



## Forest School Association (FSA)

### Pre-application Information: Trainer's Quality Assurance Scheme (V17)

#### What is the Trainer's Quality Assurance Scheme?

- The Trainer's Quality Assurance Scheme has been developed as a reflective process that supports trainers to develop their practice.
- This membership type is a route for those who train and assess Forest School courses to become FSA Endorsed through a rigorous Quality Assurance process.
- As a Trainer Member the FSA will be endorsing that you are providing quality Forest School Training in line with the 6 core Forest School principles and that you are following a quality training process.
- We will use a three stage process to enable us to fully explore a trainer's practice: 1) desktop assessment 2) interviews with trainees and 3) a panel interview with the trainer.

#### Who is the scheme for?

- The scheme is currently only open to those who both train and assess Forest School courses.
- The Trainer's Quality Assurance Scheme is open to anyone who facilitates level 1, 2 and/or 3 Forest School Training.
- This membership type applies to the individual trainer (not the organisation) and is therefore a personal and portable endorsement. The FSA have a separate provider membership scheme suitable for Schools and Organisations who provide Forest School experiences to clients.
- The applicant must facilitate at least 50% of the face-to-face elements of the course AND must act as the main point of contact/Lead Trainer for some cohorts.
- Recently qualified trainers can register for this scheme (i.e. go through Stage 1 and get on the 'FSA Registered Forest School Trainer' map/database) before they have trained any trainees. Applicants will need to have trained and assessed at least one cohort in order to pass through Stages 2 and 3 though.

#### What are the benefits of the scheme?

- Trainers in receipt of the FSA endorsement will be able to publicly demonstrate that they meet a variety of standards associated with providing quality training experiences in line with the six core Forest School principles.
- A personal and portable endorsement of a person's quality training provision (because it applies to an individual not an organisation).

- A personalised e-badge and a certificate to display to publicise this endorsement.
- Presence on the public map and database of FSA Registered (after Stage 1) and Endorsed (after Stage 3) Forest School Trainers for those trying to identify a suitable trainer.
- Free advertising of all training courses you facilitate, on the FSA social media channels, in our newsletter and on our website (upon final Endorsement).
- Access to FSA branded materials such as clothes and badges.
- Voting rights within the FSA.
- Access to our FSA Endorsed FS Trainer Basecamp group which is an online space in which to discuss challenges and good practice (upon final Endorsement).
- Access to an annual CPD event for Forest School Trainers.
- An FSA membership discount code to offer to trainees (50% discount code made available to trainers upon Endorsement via 'Basecamp'). Your students will be able to use the code to become members for £10.
- A significant discount on bulk purchases (multiples of 9 copies) of the book: Growing a Forest School from the Roots Up.

## What costs are involved?

- Due to the rigour of the scheme, there is significant FSA staff and assessor time involved in the endorsement process. There is therefore a cost to trainers to undertake the endorsement, which has been calculated to cover application costs only. The FSA Trainer's Quality Assurance Scheme will not be generating surplus income for the FSA.
- The Quality Assurance Scheme has 2 associated costs 1) a one-off charge relating to the Quality Assurance process itself and 2) an annual charge for membership as a trainer.
- The one-off charge for taking trainers through the Quality Assurance Scheme is £400 in total. This payment will be split into two invoices of £200; one issued upon submission of their Stage 1 application and the other upon endorsement at the end of Stage 3. Please note that the second instalment of £200 is due regardless of whether the applicant goes on to become endorsed (i.e. if, after the Stage 3 interview has taken place, assessors decide not to endorse an applicant, the sum of £200 is still payable).
- The annual charge relating to membership for a trainer will be £150. This annual charge will be invoiced as soon as trainers start receiving membership benefits (i.e. when trainers get added to the 'FSA Registered Forest School Trainer' online map and database at the end of Stage 1) and annually thereafter.

