



Forest School Practitioners Award OCN Level 3



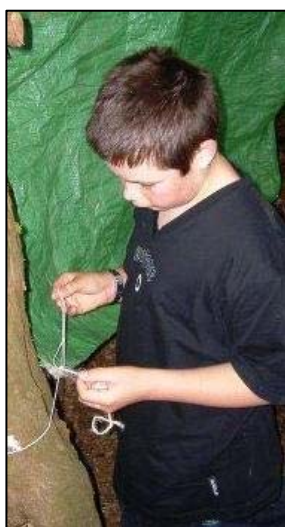
Course Information

What is Forest School?

Forest School is a long term, child-led, continuous learning process that takes place over a period of time using a natural space (not necessarily a Forest!). Forest School originates from Scandinavian educational approaches. The Forest School ethos focuses on approaches that maximise the emotional, social and developmental benefits of education. Practitioners use learning and teaching strategies which raise self-esteem, develop confidence, independence, language and communication skills.

Every Forest School will be unique, depending on the group, site and leader, however there are some key principles:

- **Forest School is a long term, repetitive learning process that uses a natural outdoor space.** It is a specific ethos of learning that focuses on processes rather than products and allows learners time and space to develop at their own rate. Learners develop a strong sense of space through repeated contact with the natural world (ideally woodland but not always) throughout the year and in all weathers.
- **Forest School empowers children and young people to take responsibility for their own learning and development.** The ethos encourages child-led learning and learning through play. Choice increases enjoyment, participation and motivation. Children are set up to achieve and supported to take appropriate risks through developing trust in themselves and in others.
- **Forest School promotes holistic, individualised learning and development.** It is for all ages and abilities and its ethos is fully inclusive. It is most effective in smaller than class size groups with a high adult to child ratio. The natural environment provides stimulus for all senses, all areas of development and all learning styles; visual, auditory and kinaesthetic.
- **Forest School encourages emotional growth, self esteem, confidence and independence.** It gives learners the time and space to be themselves, find peace and communicate with others in a safe and caring environment. Emotional literacy is actively practiced by adults and children within a Forest School.



- **Forest School is facilitated by qualified Level 3 Forest school Practitioners.** Receiving a nationally recognised Level 3 qualification in Forest School is essential for practitioners to link theory to practice and create the Forest School ethos. Training ensures practitioners provide safe, skilled and appropriate learning experiences. Practitioners build a trusting relationship and make careful observations of the group to then provide well planned, individualised support for each learner.
- **Forest School instils a deep respect and awareness for the natural world and reconnects participants to their environment.** The repetitive ethos builds a deep, instinctual connection to the natural space and reconnects all to their ancient heritage. Being in nature allows learners to observe real life, witness cause and effect and consider our roles and responsibilities towards it.

Forest School Training

Forest School is delivered by qualified practitioners. People from many different backgrounds train in Forest School; teachers, playworkers, rangers, ecologists, artists, learning support assistants, parents and conservation volunteers may all come to Forest School to provide meaningful outdoor learning experiences for the children they work with.

There are 3 levels of training. To provide 'Forest School' the practitioner must have completed a Level 3 Forest School Practitioners Award.

- Level 3 – Forest School Practitioner Award (180 hours)
- Level 2 – Assistant Forest School Practitioner (60 hours)
- Level 1 – Introduction to Forest School (30 hours)



Birchwood Learning - Training Provider

Birchwood Learning is a licensed tutor of the Forest School Training Company (FSTC) one of the leading providers of Forest School training across the UK. Birchwood Learning provides all levels of Forest School training alongside other specialist trainers. All Forest School training courses are accredited by the Open College Network (OCN) and are nationally recognised qualifications. FSTC is a member of the UK Forest School Training Network, and is key in the standardisation and development of Forest School qualifications in the UK. This ensures FSTC training is continually up to date with current UK practice.

FSTC training is delivered with the belief that learning should be hands-on, relevant and flexible to meet learners' needs. Training is designed to set learners up to achieve and given time to consolidate skills and knowledge.

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The OCN Level 3 Forest School Practitioners Award

OCN Level 3 training is the nationally recognised standard of training required to lead 'Forest School' programmes it is designed for those practitioners wishing to be qualified to establish and deliver Forest School. The course covers a variety of practical skills and theory that will support practitioners' to create innovative and meaningful Forest School programmes for children and young people.

What does the qualification cover?

This OCN course carries a total of 18 credits at Level 3 and consists of 3 units;

- Forest School practical skills and woodland management.
- Learning and development at Forest School.
- Establishment and delivery of a Forest School programme.

