



'quality Forest School for all'

Forest School Association Newsletter No 2

Spring 2013

Chairs welcome to the FSA's Spring newsletter.

Since the autumn we have been hard at work. You'll all know by now we have appointed Gareth Davies as our development officer and one of his first jobs has been to develop the FSA website which will be live by the end of April – thanks Gareth, see www.forestschoollassociation.org. This will be one of our main tools for signposting people and informing the world about Forest School in the UK. We have been developing the membership model for the organisation which will include, open membership, professional membership and training membership at the present. Also we are working closely with Forest Education Network on England who have just launched their website see <http://www.lotc.org.uk/fen> and Forest School Wales see www.forestschoollwales.org.uk and FEI in Wales and Scotland see www.foresteducation.org/.



The board has been working away in its working groups; Marketing (web and PR); Fundraising; Membership (inc local groups, see Louise's article on membership); National Representation (we are currently working up a response to the new national curriculum document (see article below) and have been invited on to the Growing Britain group looking at the future of our forests); and Conference (see later for details of the autumn conference). If you can help out/contribute in any way we would love to hear from you.

We'd love to have your feedback on the newsletter and membership services so all suggestions and contributions welcome, we want to make this seasonal and personal!

I heard my first willow warbler last week – always a good sign that the migrants have got here – albeit to a cold cold welcome! So, as this is the start of spring, happy hare spotting; enjoy watching and listening for the harbingers of spring with your groups; and telling spring tales (love the hare tales). You may even want to get involved with the woodland trusts phenology project that has been running for a number of years looking at seasonal change (many Forest Schools across the country have engaged with this).

Make a clean sweep with those freshly made birch besoms before the leaves bud up, and if you've managed to tap the birch tree, enjoy its spring sap!

~Jon Cree

Don't forget to check out the new website & register!
www.forestschoollassociation.org

Forest School Moments – the power of winter fire at Forest School



Wyre Forest Special School, a school that has been following the Forest School programme at Bishops Wood for the last 5 years, this year witnessed a special moment around the fire. A young female 14 year old, quite withdrawn and who finds it hard to mix with others, is part of a group of 5, all the others being boys! Just after Christmas when the snow was lying on the ground, for the first time since September she joined the fire circle at

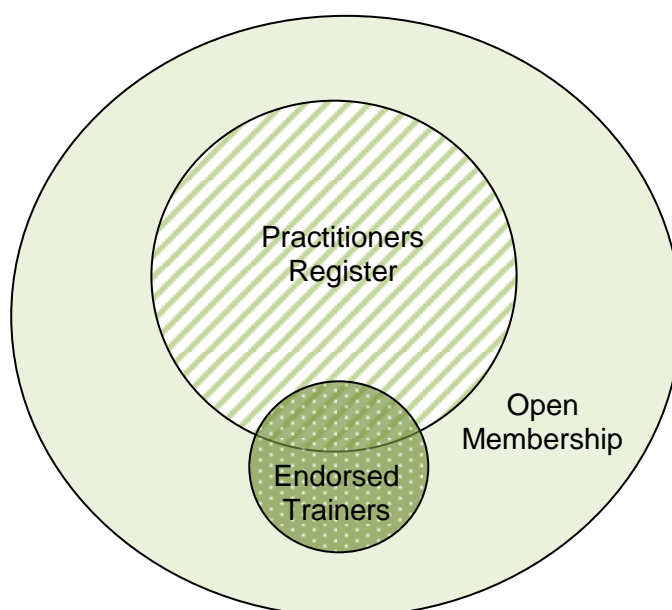
lunchtime. She was entranced by the fire and suddenly without any prompting from any of the group took out her sketchbook. She started to sketch the fire and has used this as a foundation for weeks of artwork in the school based on fire. This is the first time she has engaged and is now working with the boys in making chairs and suddenly talking and contributing to the fire conversation – **'the alchemy of fire'**.



~ R Liggitt, Forest School & Outdoor Learning Leader, Wyre Forest School.

Membership News

The membership sub group and executive have been developing the membership model for the FSA. We have decided that a 'holistic' approach to membership is the most fitting with the Forest School ethos and therefore the FSA will maintain an open membership policy. This means that anyone with an interest in promoting and celebrating quality Forest School is welcome to join the FSA. In order to collaboratively meet the needs of the varied range of members, we are currently working on 2 additional categories of membership – for training providers and practitioner. We feel that it is important to get the details of these 2 categories right and so they are still being worked on. The FSA envisions that these 2 categories will form the basis for quality assurance within Forest School training and practice in the UK.