## Will I still be a member of the FSA?

- 'Registered Trainer' and 'Endorsed Trainer' are membership types in their own right. As soon as you have met our Stage 1 criteria you will become an FSA member and your annual membership fee will be levied then and annually thereafter.
- At the point of applying, you may be an individual member. It is FSA policy not to offer refunds on membership fees so, depending on when you apply, you may have a period of a few months when you have concurrent memberships running.
- You may choose to plan your application so that it coincides with the expiration of your individual membership. If that is the case, please be aware that if you let your individual membership lapse and you have a period of not being a member you will not receive membership benefits during that time.

## What do each of the Stages involve?

- **Stage 1 desktop assessment** - our verifier undertakes a desktop assessment of information relating to the trainer, their course/s and their organisation, provided via an application form and a series of documents they share with us. The required standard to become a Stage 1 FSA Registered Forest School Trainer is set out in the guidance accompanying each section on the *Stage 1 Application Form*. As a guide, we estimate that the completion of Stage 1 Application Form and the gathering of supporting documents can take between 0.5 and 2 days, depending on how many policies require revision. If all of the criteria are met, applicants will become an FSA Registered Forest School Trainer. Upon fulfilling our Stage 1 requirements, trainers will be added to our publicly searchable 'FSA Registered Forest School Trainer' online map and database and issued with an e-badge.
- **Stage 2 interviews with trainees** - our assessors explore the outcomes of training by conducting telephone interviews with up to 5 recent trainees (trained in the last 2 years). If, through our conversations with trainees, trainers demonstrate sound Forest School Training outcomes, they are eligible to remain an FSA Registered Forest School Trainer. If we still have queries about a trainer's practice after Stage 2 we can link them with a [mentor](#) who can work with them to develop practice in any of our areas of concern. Having successfully come through Stage 2, a trainer will be eligible to remain on our publicly searchable 'FSA Registered Forest School Trainer' online map and database, and proceed to Stage 3.
- **Stage 3 interview** - together with a small panel, trainers will participate in a video call interview where we explore skills and attitudes. We ask all applicants a standard set of questions and also an additional, bespoke question based on the application evidence assessors have examined from Stages 1 and 2. In occasional cases, based on the evidence that has been examined, assessors may identify multiple areas of concern that require further bespoke questions. In cases where assessors decide that more than one bespoke question is required, we will make additional charges to cover the additional assessor time required. Dependent upon the outcome of this interview, applicants become a Stage 3 FSA Endorsed Forest School Trainer. When trainers have completed Stage 3 of the Trainer's Quality Assurance Scheme they will receive a new, prominent pin on our publicly searchable 'FSA Endorsed Forest School Trainer' online map and database which enables potential clients to identify a reputable trainer. At this point trainers are eligible to join our online community in Basecamp and advertise their courses with us. If however we still have queries about practice after Stage 3, we may postpone Endorsement and invite applicants to take a period of time to develop practice. After this period of time has elapsed, we will arrange for a further interview between applicants and assessors to take place so that we can ask bespoke questions that explore the stated areas of development. The additional assessor time will be charged for. If applicants require it, we can link them with a [mentor](#) (a trainer already in receipt of the FSA endorsement) who can work with them to develop practice in any of our areas of concern.
- **NB** Trainers have a maximum of 24 months from the date of registration (i.e. meeting our Stage 1 criteria and becoming a Trainer Member) to become endorsed. If a trainer has not

been through Stage 3 after 24 months their membership will be cancelled and if they wish to apply for endorsement again they will have to begin Stage 1 again (and be liable for the associated cost) to ensure that we have up to date information relating to policy, procedures, CPD, insurance, first aid etc. Trainers should consider this timescale as they gather evidence and move between stages.

