



# Irish Forest School Association

## IFSA strategic plan 2018 to 2020

August 2018

### Introduction

The Irish Forest School Association (IFSA) is engaged in the promotion and development of the Forest School (FS) movement in Ireland. FS is an opportunity for the same group of learners and leaders to spend a sustained period outdoors, once a week, in a wooded environment, ideally year-round. A regular routine is followed that is learner-led and facilitated by trained leaders. Learning is holistic and closely related to developmental stage and regular curricular requirements. There must be a high ratio of leaders to learners, everyone must be suitably dressed and a risk/benefit approach to health and safety is followed by all. (IFSA, 2017)

### Mission Statement

To bring Forest School practitioners together to inspire inclusive, playful learning for all, in nature. To build resilience and relationships, through our connection with each other, and the natural world, while inspiring creativity and supporting wellbeing.

### Rationale

The Mission Statement covers various aspects of the role of the IFSA. It allows the organisation to highlight different aspects of its work, to enable different emphasis according to the requirements (e.g. funding applications). It offers both an internal and external focus and explanation of the purpose of the IFSA.

### Our purpose is to:

- To promote quality, inclusive Forest School in Ireland.
- To act as the National Association for the promotion of Forest School in Ireland.
- To advocate for the Professionalism of Forest School in Ireland.
- To hold information and educational conferences and events about Forest School.
- To provide advice and support to members about issues relevant to Forest School.
- To promote a quality assurance scheme for Forest School practitioners.
- To provide and promote continuing professional development for Forest School practitioners.
- To ensure that all of the stakeholders interested in Forest School activities in Ireland will benefit from these activities.

## **We achieve this purpose through activities which:**

- Bring those interested in Forest School together to inspire inclusive, playful learning for all, in nature.
- Promote the availability of inclusive Forest School in formal and informal education settings.
- Act as the National Association for the promotion of Forest School in Ireland by providing information and advice to members through our conferences, events
- Raise awareness about Forest School in Ireland.
- Advocate for greater funding and availability for Forest School approaches
- See attached 'Our Vision for Forest School'

Our Annual Conference and AGM in May each year and our Autumn Gathering and Continuing Professional Development Day are core activities to achieve our charitable purpose.

## **Association Structure**

The IFSA is governed by a committee elected annually at the AGM in May each year. This committee is responsible for managing the IFSA on behalf of the members. The IFSA is a non-profit association whose income and property are to be applied solely to the promotion of the aims of the IFSA. The Chair maintains overall responsibility for the work of the management committee. The management committee is responsible for the day to day running of the affairs of the IFSA including governance and financial matters.

A three-year start-up phase for the IFSA (2017- 2020) was approved at our inaugural AGM in May 2017. A 10-member Committee was elected to manage the affairs of the IFSA and to oversee the start-up phase. We regard this period as crucial to establishing a successful sustainable organisation that can fulfil our purpose and mission.

## **Key priorities that have been achieved so far, in line with our purpose include:**

- Agreement on our vision and our mission statement
- Agreement on our definition of quality inclusive forest school
- Design of our logo and branding
- Establishment of our website and social media platforms
- Application for charitable status
- Agreement that we would hold two annual networking and CPD events for members as core activities to achieve our aims.
- Establishment of a collaborative culture for decision making
- Completed the process to provide Garda Vetting Services for members
- Initiated the process to be granted charitable status
- Established links with international organisations which are also engaged in promoting Forest School

## **The following policies and governance documents have been approved:**

- Financial Policies and Procedures Manual
- Social Media Policy
- Garda Vetting Policy
- Privacy Policy
- IFSA Conflict of Interest Policy

## Strategic Work Plan for the IFSA for the period 2018/2020:

1. An exploration of relationships with stakeholders: who makes decisions that affect us (e.g. Coillte, Heritage Council, Department of Education and Skills, The Tree Council; Irish Environmental Network etc.); who is affected by decisions we make (e.g. members, ourselves, public face of Forest Schools, etc.)
2. Further exploration of 'selling' points of IFSA, how to engage attention without compromising core values of organisation. What is the agreed public message/ statement? Who can comment? What can they say on behalf of the IFSA?
3. Further exploration of ways in which upscaling of organisation can remain in touch with founding principles, and maintain a cohesion across all member practitioners. Use of regional meetings to provide discussion/network/sharing forums for member practitioners, to share both cultural and practical experiences. Meetings based on the 'train the trainer' model, so that regionally-based members would set up and run the meetings, rather than members of the IFSA ACORN.
4. Further exploration of where a line would be drawn, i.e. what isn't a Forest School; how to maintain the integrity/authority of the 'brand'
5. Governance: Putting in place practical markers/policies/procedures to ensure the current excellent working relationship of the IFSA ACORN remains in place, and becomes embedded in the culture of the organisation.

*Approved by IFSA  
August 2018*



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School Association**

[info@irishforestschoollassociation.ie](mailto:info@irishforestschoollassociation.ie)

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