FEI S Co-ordinator and Forest School Co-ordinators currently contribute, officially, 2 days/week. This is not a sufficient resource commitment to meet the demands of establishing an effective Forest School network in Scotland.

CHALLENGE 4 : Training and support

The training and support of Forest School leaders, as a means of developing the Forest School network, is the highest priority. This is the experience and conclusion in both England and Wales, and in Scotland.

Accredited trainer for leaders in Scotland

An essential element of taking Forest School forward is obtaining an accredited trainer/s based in Scotland. Properly resourced, this enables a leader/trainer network to develop; ensures better quality assurance, and mentors for individual leaders during training, and in gaining early experience.

Evidence shows the current system of training provision and support in Scotland, based as it is in England, is overstretched. It is not meeting trainee leaders needs in Scotland adequately or consistently.

Raising awareness of Forest School, before having the capacity in place to train and support leaders adequately is risky. Poor practice and the 'watering down' of the original Forest School concept and resulting impact (e.g. carried off as a few one off half day visits, carried out in unsuitable school grounds etc.) can result.

One respondent reflected that they and a colleague had been encouraged and enthusiastic about running Forest School at their site. However, a number of logistical and information sharing breakdowns in the organisation of follow up training and support events had totally demoralised them. They do not wish to have further involvement with Forest School at this moment.

Although working locally the Forest School leaders need to feel, and be, part of a **national network** – with a capacity for sharing good practice and providing a strategic, coordinating and support function. Responses from the leaders perspective, showed how **support during/after training is of key importance** to them. For example, the ability to access mentors, generic advice (e.g. on curriculum links, risk assessment and equipment sources), experience of good practice and access to further training. There is an important **face- to- face** element to this, and continuing training and development, but much of what the leaders are asking for at this stage can be provided through **generic guidance on the internet** – writing such materials could be done by contracting out.

Table 2-2: Challenges for success – National and Local

Scotland/UK	Local
Promotion/marketing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of what FS is/is not & what it can deliver • Effectiveness in delivering FCS objectives within FCS • Effectiveness in delivering breadth of educational and social priorities to Scottish Exec, agencies, teacher assocns, SPTA & CoSLA – links to Health/ Active Schools, Determined to Succeed (enterprise), outdoor education & citizenship/sustainable development education and PSD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarification of what FS is/is not & what it can deliver • Effectiveness in delivering FCS objectives within FDs • Effectiveness in delivering breadth of educational & social priorities to Local Councils and schools/teachers – links to Health/ Active Schools, Determined to Succeed (enterprise), outdoor education & citizenship/ sustainable development education and PSD

Scotland/UK	Local
Organisation/Partnership	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scotland overview - FCS lead* with FEI Forest School (FS) subgroup, or FS Partnership <i>Leadership, promotion to key players (Scott Exec, HMI e, agencies, HLF), resourcing/ funding, strategic planning, networking with Wales & England, quality assurance, training/ support provision, good practice, disclosure</i> *Ultimate goal to encourage SEED to take on lead role • Scotland co-ordination - find funding for 1 post FTE (minimum) + 0.5 FTE Admin support + project funds <i>Overview group secretary, coordination of training needs, devt of support packages & materials (by contract), share good practice, promotion to education/general audience</i> • Key funding partners - engage with Scottish Exec rep., SNH, Scott Ent/HIE, Local Councils/ CoSLA, Heritage Lottery Fund <i>Grants,</i> • Key 'in kind' partners - Comm W'lands Assoc, Central ScotlandFT, Woodland Trust, Borders FT, Eco Schools, GfL, JM Award, SCRA <i>Sites, time & expertise, fundraising</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local overview - FEI Cluster Group to engage Forest District (FD) & Local Council Education/Social services - joined up thinking • Local Co-ordinator - support dedicated resources - target school clusters, area/ District wide?, link to Active School co-ordinators? <i>Support/ mentor local leaders, coordinate local training and networking, cover for leaders, manage pool of resources/ equipment, risk assessment, quality assurance, play trouble shooter, promote locally</i> • Local leaders - find teachers, envtl. educators, freelance/employed to take on training. • Local funding/in kind partners - FD facilitates & engages with SNH, Scott Ent/HIE, Local Council other services - rangers etc. Involve other NGOs, private woodland owners with an interest
Strategic Planning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from England and Wales experiences • Development of definite aims and targets to direct energy and activity • Provision of support and guidance to local FS leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking beyond one FS in a local area • Need to feel part of the bigger entity • Be clear on where we want to go and why
Funding options	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness in delivering breadth of educational and other Scottish Exec priorities - engaging with all SExec • Funding bid to support coordination, training and support outputs and outcomes delivered through 1FTE, 0.5 Admin support, T&S, and project funds + accommodation (in kind) • Funders develop a dedicated FS fund managed by FCS - contributions from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding bid to support 1 FTE and admin support (in kind) +accommodation (in kind) • Funding bids to support purchase of a pool of equipment/activity props, to 'buy in' specialists or extra cover • Franchise approach - client& leader work up 2-3 year package bid from FCS managed FS fund

