

Guidance Note 4

History of the Forest School Training Network

The current Network has grown from a one which started in Wales. Open College Network (OCN) Units for Forest School were originally developed in Wales and began to be delivered in 2003. The OCN Wales Forest School Training Network was set up at the beginning of 2006 and brought together all the existing Forest School trainers operating in Wales. It was facilitated by Forestry Commission Wales and advised by OCN Wales and two partner further education colleges - Coleg Gwent and the Welsh College of Horticulture. The Network enabled trainers to work together to address issues of concern and to start to build training capacity in Wales.

Level 3 History - The Network's first priority was to develop a new suite of Level 3 Units to create a coherent Forest School Practitioner Award module. The module would also have an endorsement that would require OCN centres wishing to deliver the units to meet agreed criteria and become members of the training network. Working closely with OCN Wales, three new Level 3 units were developed in the first half of 2006. These were sent out to all qualified Forest School Leaders in Wales for consultation. Thirty detailed responses were received – all generally positive with some useful suggestions for minor changes. The new units were added to the OCN Wales framework in July 2006.

Between July 2006 and July 2007, the new Level 3 units were piloted on five courses run by a range of training organisations who were all members of the Network (Forestry Commission Wales, Merthyr College, Cambium, Forest School Training Company Ltd, Archimedes). The quality of the evidence and completion rates demonstrated a marked improvement on that from the original OCN units. Feedback from these courses promoted the trainers involved to agree some amendments to clarify a few of the Assessment Criteria.

Level 1 History - In 2007, the Network developed two new Level 1 units. These units were added to the OCN Wales framework in July 2007 with an endorsement. The Level 1 units were designed to accredit learners who were participating on a Forest School programme (post 14) or for adult learners who came on a specific course to gain a basic understanding of Forest School. The Level 1 units were piloted with a range of learners including 14-16 year olds, school staff and interested adults between July 2007 and July 2008 and the Network went on to share ideas and resources for supporting and assessing Level 1 learners.

Level 2 History - In 2007, the Network developed two new Level 2 units. These units were added to the OCN Wales framework in July 2007 with an endorsement. Level 2 units were designed to qualify a learner to be a Forest School Assistant so they could take a proactive role in helping the Forest School Practitioner plan and deliver the Forest School programme and to support the learners. The Level 2 units were piloted with a women's group in 2008.

The units at L1, L2 and L3 became known as the "CY" units to distinguish them from the original 2003 units.

Becoming a UK Network

The Wales Network always included Forest School trainers based in England who were delivering training in Wales (Archimedes, Forest School Training Company Ltd and Cambium). At the end of 2007, Worcestershire Forest School (Bishopswood), Shropshire Forest School and Warwickshire Forest School requested the use of the new "CY" units and to become members of the Network. After discussion it was decided the Network should lose its Wales focus and become a forum for all trainers using the 'CY' units.

The Network also has links with Forest School training in Scotland and with the early stages of Forest School development in Northern Ireland. With more trainers delivering the units, the Network agreed good practice requisites for delivering the units and is aimed to replicate their OCN Wales relationship with other OCN Boards.

In 2008 the Network produced guidance on Level 3 observation assessment of Forest School sessions following an all-day workshop (see Guidance Notes 8) and OCN Wales ran a Tutor Assessor Award course for 13 Network members. This resulted in the development of templates and resources for Forest School assessment. A Level 3 standardisation event ensured consistency across different trainers and OCN centres and highlighted issues with the units. This was the start of annual standardisation events.

The Network also reviewed and updated an existing FC Wales Forest School Health and Safety draft document. This can then be used as a reference document for trainers and reviewed annually.

In 2009/2010 the Network revised the Level 1, 2 and 3 awards as a result of the standardisation events and these were finalised in Spring 2010. As a result of OCN Wales becoming completely independent of National OCN (becoming Agored Cymru with no legal obligation to share units with other OCN regions) a sub group of the Network was formed in Spring 2010 – Forest School Training Network Wales, for those delivering in Wales. In response to this Forest School Trainers Network renamed itself March 2010 – 'Forest School Trainers Network GB'. There will always be at least two representative from the FSTN Wales group to act as a link between FSTN GB and FSTN Wales.

Currently:

In February 2011 the FSTN GB has a membership of 20+ providers from Wales, England and Scotland. Guidance Notes, produced in 2008, have been to include the format of meetings and aims of the Network and will shortly be available electronically via an area of the FEI website www.foresteducation.org

It should be noted that the units developed and endorsed by the Network during 2010 have different codes in Wales and England (due to the different awarding bodies) but are comprised of the same assessment criteria.