## **What are my responsibilities after endorsement?**

- Abide by the Members' Code of Conduct
- Advocate for Forest School in accordance with all six principles and for the FSA
- Operate within the Endorsed Trainer group in accordance with its agreed group foundations:
  - Community - work to build a welcoming, mutually supportive community where relationships can be built and friendship offered
  - Learner mindset – operate as part of a reflective community of learning where respectful challenge is offered and welcomed
  - Acceptance – acknowledge that we are a diverse community with varying commitments and priorities
  - Cooperation – work together to get things done in an open atmosphere of sharing rather than competition
  - Quality – we are all working together to journey deeper into quality provision
  - Safety – in all communications we will offer our authentic points of view in confidence whilst maintaining a culture of respect and non-judgement
- Undertake CPD
- Help to ensure the long-term future of the scheme by i) encouraging students to sign up to become student members of the FSA and ii) considering providing students with copies of the book 'Growing a Forest School From the Roots Up'.
- Deliver Forest School training of the standard outlined in their Stage 1 application. The FSA will not continue to endorse trainers who begin to deliver courses that do not meet our benchmarks, for example fewer face-to-face days.
- Complete an annual declaration which asks questions about CPD, course content and changes in practice. Wherever criteria are no longer met trainers will need to declare this. If some criteria are highlighted as no longer met, we will work with trainers to support them in reaching the standard again so that they are able to remain an FSA Endorsed Forest School Trainer.
- Attend the annually offered FSA CPD event for Endorsed Trainers at least once every 2 years. The cost of this event will be heavily subsidised but a nominal fee to trainers may be applied. This event will be held annually for those that wish to attend every year.
- Share practice with the Endorsed Trainers Group. Practice can be shared through videos, written case-studies or facilitation of sessions FSA CPD events. The FSA will request evidence of this sharing via our annual declaration.
- Join and participate in 'Basecamp', a platform that enables you to network together with the other FSA Endorsed Forest School Trainers. You will be able to ask questions, share documents and have discussions.
- Support trainers going through the application process via our closed 'FSA Trainers Group' Facebook page. People can have access to this page as soon as they submit their Stage 1 application form and it is a tool they can use to ask for help with any aspect of their application.

- For more complex queries from applicants we can offer to link them to a [mentor](#). Upon Endorsement you will be asked if you wish to act as a mentor. There is no obligation to become a mentor.
- Should the FSA decide that we need to recruit more Assessors (to undertake Stage 2 and Stage 3 interviews) we will approach Endorsed Trainers. If demand for the scheme means that we need to appoint more assessors, we will write to Endorsed Trainers outlining what the role involves and requesting expressions of interest.
- Endorsed Trainers are also expected to be occasionally available to act as a counter-signatory for applicants going through the process.

## Is there any support to help me through this process?

- The Scheme Coordinator (currently Nell Seal) will be available for phone or video call discussions as trainers work through the three stages of the scheme: Email: [applications@forestschoollassociation.org](mailto:applications@forestschoollassociation.org) Skype: nellseal
- For ongoing, straightforward queries you will be able to use our closed 'FSA Trainers' Facebook group. You will receive an invitation to this group after you submit your Stage 1 application.
- The FSA can also signpost to an experienced [mentor](#) to support trainers through Stages 2 and 3 if desired. The trainer will be liable for a charge relating to this mentoring and this will be agreed directly with the mentor.
- NB Once an applicant becomes an FSA Endorsed Forest School Trainer they may opt to become a mentor or an assessor, should any vacancies for these roles become available. If trainers do decide to become a mentor or assessor, they will be recompensed for any work they undertake.
- In the event of you being dissatisfied with any element of the process there will be a chain of investigation as follows: FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator > FSA Chief Exec > Endorsed Trainer's Group > Board of FSA Directors. In the first instance then please address your concerns to the FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator (currently Nell Seal via [applications@forestschoollassociation.org](mailto:applications@forestschoollassociation.org)).

