



## **Forest School Association Annual Report, November 8<sup>th</sup> 2016**

2015/16 has been a year of consolidation and helped the FSA to continue to work on priorities set out by the development plan which launched the organization 4 years ago, namely the piloting of the Training Quality Assurance scheme and Organizational Membership. So here is a summary of activity in the last year

### ***Training Quality Assurance Scheme***

This was started towards the end of the previous year – see annual report 2015/16. Last October an outline of the scheme was presented to the GB trainers network which included three stages and was generally favourably received – however the detail still needed to be worked up.

For the last year the FSA board have set up a working group and a wider small consultation group to act as a sounding board and we now have worked up the detail of the scheme with the support of a short term project worker – Nell Seal. The board working group consisted of a chair – Chris Millett, who has had previous experience of working on the IOL professional accreditation schemes and three trainers on the board – Lily Horseman, Louise Ambrose and Jon Cree and the wider consultation group are external trainers – Sarah Lawfull (Oxfordshire Forest School), Richard Irvine (independent provider) and Mike Brady (Lanarkshire Council).

So far we have piloted **stage 1** of the process with a number of trainers, which asks for all the experience and qualifications (both validated), policies and procedures, course schedules, evidence of guided learning hours and how trainees are supported through the training process. The results of this are being pulled together as I write this.

**Stage 2** will be piloted next and will involve interviews with newly qualified trainees from both the first cohort of trainers and a second cohort that will go through stage one after all the feedback from stage 1 pilot has been collated.

**Stage 3** will involve peer/board combined interviews with the trainers. Standards have been set for all the stages and will be reviewed as these initial cohorts pilot the process.

Ongoing – the QA process will continue with training of the trainers and attendance at sharing events to maintain trainers own CPD and up to date training practice in Forest School.

Costings have also been put to the GB trainers network and there is general agreement on this – we aim to just cover the expenses associated with the scheme.

We will be ready in early 2017 to announce the detail of the scheme and open it up to the Forest School training community and establish some baseline standards for training for those who engage with the process and quality assure the training through the FSA.

To administer the scheme we have employed a new part time project worker for the next 6 months – Lisa Pearce, who previously has worked for Natural England, Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission.



### ***Forest School Qualification review***

In late 2015 OFQUAL, the government regulatory body for qualifications, introduced a new qualification framework – the Regulated Qualification Framework. This meant that all qualifications that are to be recognized by government needed to be reviewed by the end of 2017. So the GB trainers network have been working this year with Open College Network West Midlands to start the review off and have had input from the professional body – i.e. the FSA. The next stage of this is for the GB Trainers Network and FSA to work with more of the awarding bodies involved with Forest School training, and OFQUAL, to finish the review and have the Forest School qualifications on to the new Regulated Framework to ensure they continue to be nationally recognized.

The FSA have continued to work with awarding bodies to ensure they are at least adopting the qualification guide which provides some minimum standards by which awarding bodies should be establishing Forest School training centers. These were developed, with the FSA and GB Trainers Network when the qualifications were put on to the previous national Qualification Credit Framework. There are now 7 awarding bodies supported by the FSA.

### ***Organisational Membership***

For the last four months the board have been developing and piloting a new organizational membership scheme, steered by Helen Martin. Again as I type this it is being pulled together by Lisa to iron out any glitches in the process before we announce it to the wider Forest School world. While this is a membership scheme, the FSA sees this as being a way for organisations to demonstrate that they are at least attempting to work towards embracing all the six principles and are part of the wider Forest School community. They will also receive all the benefits of membership – access to the wiki, newsletters, guidance etc.

We see this as a valuable scheme not only for organisations running FS – recognizing their programmes, but also for the wider public - as a way of pointing interested individuals to local organizational members – thereby fulfilling one of our charitable objectives.

We hope to launch the scheme before the end of 2016.

