



Forest College FAQs

What is Forest College?

Our Forest College at Newbattle Abbey College was established in 2018 to provide Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards which offer a learner centred approach to developing the skills and understanding to work sustainably in forest and outdoor environments.

They have been developed for the Scottish educational context, but have been designed to apply to all forest and outdoor situations. The awards are credit rated to SCQF levels which are recognised internationally.

At their heart, the awards help people learn about how to be in forest and outdoor environments in sustainable ways. The awards are grounded in the ethos of 'Forest School' that places the human within the natural environment and supports active and person centred approaches to learning.

They support Curriculum for Excellence and the Attainment Challenge in Scotland. The awards seek to support the development of skills for Learning, Life and Work.

The awards are designed to achieve SCQF levels 2-6 & 8 and have been developed in consultation with a range of partners including: Local Authorities, colleges, schools, the Forest School Association (FSA), Forest School trainers, the Forestry Commission (now Forest and Land Scotland) and leaders of outdoor learning.

They will:

- Introduce accreditation of SCQF level 2 - 8 to include a wide range of learners and offer clear progression routes to further training or employment
- Meet the requirements of Curriculum for Excellence explicitly
- Meet the requirements of the current Forest School Leader system for the Scottish educational context and SCQF credit rating process

What are the Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards?

Skills Awards SCQF Levels 2 – 5 For Schools and Community Groups

We deliver Forest and Outdoor Learning Awards (FOLAs) Skills levels 2 – 5 for children, young people and adults in schools and community groups. These are most suitable for those in upper primary, secondary and schools supporting ASN. They are also relevant for adults with few or no formal qualifications.

The programmes are funding dependent so there is no set schedule of dates. We can organise a programme for organisations who can self-fund on request (4 min – 15 max group size.) Periodically we receive funding for such programmes and can offer these to local organisations, schools or community groups.

We can deliver the FOLA Skills Awards in our woodland here at Newbattle or on your own site.

Content

We cover nature connection, responsible access in the outdoors (SOAC), species identification, conservation, working with tools and fire safely as well as woodcraft, storytelling and other creative elements.

Awards are inclusive and accessible for all – there are no tests and no written requirements for levels 2 -4. All assessment is flexible and appropriate for participants making them particularly relevant for those who find traditional classroom learning challenging.

Time Commitment

A minimum of 6 weekly sessions for a condensed programme, or over an academic term (10 weeks) but can be delivered over a full academic year as part of a wider education programme.

Leadership Awards SCQF Levels 5 – 8 for Individuals and Groups

Level 5: Developing the Forest School and Outdoor Learning Leader

This is a short course introducing the learner to the principles of leadership and underpinning theory based on forest school ethos.

The course requires learners to shadow at least one forest school session. The taught elements can be delivered over 3 full day or 6 half day sessions. The course covers content from Units 1 – 5 in the list below.

Level 6: Assistant Forest School and Outdoor Learning Leader

This course trains learners to Assistant Forest School Leader level. Learners need to assist with 3 forest school sessions at a local forest school. The taught elements cover content from Units 1- 6 in the list below and are delivered over 5 days or 10 half day sessions.

We can deliver leadership awards at levels 5 – 8 for groups at the request of organisations (self-funding.) Group size is 6 min – 12 max.

Level 8: This is the full leadership award which is scheduled to run once or twice a year in spring and autumn - see our website for dates Outdoor Learning Leadership - Newbattle Abbey College.

The FOLA level 8 is recognised by the Forest School Association as equivalent to the Forest School Leader Practitioner award level 3 which qualifies you as a Forest School Leader and to run forest school programmes.

The FOLA award at level 8 is slightly wider than purely forest school and gives practitioners the skills to deliver a range of outdoor learning in different outdoor environments (i.e. not just woodlands) using a forest school approach. As such the training is quite intense and there is a structured time commitment. The taught elements are delivered over 10 full days (blocks) and there is considerable independent study. The course is designed to be completed in one calendar year.

Content

The first blocks focus on forest school ethos and practice, learning theories, behaviour, play and holistic development as well as practical outdoor skills, using tools, woodcraft, site surveys and species identification. We will also spend time covering the policies and procedures required to run a forest school and you will need to prepare a handbook of policies.

A two day Outdoor First Aid course is a requirement for forest school leaders and we host a course within the training blocks to ensure you achieve this in the required timeframe. If you have a current outdoor first aid certificate (valid for 3 years) you do not need to do this part of the course.

All of this prepares you to deliver a programme of 6 Forest School sessions. You should be thinking in advance of the course where and when you can deliver your sessions – it could be a school group, early years group, youth group or adult community group. We will help to signpost you if you do not have any group options in mind.

During the final blocks we will reflect on learning from the forest school sessions and cover woodland management, campfire cooking, outdoor games and skills sharing. Thereafter, you will complete the written work and your learning journal.

Assessment

A considerable part of the course is reflecting on learning and you will need to submit a learning journal so it is essential to take notes and photographs wherever possible throughout your learning experience.

In addition there will be assessments on each of the 8 units of the course. The units cover your own understanding of the following as well as how you facilitate learning for others in:

1. Being in the forest and outdoors: Nature connection, Scottish outdoor access, responsible behaviour and safe practice
2. Knowing the forest and outdoors: the woodlands and outdoor habitats – species identification and sustainable site use
3. Working in the forest and outdoors: in the outdoors – tool use, fire making, cordage and knots, cooking
4. Making in the forest and outdoors: shelter building, woodcraft, visual art, imaginative responses
5. Learning: understanding of ethos, behaviour and theoretical approaches to learning and teaching in the outdoors
6. Leading in the forest and outdoors: leadership, decision making, community and team building
7. Managing in the forest and outdoors: implementation and management of a forest school programme, observation and recommendations for 3 learners
8. Legal Compliance: demonstrate understanding and application of legal compliance, risk assessment, insurance, relevant policies

Much of the assessment will be written though you can present in different formats. There is also a mix of group discussion assessments and practical skills assessments.

Who Can Deliver FOLAs?

Newbattle Abbey College is the awarding body for FOLAs but organisations can become Approved Assessment Centres to deliver the award. You will need at least two members of staff who are trained to FOLA level 8, to deliver, assess and internally verify the awards. Centres pay an initial one off set up fee (£275) plus an annual licence fee of £575 +VAT.

For further information, costs or to discuss any aspect please contact FOLA@nac.ac.uk