## How do you ensure applicants are getting a fair and consistent assessment?

FSA Trustees who sat on the Trainer's Quality Assurance Scheme Working Group agreed an approach to standardisation:

- One in every ten Stage 1 Applications will be verified by both the FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator and an Endorsed Trainer to check that decisions about benchmarks are fair and record keeping is thorough.
- In the event of a new assessor undertaking Stage 2 interviews, the FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator will sit in on one of those to ensure a standard approach to questioning and an appropriate interviewing style.
- Thereafter, each Assessor will have the FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator observe one of their interviews every 2 years to ensure standards are maintained.

- The FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator will always be present during Stage 3 interviews to ensure consistency.
- If Assessors have queries or concerns about any aspect of the scheme, they are encouraged to liaise with the FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator and there is an email group for Assessor queries.
- As stated in a previous section, in the event of you being dissatisfied with any element of the process there will be a chain of investigation as follows: FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator > FSA Chief Exec > Endorsed Trainer's Group > Board of FSA Directors. In the first instance then please address your concerns to the FSA Forest School Trainers Quality Assurance Scheme Co-ordinator (currently Nell Seal via [applications@forestschoollassociation.org](mailto:applications@forestschoollassociation.org)).

## How do I apply?

- Read our Pre-application Information which provides more detail about what the scheme involves, including an outline of what is involved at each of the 3 stages.
- Visit <https://www.forestschoollassociation.org/forest-school-trainer-quality-assurance-scheme/> to download the Application Form so you can check whether you are likely to meet the standards we require for registration on to this scheme.
- Make your payment using the online form that can be found here: <https://forestschoollassociation.org/forest-school-trainer-quality-assurance-scheme/> Choose your preferred method and pay us the first half of your registration fee (£200 now and £200 upon endorsement at the end of Stage 3).
- Email FSA Scheme Coordinator Nell Seal to arrange a quick, informal video chat ([applications@forestschoollassociation.org](mailto:applications@forestschoollassociation.org)).
- After a conversation with Nell, complete your Application Form and compile supporting documentation.
- Upon completion of your application form, save a Word version of it and return it to us via Dropbox (instructions can be found on the application form) along with your supporting documentation.
- Ensure you send an email to [applications@forestschoollassociation.org](mailto:applications@forestschoollassociation.org) to advise that you have submitted.

## What if I take maternity leave or have extended sickness absence during the preceding 2 year period or during my term as an Endorsed Trainer?

We will make allowances for maternity leave or sickness absence during the 2-year period leading up to applying, as follows:

- Our requirement for ongoing delivery practice will be approached on a pro-rata basis. We currently require an applicant to have 28 hours of delivery with at least two groups over the previous 2 years. We will base pro-rata calculations on your actual length of absence, up to a maximum of 12 months (maternity and sickness absence). As an example, if a person had taken 12 months of maternity leave, we would reduce our requirement to only needing to

have 14 hours of delivery experience. We would still expect all applicants to have worked with at least 2 client groups though.

- Likewise, we would approach our CPD requirement on a pro-rata basis. We require 28 hours of type 1 CPD over the past 2 years. For example, if a person had 6 months of sickness absence, we would reduce this requirement to only needing to have 21 hours of Type 1 CPD in place. We would still expect all applicants to have undertaken CPD that relates to 3 of the 5 units though.
- However, our requirement that a trainer must have had 2 years' experience of facilitating Forest School sessions prior to becoming a trainer will still stand. We would not accept, for example, 1 year of leading Forest School groups and 1 year of maternity leave.

We will also make allowances for maternity leave and sickness absence during the term of your Endorsement: please contact us to discuss this.

## **What happens if a trainer moves training organisations whilst Endorsed?**

Through this Scheme, the FSA Endorse the person not the training organisation so we will be able to support you if you move from one organisation to another. We ask that you:

- inform us before the move happens.
- establish training practice at the new organisation that still meets all scheme benchmarks.
- use your next biennial declaration to communicate and document all changes.
- agree to having a temporary note appearing on your entry on the FSA website which states that you are switching to new organisation.