

Forest School *or* Outdoor Learning ?

We offer Leadership courses in both **Forest School** and **Outdoor Learning**, and we want you to take the course that is right for you and your setting. Both courses equip you with the skills and confidence to take your young people outside, and reap the benefits that fresh air, full senses, and the freedom to move can bring.

Forest School is a radically different approach to education which has become very popular, with lots of schools and providers embracing it wholeheartedly. However, on many of our **Forest School** courses we discover that for one or two students, it's a case of mistaken identity, and what they really needed was to be on our Leader in **Outdoor Learning** course instead. The questions below should help you decide which course will give you the right training for your situation. "You" here refers to both you personally, and your setting.

Are you able to provide regular outdoor sessions for students over a long period of time (e.g. fortnightly during term-time over a school year?)

- While we as the Wildlife Trust would love you to get the children outside as much as possible, **Outdoor Learning Leaders are free to take their class(es) out once a week or once a year, whatever fits with their timetable and curriculum requirements.**
- **A core principle of Forest School is that it is a long-term programme. Because Forest School Leaders are asked to complete a set of 6 sessions as part of their qualification, the idea has proliferated that blocks of 6 sessions are 'enough' to offer children. If you are seeking to introduce Forest School, we would encourage you to consider how you could implement much longer programmes, enabling children to connect to the natural world throughout the seasons.**

During these outdoor sessions, do you need to stick to an adult-led agenda or are you able to follow children's interests?

- **Outdoor Learning usually involves lessons designed by teachers to meet specific learning outcomes.**
- **Forest School is 'learner-centred'. This means that you as the Leader take on the role of facilitator, enabling your individual participants to deepen their own learning by doing what is interesting to them. This may be something you consider to be educational, but it may not – process, not product, is key.**

Do you need to fulfil curriculum objectives directly in your outdoor sessions?

- **Outdoor Learning Leaders design outdoor lessons with the same process and attention as they do indoor lessons. All subjects can be taught outdoors, at least in part, and often the learning will be deeper and the memory of it sharper when it's taken outside the classroom.**
- **While you may find that Forest School activities link back to the curriculum, and inspire better work in the classroom, the sessions themselves are child-led and focused on holistic development rather than academic progress.**

Do you have an accessible outdoor space with some natural features (e.g. trees?)

- Outdoor Learning can be done anywhere, from a patch of tarmac to a vegetable garden to a woodland. The Leader in Outdoor Learning course teaches you to utilise parts of your school grounds you may not have considered before to enliven lessons in every subject area.
- You might think that to deliver Forest School, you need a forest. Well, the truth is that Forest School can be done in any (semi-)natural environment – a woodland is ideal because it's the biggest and best free toy shop there is, but the heart of Forest School is its philosophy, and that can be applied anywhere. Bear in mind though that if your space is limited in the resources it offers, you may need to import wood and other loose materials.

Are you willing to reframe classroom rules regarding behaviour?

- Outdoor Learning may require a re-evaluation of your ground rules to ensure they suit the wall-less classroom, but essentially the teacher-student dynamic remains unchanged.
- Forest School encourages more autonomy and responsibility for our own actions than is typically found in classroom environments. Learners are allowed more time to work through their challenges and are supported to recognise the consequences of their actions, rather than being instructed what to do and corrected if they deviate from the instruction.

Are you comfortable with your learners taking appropriate risks?

- Outdoor Learning may include riskier activities than you would engage in in the classroom, but this is at the discretion of the leader rather than an integral element of the programme.
- Learners being encouraged to take appropriate risks is woven into the ethos of Forest School, and sessions should provide children with regular opportunities to develop both their awareness of risk and increase their confidence in managing risk. This may even mean climbing trees, working with tools, or cooking on a fire, for example.

How much time are you willing to commit to your training?

- Leader in Outdoor Learning (Level 2) is a 3-day accredited course. After the course days are completed you will have 6 months to complete a workbook and run 3 outdoor learning sessions.
- Forest School Assistant (Level 2) is a 4-day course leading to a nationally recognised qualification. After the course days are completed you will have 6 months to complete a GCSE-standard portfolio and assist with 3 forest school sessions. When you achieve the qualification you will be able to work as a Forest School Assistant (alongside a qualified Forest School Leader).
- Forest School Leader (Level 3) is a 7-day course in-person, plus 2 remote learning sessions and an onsite training session, leading to a nationally recognised qualification. After the course days are completed you will have 6 months to complete an A-level standard portfolio and run a block of 6 forest school sessions. When you achieve the qualification you will be able to work as a Forest School Leader.