FSA Code of Conduct for Members

The executive group have developed a code of conduct for membership to support this holistic membership model. The purpose of this code is to support our vision of 'quality Forest School for all' by empowering members to participate, share and inspire people through their contact with Forest School. Following this code is one way FSA members support the FSA's articles of association. The member's code of conduct can be found on the new website here:

<http://www.forestschoollassociation.org/members-code-of-conduct/>



FSA Affiliated Groups

We have been approached by a number of existing local networking groups asking to become local FSA groups. The FSA welcomes this and would like to support members to set up and run groups which will support and celebrate Forest School at a local level. We are currently working up some guidance notes on how groups of members can work together to do this and what support the FSA can offer to these group.

Website Membership Services

The new website will have a password protected members-only section, including resources library and social networking facilities. We will be continually adding resources to this membership section of the website; including reviews, case studies, meeting minutes and news. We would welcome members contributions to this area, so please do get in touch if you would like to support this development. The membership networking facilities will offer website users the ability to make 'friends', join groups and post on forums. Gareth has also made a video to explain the functionality of the website, to help us use it!

Once the website is up and running fully, we will be having a push on PR and increasing membership. So do look out for some press about the FSA in the future!

~ FSA Membership Sub-group



Forest School Doodle



~ Kindly contributed by Lily Horseman

Training Success and Progress

"I have never before come across an educational organisation which understands how child led learning applies to adults as well, with amazing results. You have lit a warm flame inside me, thank you, thank you, thank you."

Senior Manager on October 2009 Level 3 course

"Estimated 10,000 people going through the FS training process", just one of the headlines that has led to the establishment of the FSA. Three of the objects on the FSA constitution relate to ensuring quality training and one of our first breakthroughs this March was being able to send a letter of support to OFQUAL (the body responsible for national qualifications in England) to enable the FS quals to be part of the English Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF). This has been a number of years in the making and having a national association in place slotted in the final piece of the jigsaw. It means that the Forest School qualifications at level 1, 2 and 3 are now recognised as 'valid' qualifications by the English qualification body and is another step towards this becoming accepted as an integral part of our education system. Many folks have asked me what does this mean for our qualification? – this is still valid so don't worry that it is not the 'new' qualification. The trainers network have been beaver away over the years reviewing and refining the quals and the latest, which is on the QCF, you'll see has been tweaked but still retains the essence of what all we FS practitioners have been trained in over the last 15 years. So can I take this opportunity to thank all those people who have had an input into the current units now on the QCF, in particular the various working groups on the trainers network through the ages (that includes AGORED, the Welsh awarding body, as well as the training providers) and Open College Network West Midlands who had to put this through all the OFQUAL hoops.

For those awarding bodies wanting to clone the qualification the FSA will add a letter of support providing they clone the qualification as it is on the QCF and they follow the qualification guidance outlined in the OCNWMR FS guidance booklet.

The FSA is currently working through how it will endorse training providers and what the criteria will be – so do watch this space.

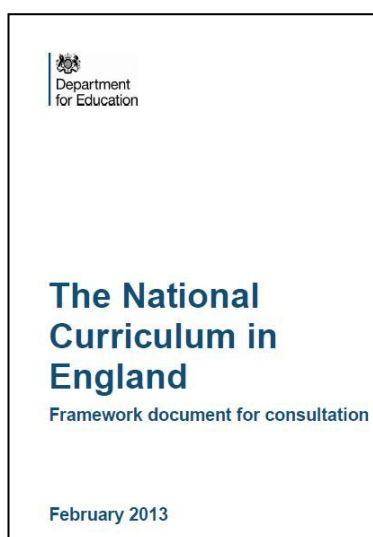
Training seems to be still thriving with three new providers recently joining the GB Trainers Network which brings the network membership to 25 organisations. UK providers are also being asked to facilitate training in other countries and contribute to international conferences and papers. The 7th EU Forest Pedagogy Conference in Scotland last Autumn was witness to this where FS had a large presence see <http://www.forestpedagogics.eu/>. Do watch out for Sara Knight's new book to be published this Autumn on the international dimensions of FS.