<p>Scott Exec, SNH, FCS, SEPA, Sc Ent/HI E. Sc Health Board</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scottish Exec Fund developed to support every child in Scotland attending FS once in nursery/primary years. 	
Leader Training & Quality Assurance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need a dedicated trainer for Scotland • Bid for Training for Trainers UK • Continue involvement with Quality Assurance scheme being developed, or go it alone with SQA? • Continued improvement of coordination and delivery of leader training • Build in evaluation methodology - based on nef research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce local 'buddy' scheme or mentor support after initial training • Further training to develop new skills/activities - sharing good practice
Leader Support and Networking	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic risk assessments for common activities • Generic education outcomes for common activities • Generic evaluation schemas e.g. nef <p>Use website and/or networking events for sharing new experiences and good practice, gathering views of practitioners to inform strategic developments, keeping people in touch with new developments UK/Europe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local information on where to get equipment; storage provision • FD help on developing management plans for FS sites & identification of new sites

5 Conclusions and recommendations

- **Agree FCS and FEIS key roles** - FCS should continue a key advocacy and facilitating role on behalf of Forest School, until FEIS Steering Group has established itself and has a focus for Forest School. After which time a co-ordination of effort may reduce the level of FCS input required.

FEIS is an important potential 'broker' in coordinating the promotion, funding and support of Forest School, nationally and locally. But FEIS may or may not be the way forward - this often depends on personalities as much as partner representation - for FCS to gauge.

- **Find partnership and funding for national co-ordination and support** - This is the **highest priority action**, and will require a dedicated resource (0.5 full time equivalent) to set up. This role is the key to sustaining/increasing the number of Forest Schools in Scotland, and recognised within the recently launched *Woods for Learning* Education Strategy.

FCS should build on existing support and investment, and use leverage on others who will benefit (SNH, Scottish Executive) to employ/ second, at least initially, a six-month, full time equivalent (FTE) project officer post (part time for 12 months?) with the purpose of using leverage to find potential funding partners and putting together a funding package and seeing it through e.g. Lottery bid - learning from FEI England Big Lottery Fund bid experience.

- **Improve leader support and training** - Getting a suitable support framework in place is considered a higher priority, than training new leaders at the moment. In this way, it will be easier to support newly trained leaders, improve their confidence, and thus the quality and effectiveness of future Forest Schools. Existing Forest School leader support within FCS and FEIS should be directed towards:
 - providing practical, generic guidance/good practice for leaders;
 - establishing a strategic focus within FEIS and influencing all FEI cluster groups to support Forest Schools in their area.
 - Enabling a functioning focus for the Forest School Steering Group,
 - a database and network of existing Forest Schools and leaders (in/completed training)

Forest Schools will be more sustainable if leaders come from within the school community involved. It requires the training package to be of a consistent and high quality. If marketed to teachers, it would benefit from being 'signposted' through existing teacher CPD provision e.g. the Chartered Teacher system, and linked to the current Curriculum for Excellence review

process. Training needs to be supported and resourced by commitment at a high level of management in schools and local authorities.

- **Promote Forest School benefits within FCS** – The strategic benefits of Forest School should be targeted at all levels within FCS, and within all Forest Districts. A demonstration workshop, or other face- to- face events – allowing staff to share their enthusiasm, and/or doubts, and ways in which staff may facilitate the delivery of Forest Schools on the ground (grants, forest sites etc.). Explicit **support from senior management** will make a significant difference to this process.
- **Promote Forest School benefits within national and local government** – The integration of Forest School into mainstream education will depend on persuading two groups of the benefits:
 - Scottish Executive Education Departments (and others) and agencies, at a national level, and
 - Local Councils and school communities at a local level

There are examples in England where this has happened in several local authorities – lessons can be learned from these. There is a need for FCS/FEI S hosted, high profile, promotional and/or demonstration events for these client groups. See **Part 1** recommendations.

ANNEX 1 CONTACT LIST OF CONSULTEES

FCS

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Learning and Teaching Scotland

Colin McAndrew, Principle Education Officer, Policy and Liaison

Bill Lynch - Sustainable Development Education

Willie White - Outdoor Learning/Education

Others

Rob Busby, John Muir Award

Peter Higgins, Head of Outdoor and Environmental Education, University of Edinburgh

Education

Duncan Campbell (report)

Elaine Clark, Class teacher, Falla Hill PS

Anita Craig, Head Teacher, Falla Hill PS

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