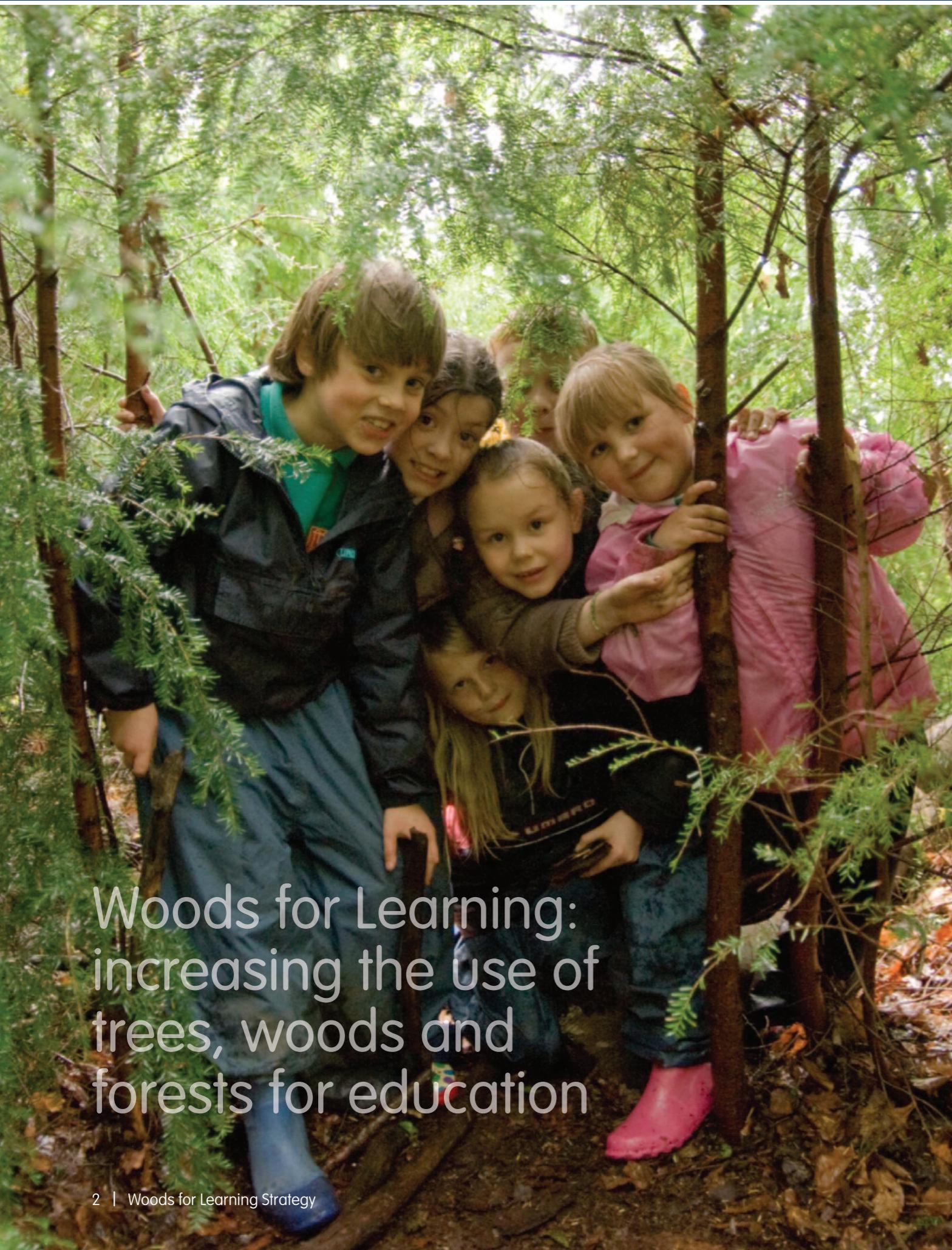


# Woods for Learning





# Woods for Learning: increasing the use of trees, woods and forests for education

## Foreword

We want our young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

We also want the people of Scotland to value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations. These are two of the national outcomes set out in the Concordat with Local Government, which lie at the heart of this Strategy.