Practical skills and woodland management

Working safely and practically within a natural environment is key to the effectiveness of Forest School. Woodlands are dynamic natural systems, rich in learning opportunities and resources. This unit develops skills and understanding to use the potential of woodlands effectively, safely and sensitively to support learning and development within a Forest School context. Topics covered include:

- Woodland ecology – understanding succession in the UK, the history of British woodlands and comparing native broadleaf and coniferous plantations.
- Woodland species identification and observation – considering the importance of understanding natural history for the Forest School Leader.
- Sustainable management of woodland.
- Teaching safe tool use at Forest School – tool procedures, storage and maintenance, personal protective equipment.
- Teaching and using appropriate knots and lashings at Forest School.
- Shelter building – applying skills to erect temporary shelters.
- Fire lighting, safety and management – understanding fire preparations, procedures, cooking techniques and extinguishing.
- Using natural resources – applying practical skills to make items from natural materials.



Learning and development

Forest School supports holistic development and is particularly effective at building confidence and self esteem in children and young people. The philosophy of Forest School is rooted in learning theories, psychology and neural development. Its ethos is formed through a combination of the natural physical environment and the safe, open and trusting community created by the supporting adults. This unit covers some of the theoretical components that underpin the Forest School ethos. Topics covered include:

- Learning theories – considering relevant learning theories and how they support the Forest School philosophy.
- The importance of holistic development and how it can be promoted at Forest School.

- The role and benefits of play at Forest School.
- Self esteem and emotional intelligence – how these can be developed at Forest School and considering the role of the leader in this.
- Understanding factors which effect behaviour – considering neural development, self esteem and emotional development.

Establishment and delivery

This unit draws together the skills and understanding of the previous 2 units and combines them to create a Forest School programme. Every Forest School programme will be different and be based on the needs of the individuals within the group. A Forest School Leader is able to plan meaningful learning experiences whilst remaining flexible to follow individuals interests and learning styles. This is only possible with careful observation of the learners within the group and good preparation and operating procedures of how their Forest School runs. This units covers these aspects of planning, preparing, delivering and evaluating a Forest School programme. Topics covered include:

- Forest School history and research – considering Forest School in the UK and locally and reviewing current research about it.
- Creating a Forest School handbook – containing all relevant policies and procedures required for the operating of the Forest School.
- Creating a communication strategy – to share aims and inform stakeholders.
- Plan, deliver and evaluate a minimum of 6 Forest School sessions – showing how observations have informed future plans and taken account of learners needs and interests.
- Observing individual learners over time and evaluating impact.
- Ecological survey and environmental impact – monitoring the impact the Forest School has on a site is part of using woodlands sustainably and an important responsibility to pass to the learners.



Who is the qualification designed for?

The Level 3 training course is designed for professionals already working with children and/or young people who wish to establish and deliver Forest School programmes. It is a leadership qualification thus assesses practitioners' skills practically and through a written portfolio of evidence. It is appropriate for practitioners over the age of 21 with relevant (teaching, early years, play work, ecology etc) Level 2 or above qualifications. No previous experience of Forest School is necessary; however we recommend that students research and/or visit a Forest School to ensure they are fully aware of the philosophy and an appropriate outdoor learning ethos for their situation. We have observed that those practitioners who are uncertain about Forest School have gained assurance in doing the Level 1 qualification before committing to the Level 3.



How is the course delivered?

The OCN Level 3 Forest School Practitioner Award carries 18 credits at Level 3 and is delivered over a 9 month period. Level 3 is the equivalent standard of an A level standard and 18 credits refer to 180 hours of learning time, approximately

70 hours of this is guided work with a tutor and the remaining 110 is self directed learning hours of research and coursework.

Birchwood Learning delivers these 70 guided hours via a 5 day intensive training course, 3 day practical skills assessment, half day delivery assessment and a half day tutorial. Students are expected to establish and deliver a minimum of 6 Forest School sessions and submit a portfolio of written assignments.

1. Attend the 5 day intensive week training course (please see website for forthcoming dates and locations).
2. Attend the 3 day practical skills assessments – an assessment of competency in teaching practical skills (tool use, fire management, knots and health and safety).
3. Establish a Forest School and create a Forest School handbook containing all documentation for running a Forest School. Deliver a minimum of a 6 session Forest School programme with a small group of children or young people.
4. Delivery assessment – a tutor will visit a Forest School session at the students site and assess the leadership and learning experience.
5. Attend the coursework tutorial – a half day tutorial to support the written components of the qualification.
6. Hand in a portfolio of written assignments.