Also we, the FSA, have been involved in advising Canadian practitioners in setting up both Forest School Canada and a Canadian training system, see <http://childnature.ca/forestschoolcanada>



One of the things the FSA will be looking at will be Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and supporting ongoing professional support for practitioners in all its forms – be it through sharing networks, mentoring, short courses, conferences etc. So if you have ideas on how we can help facilitate and support CPD for FS practitioners we'd love to hear from you.

Wider Issues & Forest School.



English National Curriculum Consultations

I am sure that many of you will know that the Government have published a consultation document on the English National Curriculum from September 2014. The Executive Committee put together a response on behalf of the Forest School Association. Along with many other organisations we expressed concerns on a number of issues, and we have drawn comparisons with the curricular in Scotland and Wales to point out some of the weaknesses. Here are a few of our comments:

The curriculum seems to be neither balanced nor broad with a list of prescribed facts in many of the subject areas. The unimaginative content gives little time to allow teachers to deliver, as the document states, “exciting and stimulating lessons”.

The content in the programmes of study is largely a lack-lustre and outdated regurgitation of early 20th century goals. It misses the opportunity to prepare children to be flexible and adaptable members of the workforce by virtue of their abilities to think laterally, creatively and sustainably.

One future responsibility children will be dealing with is environmental and climate change, which is mentioned no-where. There is nothing in any POS, in particular science and geography, about individuals place in the globalised society. There is nothing mentioned about how we as individuals and society as a whole interact with these processes, such as resource depletion, and the impacts on the natural world upon which we depend for all our lifestyles nor about climate change, and how we can influence and care for these key processes.

The narrow focus and the fact-heavy content will lead to the unambitious delivery of a stodgy curriculum, lacking the innovative spark that would ignite perspiration, let alone inspiration. There is not enough aspiration particularly in key stage 1 and 2 – in science. For example, young pupils are quite able to understand basic processes such as ecological interrelationships. We can evidence that children can grasp these concepts from the Foundation Stage onwards.

There are many adventurous activities to be had in the outdoors that do not necessarily conform to the normal activities such as climbing and canoeing. This could include climbing trees, playing outdoor games etc. To state that Art is the optimum of human creativity is symptomatic of a miscomprehension of creativity, which should infuse every aspect of every subject. This would illuminate the learning journey for each child, exciting them to travel ever further and faster.

If this is to be real world learning there needs to be more reference to taking children out of the classroom and into our communities and landscapes to experience and contribute to the wider world. It seems disingenuous that at primary level, school history stops at Wars of the Roses, and there is very little mention of local history.

Clearly "higher standards" is a subjective judgement, but the children starting this curriculum in 2014 will probably not leave education before 2028. The world will be a place that is unknowable to those of us working with young people now. Higher standards must mean adaptability, flexibility, confidence and good communication skills. This curriculum will not give them that.

There is little reference to a globalised society and how we need to equip pupils and schools to participate in this rapidly-changing society and the most vulnerable will be left behind if this is not addressed.

It is extremely disappointing that yet again the Government has shied away from bringing the curriculum into the 21st Century. The Cambridge Primary Review is still the most innovative and creative approach to the needs of our children and the world in which they will have to live. And to fail to make any mention of the environmental issues that will be so fundamental to their wellbeing is completely reprehensible.

In the light of our serious concerns we recommend that the current curriculum stays in place until a curriculum more fit for the 21st century is in place. We, the Forest School Association, which represents over 10,000 educators, are willing to support this process to serve the best interests of children and young people.

The full version is available on the Latest News section of the website. Now we sit back to see if any notice is taken!

~ Sara Knight

FEI Forest School Scotland Coordinator funded for 2 more years

The FEI Forest School Scotland coordinator post has been extended with additional funding for further 2 years. Penny Martin, the Forest School co-ordinator (also on the FSA board of directors) promotes and supports the development of Forest School in Scotland and is happy to help with any Forest School Scotland related enquiry. The

Forest School Scotland database continues to grow. Everyone within this network receives FEI and Forest School Scotland news and updates. If you are a trainee or qualified FS practitioner in Scotland and would like to be included on the database, please email Penny forestschoolcoordinator@livingclassrooms.org.uk

For further Scotland news the latest FEI Forest School Scotland Spring newsletter can be accessed in the news section of the FEI website http://www.foresteducation.org/news/view/fei_forest_school_scotland_newsletter_spring_2013/