Traditional ideas about classroom teaching are giving way to new and exciting approaches, like the use of woods for learning. Woodlands provide a rich resource for a range of learning opportunities that can help deliver Curriculum for Excellence. They provide a unique environment for young people to learn about sustainable development and climate change. Woodlands are robust, seasonal outdoor spaces – cool in summer and sheltered in winter – where all senses are stimulated: touch, taste and smell as much as sight and sound. In Scotland 90% of all schools are within one kilometre of a woodland<sup>1</sup>. By walking to a woodland and being active once there, pupils gain health and wellbeing benefits. Woodland settings also provide a calming learning environment for those children with attention deficit issues or additional support for learning needs.

This Strategy – aptly entitled **Woods for Learning** – sets out the key role that trees, woods and forests can play in helping improve young people's life chances. Along with its associated Action Plan, the Strategy guides the Forestry Commission's work in Scotland with young people in pre-school establishments, primary and secondary schools and provides a platform for Forestry Commission Scotland to work in partnership with the rest of Scottish Government and education professionals.

In welcoming the publication of **Woods for Learning**, we encourage teachers throughout Scotland to recognise the value of woodlands as classrooms and to use our precious national green resource to benefit the next generation of Scottish society.



**Roseanna Cunningham**  
**Minister for the Environment**



**Adam Ingram**  
**Minister for Children and  
Early Years**

# Woods for Learning Strategy

## Introduction

This document sets out our Woods for Learning Strategy in Scotland for the period 2010-2013. We aim to provide places in our green environment, particularly trees, woods and forests, for learning and teaching outdoors to:

- help improve the life chances of young people
- show forestry as an exemplar of sustainable development
- show how woods and forests can contribute to combating climate change.

Working with education professionals and others, we aim to help transform the lives of young people by creating greater awareness and use of the opportunities and benefits of learning and teaching outdoors.

## Context

Education is recognised as a universal right in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>2</sup>. The Scottish Government's lifelong learning skills strategy, *Skills for Scotland* (2007)<sup>3</sup> aims to build a self-confident, outward looking Scotland: an ambitious nation with opportunities for everyone to contribute and benefit and make a positive contribution to the country's prosperity.

A smarter Scotland is at the heart of everything we want to achieve for this country. We can only build a Scotland that is wealthier and fairer, one that is healthier, safer, stronger and greener, if people are equipped with the skills, expertise and knowledge for success.<sup>3</sup>



### Edinburgh and Glasgow Forest School Programmes

Forest School works with children and adults in the same outdoor space over a period of time. Participants are supported in their learning and encouraged to explore the outdoor environment and appreciate nature.

Both these projects aim to increase the use of woodlands within the cities for learning and are designed to offer teachers a supported training package. Feasibility studies of the woodlands were carried out to identify the best for learning in each city.

All the teachers involved have noticed a range of benefits to participants, for example; working better with others, calmer behaviour in class and more engagement with the learning process.

The Edinburgh programme is a partnership with City of Edinburgh Council, Career Scotland, Edinburgh Forest Education Initiative (FEI), FCS, SNH and employs a project officer.

The Glasgow programme is a partnership with FCS, Glasgow FEI, Glasgow City Council, Kelvin Clyde Greenspace, Careers Scotland and is co-ordinated by the FCS Central Conservancy Education Officer.

Curriculum for Excellence (2004)<sup>4</sup> outlines the values, purposes and principles for the Curriculum 3-18. Schools are now using Curriculum for Excellence to:

- make learning active, challenging and enjoyable
- include a wide range of experiences and achieve a suitable blend of what has traditionally been seen as 'academic' and 'vocational'
- give opportunities for children to make appropriate choices to meet their individual interests and needs, while ensuring that these choices lead to successful outcomes.