### ***Membership and Membership Services***

The ***number of members*** has steadily grown in the last year – the current membership is at 1682, compared with 1215 in late October 2015

This breaks down into;

838 General individual members;

186 Practitioner Members (indicated on the practitioner map);

844 Trainee members;

This last year we have continued to produce the bi monthly *newsletter* ie 5 editions of ‘word from the woods’ and the Green Man has continued with some thought provoking and meaningful blog entries for practitioners to ponder on when delivering Forest School



**The website** had a small revamp and is easier to navigate and the WIKI now includes all resources, including case studies and guidance notes. Guidance notes added this year have included UK Knife law, First aid requirements for Forest School practitioners, Use of PPA for FS provision. The WIKI continues to be used and we have had comments from practitioners about what a useful resource this is - although the number of entries on to the wiki have declined this year. We have produced a set of rules and guidelines for members on using the Forums on the website which continue to be a place where members can talk to each and gets regular use.

We are planning in the future to develop the website and WIKI further.

### ***Insurance***

There has been a change in insurance premium recommendations by local authorities this year and the liability level has doubled. The FSA is currently working with the Institute for Outdoor Learning and approaching the local government association to influence this and try to keep to the previous level of cover. Having liaised with a couple of insurance companies this previous level of insurance does seem to be a reasonable level of cover for the types of activity Forest School is involved with.

### ***Union Membership***

We are acutely aware that in these uncertain and unsettled times many of our members' jobs and careers are precariously placed.

Not everyone, and especially independent practitioners, has the opportunity to join a trade union and enjoy the protection and benefits that this offers.

To this end we have entered into tentative discussions with a major public service trade union to negotiate, initially, a memorandum of understanding between our two organisations. If this proves achievable and fruitful we envisage that, in the long term, our members will be able to enjoy the same benefits of union membership that the members of that union already receive. The FSA will not be a part of that union, we will be a 'recognised' body.

These negotiations are at an early stage and could prove lengthy, but we want to ensure, as does the trade union, that we get the best deal we can for our members.

***Other membership services*** We continue to seek discounts for our members with various companies and for particular products

### ***2015 Conference***

The 2015 conference was a successful event and saw lots of sharing of practice with a diverse number of workshops and some stimulating keynotes – notably Bob Hughes and wild play which provoked much national conversation on what play at Forest School should or shouldn't look like. Another highlight was the presentation from the Canadian contingent. Workshop reports and the keynote speeches can all be downloaded from the website. Numbers attending were 227 and the feedback was very positive. As one participant said "Such a buzz, lots to think about and great to realise I am part of something bigger" A big thanks goes to Alice Savery of Shropshire Forest School for co-organising the event.



Due to the intensive development work underway this year it was decided to move the conference to 2017 and we are still waiting to announce the date and venue for this.

### ***Local groups***

We now have 19 groups listed on the website (an increase of 7 on the previous year), 7 of which are now constituted and formally affiliated to FSA, the most recent being FSA Herefordshire. 2 other local groups are very close to affiliation stage. Each group organizes itself in a different way and runs their own events, skill shares and CPD sessions. Louise Ambrose, the local groups coordinator, has developed a new induction system and continues to facilitate meetings of local coordinators to share ideas and practice. This year the group has successfully worked on developing a competitive insurance package for local groups after some groups had encountered difficulties with this.

### ***National and International Advocacy***

Membership of national groups includes

- The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom School Grounds National Sector group and the Natural Environment Sector group. Both these groups continue to make representations to government agencies. In the last year this included a contribution from the FSA on the DfE consultation on the 'purpose and quality of education' (see the January newsletter). As a result of this, outdoor learning has emerged as a significant stream of work to be developed by the DfE – so it is time for us, along with all the outdoor learning sector, to get our evidence together. We are also working together to get input into the Education Endowment Fund toolkit
- Forestry Learning and Working Development Group – this group has this year launched the new careers portal for anyone interested in entering the woodland/forestry sector, including Forest School
- The FSA continues to be on the steering group for the Forest Education Network and are supporting the FEN March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2017 conference organisation – information to be announced in the next newsletter and by FEN.

