Ethos and Definition

“Forest School is an inspirational process, that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve, develop confidence and self-esteem, through hands-on learning experiences in a woodland or natural environment with trees.”

Forest School is a specialised learning approach that sits within and compliments the wider context of outdoor and woodland education.
1. Forest School is a long-term process with frequent and regular sessions in a woodland or natural wooded environment rather than a one-off visit. Planning, adaption, observations and reviewing are integral elements of Forest School.
Regular and long term

- FS takes place regularly, ideally at least every other week, with the same group of learners, over an extended period of time, if practicable encompassing the seasons.

- A FS programme has a structure which is based on the observations and collaborative work between learners and practitioners. This structure should clearly demonstrate progression of learning.

- The initial sessions of any programme establish physical and behavioural boundaries as well as making initial observations on which to base future programme development.
Forest School takes place in a woodland or natural wooded environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

- Whilst woodland is the ideal environment for FS, many other sites, some with only a few trees, are able to support good FS practice.

- The woodland is ideally suited to match the needs of the programme and the learners, providing them with the space and environment in which to explore and discover.

- A FS programme constantly monitors its ecological impact and works within a sustainable site management plan agreed between the landowner/manager, the Practitioner and the learners.

- FS aims to foster a relationship with nature through regular personal experiences in order to develop long-term, environmentally sustainable attitudes and practices in staff, learners and the wider community.

- FS uses natural resources for inspiration, to enable ideas and to encourage intrinsic
Forest School aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

- Where appropriate, the FS leader will aim to link experiences at FS to home, work and/or school education.

- FS programmes aim to develop, where appropriate, the physical, social, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of the learner.
6. Forest School uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for development and learning.

- A learner-centred pedagogical approach is employed by FS that is responsive to the needs and interests of learners.

- The Practitioner models the pedagogy, which they promote during their programmes through careful planning, appropriate dialogue and relationship building.

- Play and choice are an integral part of the FS learning process where play is recognised as vital to learning and development at FS.

- FS provides a stimulus for all learning preferences and dispositions.

- Reflective practice is a feature of each session to ensure learners and practitioners can understand their achievements, develop emotional intelligence and plan for the future.

- Practitioner observation is an important element of FS pedagogy. Observations are used to ‘scaffold’ and tailor learning and development at
Forest School offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

- FS opportunities are designed to build on an individual's innate motivation, positive attitudes and/or interests.

- Forest School uses tools and fires only where deemed appropriate to the learners, and dependent on completion of a baseline risk assessment.

- Any FS experience follows a Risk/Benefit process managed jointly by the practitioner and learner that is tailored to the developmental stage of the learner.
5. Forest School is run by qualified Forest School Practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice.

- FS is led by qualified Forest School Practitioners, who are required to hold a minimum of an accredited Level 3 FS qualification.

- There is a high ratio of practitioner/adults to learners.

- Practitioners and adults regularly helping at Forest School are subject to relevant checks into their suitability to have prolonged contact with children, young people and vulnerable people.

- Practitioners need to hold an up-to-date first aid qualification, which includes paediatric and outdoor elements.

- FS is backed by relevant working documents, which contain all the policies and procedures required for running FS and which establish the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers.

- The FS leader is a reflective practitioner and sees themselves, therefore, as a learner too.
This definition, principles and criteria were based on the original principles and criteria agreed in 2002 and were reviewed in 2011. They were agreed after 5 months of consultation with the FS community in 2011. Published by the FS IOL SIG group and FSA Steering group in February 2012.