Curriculum for Excellence is the most ambitious reform of Scottish education for many years. It offers the opportunity to provide a fresh approach to enable our young people to become responsible citizens, confident individuals, effective contributors and successful learners. For the first time there is a clear focus on a coherent curriculum for all children and young people from 3 to 18.<sup>5</sup>



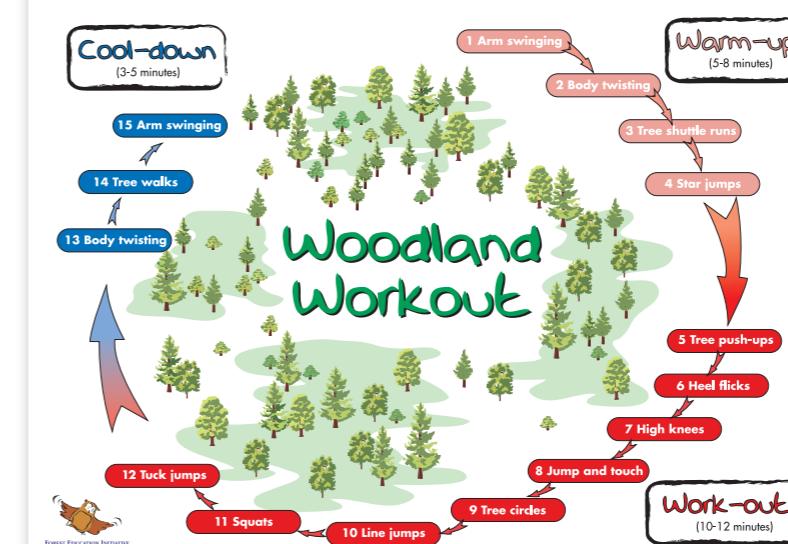
### Woodland Workout

Many teachers have a lack of experience of woodland activities and this can act as a barrier to leading outdoor learning. The Woodland Workout was developed for teachers to help overcome this.

The pack requires very few resources and can be easily used and adapted to suit all ages and abilities. It consists of 10 activity cards and 15 physical exercise cards which can be set up in a trail round a woodland or in the school grounds for pupils to find and take part in activities.

Woodland Workout CPD sessions have been delivered to additional support needs staff, nursery, primary teachers and Active Schools Co-ordinators in Central Scotland.

Four teachers on placement developed it in 2006, (Excellence in Education through Business Links (EEBL) programme funded by Careers Scotland).  
[www.foresteducation.org](http://www.foresteducation.org)



# Woods for Learning Strategy

The 2009 Scottish Government-COSLA initiative **The Early Years Framework**<sup>6</sup> identified several elements that would lead to transformational change in the lives of young people (pre-school to 8 years old), including:

- breaking cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years
- focusing on engagement and empowerment of children, families and communities
- putting quality at the heart of service delivery
- improving outcomes and children's quality of life through play
- collaborating more effectively.

Play is central to how children learn, both in terms of cognitive skills and softer skills, around relating to other people. It is a fundamental part of children's quality of life and a right enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Outdoor play in particular can also be a major contributor to outcomes around physical activity and healthy weight. Developing play spaces, and play opportunities for children and removing barriers to play is therefore a priority. This has wider implications for development planning and particularly provision of open space and green space.<sup>6</sup>



## Scottish Finest Woods Award for Education

This annual Award is open to any primary, secondary or special school for either practical or classroom based projects involved with forestry, woodlands and trees. Forestry Commission Scotland and the Royal Scottish Forestry Society support the Award and it is managed by FEI.

2009 winners are Cowgate Under 5's Centre, Edinburgh for integrating their Forest School into the nursery experience. As their Forest School the Centre uses a Scottish Wildlife Trust urban nature reserve in walking distance from the nursery, just beneath Edinburgh Castle.

Previous winners are:

2008 St Joan of Arc Special School for its Forest School programme.

2007 Cocksburnspath Primary School for their project to re-open a disused path through Eildbalks Wood.

2006 joint prizewinners St. Crispin's School for incorporating lessons in a woodland for their pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties and Kincardine-in-Menteith Primary School for regenerating an area of local woodland.

The Skills for Scotland strategy, Curriculum for Excellence and **The Early Years Framework** aim to equip Scotland's people with the skills, expertise and knowledge to help achieve the Scottish Government's strategic outcomes of a smarter, greener, safer, stronger and healthier nation. As the forestry directorate of the Scottish Government, advising on, and implementing, forestry policy and managing the national forest estate, Forestry Commission Scotland has a key role to play in helping to achieve this aim.

