



# Irish Forest School Association

**The Irish Forest School Pedagogy Association Company Limited by Guarantee**

**Company Registration No. 746830**

## **Strategic/Business Plan 2023 to 2025 (Autumn 2023)**

### **Introduction**

The Irish Forest School Pedagogy Association CLG (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, our Autumn Regional Gathering and our Spring Webinar series are core activities to achieve our charitable purpose.

### **Association Structure**

The IFSA is constituted as a Company Limited by Guarantee. There are a minimum of 3 and a maximum of nine directors/trustees. The directors/trustees are elected annually at the AGM in May each year and manage IFSA on behalf of the members in line with our constitution. The income and property of IFSA are applied solely to the promotion of the aims of the IFSA. The Chair maintains overall responsibility for the work of the management committee. The directors/trustees are responsible for the day to day running of the affairs of the IFSA including governance and financial matters.

### **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 CLG 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
- Established links with international organisations which are also engaged in promoting Forest School

- Participated in the development of an Irish accredited (QQI Level 6) training programme for FS leaders

**The following policies and governance documents have been approved and are available on our website:**

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

### **Financial and Business matters**

The IFSA keep annual accounts which are presented annually to the members at the AGM. A financial report is presented to every management committee meeting.

A financial policy/ manual was agreed (uploaded)

A start up grant of €1500 was successfully applied for from The Heritage Council.

A bank account was opened.

Membership fees, set at an accessible level, were agreed.

We have 170 members at present (September 2023). Our aim is to increase our membership to 200 by May 2024 and to 250 by 2025. We feel this increase in membership is a feasible target, given the increasing awareness of Forest School approaches and the ongoing training of new Forest School leaders in the Republic of Ireland.

The membership fee is linked to the annual conference fee, with an option for standalone membership available between events. This is a good way to ensure that members renew their membership, so that we can grow the organisation steadily and also anticipate membership income for the coming year.

At present we are reliant on membership fees as our main source of income.

Once our charitable status is approved, we will be able to apply for philanthropic funding.

We are also exploring government grants.

To date, as a young organisation we feel it is important to grow in a sustainable way, moving forward steadily rather than take on too much too soon, to ensure that we continue to serve the needs of our membership comprehensively. However, we are aware that we must also be responsive towards opportunities that may arise during this phase.

We are heavily dependant on voluntary input from members and from bodies who are interested in the promotion of Forest School. For example, parks and outdoor centres and woodland owners and education settings have provided venues for conferences and meetings. Individual members commit their time and expertise to manage queries from both our membership and members of the public, help us to develop policies and donate office equipment and supplies. We will continue to utilise this kind of support as we develop as a charity.

### **Strategic Work Plan for the IFSA for the period 2023/2025:**

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.
4. 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
5. 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’
6. An exploration of Core Funding possibilities going forward to ensure the long-term viability of the organisation.
7. Governance: Ongoing putting in place of practices/policies/procedures to ensure that we uphold the highest standards of corporate governance in line with our status as a CLG and a charity.