~ Penny Martin

Grown in Britain – the Forestry Panel

Following the hiatus caused by the government's proposal to sell off the national forests and the review into the future of our woodlands the Forestry Panel was established and we were pleased to see that the Forest Education Network (FEN) and the FSA got a mention in the first report. A good sign that the FSA and FEN have gained some national recognition for their current and future roles in promoting education and involvement in our woodlands. As a result the FSA were invited to the first workshop, held in March at DEFRA's offices in London that Grown in Britain organised to bring national organisations together to look at the future of our woodlands. In particular to find ways of helping people to get positively involved and develop the 'wood culture' required to change the way society views and values our woods and forests. Another workshop will be organized in July to follow up on the actions that were being proposed. For more information see <http://www.growninbritain.org>



Chalara Dieback of Ash – Update

I'm sure you are all aware by now of the fungus (*Chalara fraxinea*) causing dieback in our Ash trees. The disease causes leaf loss and crown dieback in affected trees, and it can lead to tree death. It is widespread across Europe and in Denmark has killed 60-90% of Ash trees, so considered a threat to UK populations. Defra have now published a Chalara management plan (found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chalara-management-plan>)

The fungal infection is spread via spores produced from fruiting bodies on infected leaf litter and shoot material. In the growing season after a tree's initial infection, the spores produced can travel on the wind and spread to nearby trees. It is believed that wind and planting infected trees are the main ways of transmission, and that contamination by birds and clothing is relatively low. Trees are likely to need a high dose of spores to become infected and the spores can only survive for a few days.



Infection starts primarily on leaves, and is progressive over time, with dieback and stem lesions usually manifesting in the next growing season. Leaf symptoms can be detected within two months of infection. Trees cannot recover from infection, but larger trees can survive infection for a considerable time and some might not die.

Please look at the Forestry Commissions website for up the most up to date information: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara>

What we can do to help:

- Monitor any Ash trees in woodlands you visit regularly. There is a guide to Chalara symptoms from the Forestry Commission, including videos.
- Report any suspected cases to the landowner and to the authorities via the 'Tree Alert' online form (there is also an App for smart phones!)
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/treealert>
- Please be aware that there is no requirement to remove infected trees, unless they pose a health and safety concern to people.
- Don't remove and/or transport any leaf litter or plant material from or to woodlands.
- Follow any bio security measures put in place by landowners/managers.

Natural Connections Demonstration Project

(NB. This is an abbreviated version – for the full article please visit www.forestschoollassociation.org and look in latest news)

Despite increasingly robust evidence on the benefits of childhood experiences in natural environments, recent surveys show that the vast majority of our children are rapidly losing connection with their local natural environments, and that those children from urban environments are particularly disadvantaged. The pace of change is profound and undoubtedly contributing to major challenges facing society today – including the rise in childhood obesity and mental health issues, the struggle to build a sense of place and community, and the need to address climate change and develop pro-environmental behaviours.

Evidence also shows that learning in natural environments can transform individual and school performance by increasing the standards of teaching and learning, allowing innovation, creativity and excellence in curriculum delivery, as well as increasing motivation and attainment. Economic assessments indicate that failure to act quickly will result in major educational, health and environmental costs in the near future. Of course, none of this will be a surprise to Forest School Association members.

In response to this growing body of evidence, the Natural Connections Demonstration Project has been set up. The Project, funded by DEFRA, Natural England and English Heritage, and recently contracted to Plymouth University, is one of the largest outdoor learning projects in the UK. This three year Project,



working in more than 200 schools across the South West, aims to significantly increase the number of school-aged children experiencing the full range of benefits that come from learning in natural environments (LINE). The three main objectives are:

- to stimulate the demand from schools and teachers for learning in natural environments (LINE)
- to support schools and teachers in building LINE into their planning and practices
- to stimulate the supply of high quality LINE services for schools and teachers.



The Project is working in five areas of relatively high deprivation: Plymouth, Torbay, Cornwall, North Somerset and Bristol, so around 40 schools directly involved in each area. In addition the Project will work with hundreds of local volunteers to help communities build capacity in their school, while enabling the school to engage the skills and expertise available in the local community. Take a look at www.naturalengland.org.uk and search for 'natural connections'.