## Why a strategy?

The 2006 Scottish Forestry Strategy<sup>7</sup> identified forestry's role in education, skills and lifelong learning as a key priority and in particular:

- helping the education sector make greater use of forestry
- using forestry as an exemplar of sustainable development
- encouraging responsible citizenship
- encouraging new entrants into the forestry jobs market
- encouraging the education sector to make greater use of woodlands for outdoor learning
- increasing engagement with the secondary school sector, particularly by promoting vocational qualifications
- working with pupils with additional support for learning needs
- strengthening the FEI partnership
- supporting the development of Forest School in Scotland.

**Woods for Learning** will guide our work with children and young people, in nursery, primary and secondary schools, and outside school. It provides a cornerstone for Forestry Commission Scotland to develop lifelong learning programmes, especially through linkages with recreation and health.

## Vocational Opportunities: Skills for Work Rural Skills course

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has developed vocational courses for pupils in S3 and above. These courses focus on the world of work and create opportunities for local businesses to engage with schools to enhance the learning experience for the pupils involved. Both the Skills for Work Rural Skills (Intermediate 1) and National Progression Award Rural Skills (Intermediate 2) can be delivered in the context of forestry. The partnership between Lochaber Forest District and Ardnamurchan High School through the Sunart Oakwoods Initiative is an example. The pupils have created a small tree nursery on community land within the village of Strontian. Once established, this will provide an ongoing learning facility for the local schools as well as a community resource.



## Why are woods and greenspace good for learning?

- woodlands and greenspace are a rich resource for a range of learning opportunities that can deliver Curriculum for Excellence
- woodlands illustrate the complexity of sustainable development and climate change and provide an ideal link from the local to the global
- woodlands provide a relatively safe place to learn about safety and risk when compared to other outdoor environments and are cool in summer but provide protection from winter weather
- regular visits to woodlands and greenspace are known to reduce stress levels and promote restorative health benefits and calmness amongst children<sup>8</sup>
- when compared with indoor environments, woodlands and greenspace used for learning result in a greater duration and intensity of activity amongst children and contribute to their health and wellbeing<sup>9</sup>
- woodlands stimulate all the senses, help to motivate and enthuse children and make use of their innate desire to learn
- as an outdoor learning environment, woods are both sheltered and robust, expressing the changing seasons throughout the year
- with 17% of Scotland's land supporting woods and forests<sup>7</sup>, this is a huge and accessible outdoor learning resource (90% of all schools are within 1km of woodland<sup>1</sup>).

In summary, greenspace in general, and woodlands in particular, have a key role to play in enriching young peoples' learning, by providing a robust environment for stimulating challenging, active, relevant and fun experiences that can be connected to learning back in the classroom.

### Forest Education Initiative

The Forest Education Initiative ([www.foresteducation.org](http://www.foresteducation.org)) is a partnership between the forestry and education sectors aimed at using trees, woods, forest and the timber industry in learning. There are 18 local groups across Scotland delivering a range of activities linking trees and forests to the curriculum. Cluster groups can access funding from the FEI Partnership Fund to take relevant projects forward. These varied and interesting projects have included green woodworking with schools, developing Careers in Forestry materials, initiating Forest Schools and a Digital Photography in Woodlands project with school children. The cluster groups are supported nationally with information, resources, training and networking opportunities.



## What linkages exist?

### Health

Our Woods for Health Strategy<sup>10</sup> recognises the importance of woods for physical activity, contributing to children's health and wellbeing. Curriculum for Excellence recognises that children need opportunities to be active, successful, confident and responsible in order to grow into adults holding the same values and exhibiting the same behaviours. Woodlands are restorative environments that reduce stress levels (teachers have noted that children are calmer after regular visits to woodland). They also provide a positive learning environment for children with attention deficit issues and children with special educational needs, including those on the autistic spectrum. Forest School and Forest Kindergarten provide active outdoor learning in natural environments on a regular basis over a period of time. This encourages children to take part in learning through, for example, physical play. The Active Schools programme<sup>11</sup> also gives pupils opportunities to make a positive contribution to their health through sports and walking and cycling to school. For young people, such active participation has been shown to lead to greater participation in such activities later in life as well as instilling feelings of wellbeing and a disposition towards caring both for themselves and the environment.

