

5. EDUCATION & LEARNING

We want improved opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development for everyone in the East of England

1. Woodlands have important educational values both as immediate settings for schools and as places to visit for outdoor learning.



Lifelong Learning

(See also Recreation and Access, Health, Community Engagement and Woodland Produce and Timber Production and Marketing)

2. Profound links have been demonstrated between the quality of playspace and grounds, and the observed behaviour relationships and attitudes of the pupils who use them. Evidence suggests that improving the quality of the space in which learning takes place will bring about dramatic changes in behaviour and relationships, reduce accidents, ease tensions, reduce bullying and confrontation and provide increased opportunities for learning. Some recent research in Norway suggests that spending part of school time in small woodlands have a positive influence on children's (5 to 7 years) motor development skills. It was found that natural landscapes had qualities to meet children's needs for a stimulating and varied play environment, with a positive relationship between landscape components and play activities. Children are thus enabled to develop more fully in a range of ways, both as individuals and as part of society.
3. Play is a vital part of learning, especially for pre-school, nursery and key stage 1 children. Woodlands can provide perfect surroundings for play if there are adequate open space and facilities.
4. The Forest School concept has developed from this work. In essence, each Forest School provides a permanent, natural but safe setting in which children have freedom to roam and to experience the natural world through practical activities. Children visit the woodland regularly throughout the year and in all weathers. Although Forest School sessions are mainly run for pre-school age children, both older disaffected children and those with learning difficulties can thrive in the positive atmosphere. There are currently no Forest Schools in the East of England.
5. The Forest Education Initiative (FEI) is a partnership between the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, Timber Trades Federation, Forest Industries Development Council, BTCV, Field Studies Council, Tree Council and Groundwork. It aims to increase the understanding and appreciation, particularly among young people, of the environmental, social, and economic potential of trees, woodlands and forests and of the link between the tree and everyday wood products. It acts as a facilitator and works with teachers and others to produce resources that help to deliver the requirements of the National Curriculum for schools.
6. There are now many more opportunities to look at education and learning for young people outside the curriculum but still through the formal education process, for example through after school activities. The Government's Connexions programme is designed to keep 13-16 year old children in school through reward, incentives and positive career advice. Each region has a Connexions co-ordinator.
7. Learning does not cease at the point students leave school or college; it is a lifelong process. Trees and woodlands can play an important role in this. As well as being popular places to visit for recreation there is a widespread, and unfulfilled, desire for information and knowledge.
8. Through well-designed programmes, it is possible to increase public awareness of their environment, heritage and history within woodlands. Relationships to and with nature can be changed and awareness of global environmental issues with local implications increased.

9. Woodlands can provide settings for adult learning, particularly those who don't learn in formal educational environments.
10. Woodland management can uniquely demonstrate global and local sustainability issues, use of natural resources and illustrate such topics as the carbon and water cycles.
11. The range of opportunities is considerable but includes;

- guided walks,
- interpretative material in woodlands,
- workshops,
- training courses,
- working holidays, and
- woodland craft holidays.

What is being done for lifelong learning?

There are a large number of environmental education providers in the East of England using woodlands as the basis of, or background to, their work. These include Forestry Commission, Green Light Trust, Woodland Trust, Wildlife Trusts, Community Forests, National Trust and agricultural colleges.

Some private owners encourage school visits to their land.

The Forest Education Initiative has three local groups, or 'clusters', in the East of England; Suffolk/Norfolk based on Thetford Forest, North East London/Hertfordshire based on Epping Forest and Bedfordshire (which is part of the Northants cluster).

A wide range of organisations provides guided walks and interpretative material for those visiting woodlands.

Many organisations and individuals give talks, lectures and courses related to woodlands, trees and wood usage.

Organisations such as BTCV, National Trust and Wildlife Trusts facilitate practical involvement.

Opportunities for lifelong learning.

- Develop a number of Forest Schools.
- Increase the number of FEI clusters linked exclusively to one or more Forest Schools, so that the whole region is covered.
- Increase access to other woodlands for educational purposes
- A fully co-ordinated approach to lifelong learning using woodlands could be developed at a regional level.
- Improved visitor facilities at major woodland recreational sites
- Improved information and interpretation in accessible woodland
- Development of the Forest School philosophy coupled with wider woodland engagement.
- Development of an outreach network, possibly using 'Community Rangers' to encourage community participation in woodland events.

Initiative for Lifelong Learning

EL1 Develop opportunities for lifelong learning through trees and woodland.

To support this initiative a series of actions will be taken. Each action will require resources and partners to achieve it. Please refer to the Action Plan that accompanies this Strategy (www.woodlandforlife.net/wfl-action).