As one of our main objectives is to support LINE providers, we are keen to involve FSA members in Natural Connections. If you would like to know more or want to be involved, please feel free to contact:

- Helen Lawson helen.lawson@plymouth.ac.uk (to register an interest as a provider to schools)
- Emily Cannon emily.cannon@plymouth.ac.uk (for more information about volunteering)
- Ian Blackwell ian.blackwell@plymouth.ac.uk (Project Manager; CPD, communications & sustainability)

Forest School research on world tour

Mel McCree is giving presentations about her PhD on adult experiences of Forest School this year, including to the World Environmental Education Congress in Morocco. Findings and other info will be published on her website in July (www.melmccree.me). There are some useful recommendations for practitioners and training providers, such as investing in a whole team approach and collaborating in hybrid partnerships locally to support FS practice.



Natural History Skills - The humble Common Stinging Nettle – *Urtica dioica*

(NB. This is an abbreviated version – for the full article please access the membership section of the website and look in resource library)

Spring has crept upon us and it's wonderful to see the nettles growing again. I'm already thinking of my Spring `nettle aloo` – think of the Indian side dish `sag aloo` but using nettles instead of spinach – it is absolutely scrummy. Then of course, there is also hearty nettle, potato soup and wild garlic soup and wonderful nettle tea. Oh and the stems for making cordage... the greenish-yellow dye from the leaves and stems... or the yellow dye from the roots and...and...and....



© Nicola Poole

Nettles are extremely good for us; full of minerals, vitamins, healing properties and of course umpteen craft uses – over the centuries the nettle has been used for cloth, food and medicine.

Collecting nettles - It is advisable to collect nettles found away from roadsides to avoid pollution and dirt and not in areas where they may have been sprayed. Most of us know how to identify stinging nettles, however it is always advisable to identify correctly by cross referencing in several field guides (and if in doubt, leave it out!).

When to pick for food - If you are collecting nettles for food, the top shoots should be picked by the beginning of June as in summer months, the nettles become bitter in taste and coarse in texture due to a chemical change owing to a build-up of calcium carbonate crystals within the plant's cells. Wear

gloves and cut the top shoots with scissors so the rest of the plant can continue to grow. Before cooking always wash well.

Some of the things you can do with nettles:

- Nettle tea
- Nettle conserve with the flowers
- Cooked as a vegetable - Nettle soup and all sorts of other delicious recipes
- Nettle compost
- To make liquid plant food

Some amazing Nettle facts:

- The Roman belief that nettle stings cured rheumatism persists in Britain today
- During WWII nettles were harvested to supply chlorophyll for medicines

So, the next time you see that humble nettle just give a thought to it's amazing properties and celebrate this year's spring growth of the nettle – what an amazing plant.

~ Clair Hobson

Up and Coming UK Events 2013

May 10th – 12th **Forest School South West Sharing Event** at Young Wood, see <http://www.youngwood.org.uk/events.html>

May 11th **Exploring Emotional Development and Facilitating Emotional Literacy in the context of Forest School**, FSW, Camarthenshire, see www.forestschoollwales.org.uk

May 15th **Musical Woods training day** FSW, Bangor, see www.forestschoollwales.org.uk

June 29th **Feasting in the Forest day** FSW, Swansea, see www.forestschoollwales.org.uk

September 13th & 14th **FEI Scotland Networking Event** at the Falkland Centre for Stewardship in Fife, see www.foresteducation.org.uk

October 12th & 13th **National Forest School Conference**, FSA, at Derwent Hill OE Centre, Keswick, Cumbria, see the FSA website for details.

National Forest School Conference – Autumn in the Lakes!

We have now fixed a date for the national conference – October 12th – 13th at Derwent Hill OE Centre. There will be accommodation available in various forms – single and double rooms, dorms, camping and of course local B&B's. We are still putting the programme together so would like your suggestions as what would be most useful to have on the programme. Tim Gill, our patron, will be laying down a few

challenges for FS and the rest of the conference will be based on what you as members feel would be most valuable, so please do get in touch to let us know what you'd like to see at the conference, this is your conference. We will be sending a survey out soon, with costs, but in the meantime do put the dates in your diary and get in touch to get the ball rolling.....



October 23rd – 25th **The 8th European Forest Pedagogics Congress will be at Bilbao in Spain** see <http://www.forestpedagogics.eu>

A big thank you to all our members who contributed to this issue!

If you would like to submit ideas for future FSA Newsletters then please do contact us at enquiries@forestschoollwales.org