### Recreation

The frequency of childhood visits to woodlands is the single most important predictor of how often people visit woodlands as adults. Connecting children with woodlands at a young age is therefore of key importance. This connection can involve the whole family getting out and enjoying activity in the woods. Natural play sites provide places where children can play, be physically active, use their imagination and be exposed to a controlled level of risk that is not present with standard play equipment. Not only does this bring health benefits but it also helps to create confidence about being outdoors, enabling children to make positive connections with the wood – that being in a wood is fun.

### Active Travel to School

Active travel to school is one way of encouraging young people to be physically active.

A pilot project is underway with Uddingston Grammar School, North Lanarkshire, to work with the school community on increasing active travel. This includes improving access and signage to woodland trails and urban paths and raising awareness about active travel options. These green transport corridors will be designed using opinions gathered from pupils, parents, teaching staff and members of the local community.

The results of the project will be shared widely to help schools promote active forms of travel and reduce the use of motorised transport on the daily school run. This project is in partnership with Sustrans and the school.



## Economic

Use of woods for learning throughout **Curriculum for Excellence** (i.e. from age 3-18) provides opportunities for children to meet people working in the forest industry. This exposure to different jobs can provide a vivid demonstration of potential career choices. Research shows that the P7-S2 stage is an important time for deciding career routes to follow, so the forestry sector needs to be engaged with children at a young stage to demonstrate the wide range of jobs available in forestry and the outdoors. Since working with schools often involves parents, long-term programmes like Forest School offer chances for parents – fathers as well as mothers – to work with their children in a very different environment. They also provide opportunities to engage with those who might be unemployed or looking to change careers.

## Community development

Working with schools gives a direct link to the local community through children and their families. The kind of work that is done and the resulting sense of teamwork and cohesion can help create a sense of place and a pride in local surroundings. Links with volunteering can bring benefits not only to individuals but also to groups, communities and society as a whole. Longer term engagement like Forest School has helped to open up local woodlands for wider use by families. For example, some children want to take the family there at weekends to show the site they are using. As a result of the children's work at school many families are in the position of using a local wood on a regular basis for the first time.



### Forest Kindergarten

Forest Kindergartens offer young children frequent, regular play opportunities in woodland or a natural setting, throughout the year, in almost all weathers. Developmental benefits include working together to help one another and taking turns, time to themselves individually and in small groups, improving balance and co-ordination and talking and listening skills.

The Forest Kindergarten Feasibility Study (2009)<sup>12</sup> identified factors explaining the under-use of local woodlands by pre-school establishments across Glasgow City and the Clyde Valley and proposed a variety of solutions to overcome the challenges identified. The study also proposed models and pilot options for developing Forest Kindergartens in this area of Scotland.

## What have we achieved so far?

In 2006 our first Woods for Learning Strategy<sup>1</sup> set out our approach to engaging with young people in primary and secondary schools. Since then we have established closer working relationships and linkages between the environment and learning sectors in Scotland, gained experience through programmes of work and added to understanding through commissioning research. As a result of this, many initiatives are currently taking place in Scotland to increase learning opportunities in, and about, trees, woods and forests. These initiatives are helping to provide innovative ways of delivering **Curriculum for Excellence** as well as creating time for physical activity when learning outdoors.

15% of the Scottish adult population, or members of their families, estimated to have attended a forest-based organised learning activity or event in the previous 12 months.<sup>13</sup>

24% of Scottish children estimated to have visited woodland in the previous 12 months as part of a nursery or school trip. Each child made an average of 2.3 visits per year, which equates to just over half a million visits.<sup>13</sup>

The Forestry Commission works with an estimated 20% of schools in Scotland, through school trips to forests, ranger visits to schools, and Forest School initiatives.<sup>13</sup>

58% of the Scottish adult population are estimated to have recalled seeing or reading about at least one topic related to Scottish forests, woods or trees in the previous 12 months.<sup>13</sup>

An estimated 96% of the Scottish adult population agree or strongly agree that woodlands allow families to learn about nature. 95% agree or strongly agree that woodlands play an important role in children's and young people's outdoor learning experience.<sup>13</sup>

### Foggieton Woods Project

Foggieton Woods is on the edge of Aberdeen and is one of the busiest woods in the area. This project was set up to stimulate local involvement in the woods. The initial phase of the project involved a felling operation in the woods which three local schools came to see. Forestry Commission Scotland staff then worked with the schools to illustrate how new woodlands can be designed.