To complete the qualification all Forest School practitioners are required to have a **relevant first aid qualification**. Ideally a minimum of 16 hour qualification appropriate for the age group they are working with (paediatric for under 8 years), with an outdoor element. Often specialist first aid training courses, tailor made to Forest School contexts, will be offered to practitioners as part of a training package alongside the Level 3 training – check details when booking to see if first aid training is included.



The 5 day intensive week training course

Birchwood Learning runs Forest School Training across Norfolk at many different locations. Some of the venues we have used include; Holt Hall Field Studies Centre, Whitlingham Country Park, Hickling Broad Nature Reserve, the University of East Anglia and Houghton Hall Estate. All venues have access to appropriate indoor and outdoor spaces. Indoor facilities will be a training room with access to hot drinks and toilets. Outdoor spaces will be a woodland environment. Birchwood Learning runs training all year round and outdoor course components will go ahead in all weathers (unless deemed dangerous).

FSTC offers Forest School training across the UK, please visit their website for details of current courses. www.forestschooctraining.co.uk

Assessments

Students are given every opportunity to pass at assessments, there is practice time between the training course and the assessment components of the qualification and time for peer review and support. If a student does not provide sufficient evidence during assessments they will receive clear feedback outlining which skills or understanding need developing and given opportunities to be reassessed.



What do our past students say?

“This was very enjoyable and informative training. I will now feel more confident to use my new found skills with the children.” – Teacher

“It has been a brilliant course. It has made me question my own practice... I am motivated to develop the outdoor environment in school.” – M.H. Teacher

“This was an excellent course which completely convinced me of the value of outdoor learning, the connection with child development and how it could be translated into school.” – M.C. Freelancer

How to book your place

To view Birchwood Learning’s current course availability and costs please view our website or contact us.

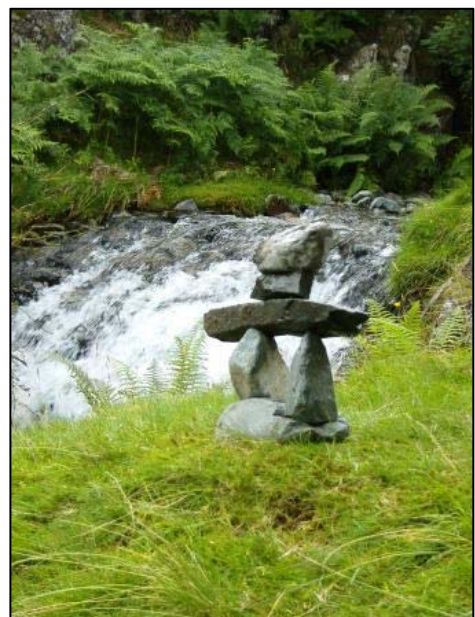
How can I prepare for OCN Level 3 Forest School Practitioner Award?

All information, materials and equipment will be provided during the training course. However students will be required to provide their own safety boots and outdoor clothing for use during the training. Safety boots are those with a steel or Kevlar toe cap and are indicated as safety wear with a CE mark. These are required as the training course involves using bladed tools and also possibly moving heavy items around the woodland. www.safetybootsuk.co.uk have a wide range of styles and sizes.

Ensure you have appropriate outdoor clothing for a woodland environment. Full waterproofs are recommended all year round in our sometimes unpredictable climate! In cold weather lots of thinner layers will keep you warmer rather than a few thick ones. In warmer weather long trousers made of light fabric are more appropriate than shorts to protect from scratches, nettle stings, ticks etc. The outdoor practical components of the course are hands-on, so getting muddy or covered in leaves is often inevitable!

It is recommended that prospective students gain some knowledge of Forest School by research or visiting one in action. The following websites may be of interest:

- Forest School Training Co - www.forestschoolltraining.co.uk
- Norfolk Forest School - www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/go/forestschoools
- Forest Education Initiative – www.foresteducation.org
- The Institute for Outdoor Learning - www.outdoor-learning.org
- Children and Nature Network - www.childrenandnature.org



Students will be provided with a full book list and handouts during the training. The following books are particularly relevant and recommended;

- **Last Child in the Woods; Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder** – by Richard Louv ISBN: 1848870833
- **How Children Learn: from Montessori to Vygotsky** – by Linda Pound ISBN: 1904575099
- **Toxic Childhood** – by Sue Palmer ISBN: 0752880918
- **No Fear: Growing up in a Risk Adverse Society** – by Tim Gill ISBN: 1903080088
- **What Every Parent Needs to Know** – by Dr Margot Sunderland ISBN: 1405320362
- **Essential Bushcraft** – by Ray Mears ISBN: 0340829710
- **I Love my World: Mentoring play in nature for a sustainable future** – by Chris Holland ISBN: 0956156606

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