There have been some recent changes in ***OFSTED guidance on safety in early years settings*** and this has had some impact on Forest School. The FSA is working with early years advisors to collect evidence of the impact this is having in order to look how we might influence some of the 'concern' over these new guidelines.

We are working with the SYLVA foundation, Royal Forestry Society and Forestry Commission on producing some ***new guidance on working with woodland landowners*** – drawing up guidance on issues such as insurance, landowner agreements, woodland management with landowners etc. This will be produced in early 2017



The FSA is a partner organization for the *Charter for Trees, Woods and People* – a coalition of organisations pressing the government to produce a charter in 2017 – coordinated by the Woodland Trust. In September the charter weekly blog was written by the chair of the FSA on the need for trees for play and education – in particular Forest School see <https://treecharter.uk/2016/09/16/charter-trees-woods-people-forest-school-ion-cree-chair-forest-school-association/>

We have been approached by a number of organisations in *other countries*. We have provided advice and support for UK organisations – mainly training organisations, but also education exchange organisations, working in China. Two articles were written for the first Forest Kindergarten journal in South Korea (see the 2014/15 annual report on the visit made to South Korea) We are currently providing advice to a Finnish teacher training university who are helping establish Forest School in Turkey Forest School in Canada continues to grow rapidly – the FSA supported their establishment as part of the advisory group. Forest School Canada now have secure funding and there is a new governance structure - joining with the child and nature network. FS Canada is now seen a key body for outdoor learning developments in the country and the recent position statement produced on outdoor play is witness to this national advocacy work – our own patron Tim Gill had a key part to play in this position statement. There is a Forest School Association currently being developed in Ireland and the FSA is offering informal support for that process at this stage.

### ***Services to the wider FS community***

The outward facing part of the FSA website continues to maintain a high profile – this is witnessed by the number of hits the website has, the growing number of enquiries we receive from individuals, organisations and schools about Forest School. Our hit rate on the website is currently at **1500** per day with traffic from all over the world. The FSA facebook page currently has **8300** likes and our twitter account has almost **4000** followers.

We continue to get on average **30** enquiries for information about Forest School per week.

There continues to be a number of articles in the national press and magazines through the year – notably the guardian and daily telegraph.

### ***Finances***

The majority of funding for the FSA comes from membership and the conference – see the annual accounts at the end of this annual report. With this in mind we are looking to the new organizational membership to ensure continued financial stability and growth.

### ***Staffing and Governance***

#### ***Staffing***

Gareth Davies is our acting CEO and as ever has worked tirelessly, 2 days a week (and more!) answering the many enquiries received that aren't the routine ones



the FSA office deals with. He also advises the directors on strategic directions as well as working with a number of national and regional organisations and local FSA groups and working on bids for grant funding. Gareth continues to do valuable work on the services provided for members through the website and works closely with the office.

We have continued the fruitful relationship with the Institute for Outdoor Learning, who we contract for the routine administration of the FSA. A particular thanks go to Alice Skinner who carried out all the routine enquiry and membership enquiries until the end of last year. She was replaced by Dave Brookes who has done a fine job both answering enquiries and producing the member newsletter.

This year we have produced a budget that has meant we have been able to appoint a part time project officer to see through the launch and implementation of the organizational membership scheme and the trainers QA scheme. We welcome Lisa Pearce who started in September. If the organizational membership scheme meets its targets we will be able to extend the contract for this post.

### ***Board of Directors***

The 2015 appointment of new directors highlighted some shortcoming in the organisation's induction processes. A number of changes to the recruitment and selection process for new directors have been made this year. In addition, the FSA became a charity in 2014. According to the charity commission 'charities have a responsibility to ensure that prospective trustees understand the responsibilities they are taking on and can be relied on to carry them out responsibly. They must be adequately vetted'.