Children were given blank maps of the woods and asked to produce a plan of their new woodland that had to fit a set of agreed rules. These ideas were incorporated into the overall design of the wood. Involvement with the schools has helped to raise the profile and understanding of the changes occurring in the woods with the local community.



## What are our future priorities?

The aim of this strategy is to make a significant contribution to delivering the Scottish Government's strategic objectives of a smarter, greener, safer, stronger and healthier nation in the area of learning. It sets out ways in which we can:

- support those who work with young people in the outdoors to use trees, woods, forests and greenspace
- help enhance teaching and learning through challenging, active and fun ways that help young people to make connections to the world around them.

We aim to increase the awareness and use of trees, woods and forests in learning and thus provide opportunities to increase the life chances of young people to enable them to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. In doing so we recognise three national outcomes and related national indicators towards which we can contribute.



## What are we going to do?

By working with partners to achieve added value we will do the following:

- increase opportunities for outdoor learning and play in woods
- provide CPD for teachers to help deliver **Curriculum for Excellence** outdoors
- increase the number of Forest Schools and Forest Kindergartens
- provide information about outdoor learning sites close to schools
- provide teaching and learning resources, to deliver **Curriculum for Excellence** outdoors, including opportunities to recognise achievement
- continue to support, strengthen and be part of the FEI partnership.

## How will the strategy be implemented?

Implementation will be through direct delivery, facilitation and influencing. Working with and through partners at local, local authority and national levels will be essential in order to implement the strategy. Specific actions are set out in an Action Plan covering the period 2010-2013 and include the following:

- undertake measures within Woodland In and Around Towns and Forestry for People Challenge Funds<sup>15</sup>
- undertake national partnership initiatives with Scotland's Environment and Rural Services (SEARS)<sup>16</sup> and FEI partners
- commission new research around knowledge gaps
- improve methods and tools to monitor and evaluate learning outcomes of pilot programmes and initiatives.

An annual review process will be established to monitor progress against the Woods for Learning Action Plan and to ensure that targets and indicators are being met.



National Outcomes <sup>14</sup>	National Indicators <sup>14</sup>
1. Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase the proportion of schools receiving positive inspection reports</li> <li>• increase the proportion of school leavers (from Scottish publicly funded schools) in positive and sustained destinations (FE, HE, employment or training)</li> <li>• reduce overall ecological footprint</li> <li>• increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport.</li> </ul>
2. Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduce the rate of increase in the proportion of children with their Body Mass Index outwith a healthy range by 2018</li> <li>• increase the proportion of pre-school centres receiving positive inspection reports.</li> </ul>
3. We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increase the proportion of school leavers (from Scottish publicly funded schools) in positive and sustained destinations (FE, HE, employment or training).</li> </ul>

## What will success look like?

The 2013 review of the Woods for Learning Strategy will provide an opportunity to examine to what extent the environment and education sectors in Scotland have become more connected and whether there is a shared understanding and implementation of Scottish Government policy. A successful future will show an increase in the number of high quality learning opportunities about trees, woods and forests available both outdoors and indoors for young people and the adults that work with them.

Success in 2013 will be measured both against the Scottish Government's national indicators and the following:

- have we increased opportunities for adults and children to regularly use woodlands for learning?
- have the number of schools/nurseries working with 3-18 year olds using woods for learning increased?
- have learning opportunities in woodlands increased?
- are more education professionals using woods and greenspace for delivering Curriculum for Excellence?
- through case studies and research, do we have a better understanding of what it is about trees, woods and forests that are good for learning?
- have methods and tools for monitoring learning activity in woodland been improved?
- have we strengthened the links between health and learning outdoors?



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