So, while our constitution says that the membership must vote on the appointment of new directors, if the FSA wishes to have charitable status then it must be able to demonstrate effective vetting of new directors. Therefore, the FSA have met with the candidates for directorship in 2016 and been more rigorous in checking they are fully aware of the responsibilities of FSA directors and subsequently put them forward to stand for election. This is a significant change to previous years where members had to base their voting on limited information provided by the candidates themselves.

Directors of the FSA have both operational and strategic responsibilities – given our budgetary and operational capabilities. The board meets monthly to fulfill these responsibilities. They are therefore involved in either at least one of the FSA working groups or other operational jobs. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the directors for the sterling and often hidden work they have carried out in 2015/16 to ensure continued support for Forest School growth and practice - from working with the charity commission and companies house through to producing material for the website; keeping members and the FS community up to date through social media; supporting local groups; reviewing and writing new policies – including the environmental/ethical policy, communication strategy, and the recruitment policy and procedures; work on the 2017 conference planning; the organizational membership scheme; trainers QA scheme and forging the way forward for the organization.





I would like to thank, in particular, Helen Martin and Rab Locke for all the work they have put into the organization as directors over the last 2 years respectively. Both have stepped down due to other commitments and are not standing for re-election. Helen has a busy job being a head of a federation of schools and will keep up her support in an advisory role, while Rab, who was our treasurer, has moved jobs and house to Scotland. We wish you both well and will keep in touch!!

Finally a MASSIVE THANKS to Chris Millett, who is stepping down after 16 years service to the Forest School community. Chris was instrumental in establishing the Forest School Special Interest Group in IOL and was subsequently elected as a director of the FSA when we formed in 2012. He has worked tirelessly and given up gazillions of hours of his time in support of this vibrant movement and the FSA. In particular his expertise in moving the trainers QA scheme has been invaluable and he will be seeing this job through to its launch in 2017. We will miss him and no doubt will continue to call on him for advice in the future.

We look forward to this year's elections – there are 4 people standing, including myself and Geoff Mason (we also stood down having been directors now for 3 years since our last election) and so will be good to welcome new blood and ideas into the FSA.

While I am restanding for election as a director, I will be standing down as chair of the FSA after the AGM, having been chair since the launch of the FSA in 2012. I feel it is time for a new chair as we are at a turning point with the two new schemes being introduced. It has been an absolute privilege to see how the FSA has grown in its first four years and I have enjoyed being part of a passionate 'working' board and membership that has healthy, thoughtful and heartfelt discussions.

I look forward to the FSA continuing to play its advocacy role and support practitioners, and in the end Forest School participants, in their journey of deepening connections with the natural world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Cree', on a light-colored background.

Jon Cree – FSA Chair - on behalf of the FSA board;

Lily Horseman – deputy chair

Elly Dolan

Geoff Mason – secretary

Louise Ambrose

Sara Collins

Darren Lewis

Helen Martin

Chris Millett

Rab Locke



**Forest School Association – Draft Summary of Accounts Year ended  
31.8.16**

	31.8.16	31.8.15
	£	£
<b>Turnover</b>		
Memberships	36,579	23,877
Conferences	24,600	40,553
	61,179	64,430
<b>Other income</b>		
Grants and funding	-	9,950
Deposit account interest	1	27
	1	9,977
	61,180	74,407
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Rent	1,800	1,800
Insurance	261	254
Wages	15,813	22,770
Social security	-	139
Subcontractors	905	9,046
Telephone and website	559	349
Travelling	361	1,024
Administration fees	5,314	6,922
Meeting and conference expenses	23,209	19,546
Accountancy	634	594
	48,856	62,444
	12,324	11,963
<b>Finance costs</b>		
Bank charges	768	565
<b>NET SURPLUS</b>	<b>11,556</b>	<b>11,398</b>