



Educational Visits Policy Part 1

March 2010

Rational

Oxfordshire County Council not only recognises and endorses the value of educational visits and offsite and outdoor education for all, it also provides through the Education Service a range of outdoor education opportunities at several of its own professionally managed centres within and outside Oxfordshire as well as providing access to a whole range of other activities organised by establishments.

Outdoor education is a term now widely accepted as covering educational activities concerned with learning, moving and living out-of-doors, whether it be in a rural or urban environment, on a day or residential basis and also embraces educational visits to particular venues to achieve specified educational objectives and benefits.

It may or may not be subject specific and can be an approach to learning which both extends and reinforces the curriculum by :-

- transcending subject boundaries
- providing investigative opportunities
- forging links with a variety of disciplines
- encouraging personal independence
- applying to all ages

The ideology of outdoor education encompasses :-

- environmental and other subject specific studies
- outdoor and adventurous activities
- personal and social development and independence

Although these elements are reflected within the National Curriculum and can provide effective opportunities for cross-curricular links it must also be realised that the provision of outdoor education should not be seen purely in a curricular context. Great benefit can be gained from youth work and extra-curricular projects providing outdoor education activities.

Aims and Objectives of Outdoor Education

The benefits of outdoor education are most effectively realised by the establishment adopting a holistic policy towards it, thereby ensuring that it relates firmly to that establishment's overall aims and objectives as an integral part of the whole curriculum or service offer.

Effective outdoor education depends on the setting of clearly defined aims and objectives for each venture, study or activity.

Participants and parents/guardians must be made aware of the aims and objectives by effective planning, preparation and presentation. They should appreciate and understand how the aims can be achieved in the context of outdoor education.

The Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, European Directives and Regulations implementing them have sharpened concern for health and safety. It is now absolutely clear that employees, volunteers and participants must all work within a system which

can be seen to be free of foreseeable hazards and uncontrolled risks. Where foreseeable hazards are intrinsic to the very purpose of an activity then the control measures identified, proposed and used must reduce the risk to an acceptably low level.

The management of, and the attitude towards, safety are just as important as sets of rules and regulations which govern practice. Good safety management is the principle of this document. It is in keeping with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 which require a suitable and sufficient assessment of risk to be undertaken before activities take place and that tasks are only given to those who are competent to carry them out.

No guidelines can account for each unexpected or unforeseeable occurrence in every environment in which teachers, leaders, students/participants and helpers can find themselves when off establishment premises but this document defines areas to be examined as part of the risk assessment process.

Activity specific governing bodies are listed in Section Five from whom detailed advice can be sought, but this publication incorporates accepted good practice as well as the general advice and guidance on safety for those persons responsible for outdoor education activities which can be found in :

- “Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits” DfES (ref. HSPV2) and the three-part supplement : Standards for LEAs in Overseeing Educational Visits, Standards for Adventure and a Handbook for Group Leaders
- “Safe Practice in Physical Education” from the British Association of Advisers and lecturers in Physical Education (BAALPE) (Millennium edition) ISBN 1 8712 2811 5
- “Guidance to the Licensing Authority on The Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 1996” from the Health & Safety Commission ISBN 07176 1160 4
- “Adventure Activity Centres : Five Steps to Risk Assessment” from the Adventure Activities Industry Advisory Committee of the Health & Safety Commission ISBN 0 7176 2463 3
- “Overseas Expeditions” from the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel

These documents are readily available :

the BAALPE book has previously been issued to Oxfordshire County Council schools, the Health & Safety Commission guidance is available from HSE Books, DfES and Outdoor Education Advisers Panel details of which appear in Section Six. Further guidance is either available from or accessible through the Education Service Intranet site and from other printed matter which is listed in Section Five of this guidance under ‘Useful Publications’.

Responsibility

The responsibility for health and safety rests, however, with each employer whether the LA in Community, Voluntary Controlled and Community Special Schools or the Governing body in Foundation, Voluntary Aided and Foundation Special Schools. However, responsibility for health and safety is not only a matter for the employer. A role in the safe provision of visits and activities is played by each of the LA, the Governing body or management Committee, the Headteacher or Head of Establishment, the Educational visits Co-ordinator (EVC), the group leader, supervising and supporting adults, parents and the participants themselves. Each role is interactive and complementary to each other.

What is clear though is that no visit or activity can take place unless adequate planning has taken place and appropriate approval given.

This document is designed to provide a framework of sensible precautions and requirements in which outdoor education and off-site visits can be enjoyed and enhance learning experiences. It is hoped this framework will safeguard all participants and protect those who exercise responsibility for them.

The requirements and guidance included in this framework apply to all persons who teach or supervise activities off establishment premises and all educational establishments which come under the aegis of Oxfordshire County Council.

Persons using the facilities of an Oxfordshire County Council educational establishment on a hire basis are subject to the County Council's health and safety policy as well as the particular establishment's local health and safety policy and regulations.

They must have obtained the approval of the Head of Establishment before embarking on any activity.

Risk Assessment

Whilst the need to undertake suitable and sufficient risk assessments for all work activities is required by law (Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999), the fact is that risk assessment and risk management are merely tools of good management and good practice.

Assessing risk is a process rather than a document. It is not merely the assessment that is important but the actions that are taken as a result of it. Taking the appropriate action is more important than the actual form in which it is made or recorded. Risk assessment is not an onerous task since it simply answers the question 'What must be done to prevent people being harmed when doing this activity?' Fundamental to answering the question is the need to distinguish between hazard and risk.

Hazard is something with the potential to cause harm.

Risk is the likelihood of that potential being realised.

The Health & Safety Executive and others have produced advice and guidance on risk assessment and all identify logical steps to follow to obtain effective risk assessments. These steps follow the process of

- identifying the hazards;
- deciding who might be harmed and how;
- evaluating the risks arising from the hazards and deciding what measures are required to reduce the risks;
- recording the findings;
- reviewing the assessment, making revisions as necessary.

Bearing in mind that hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control measures are now component parts of National Curriculum activities, participants may be involved, or be encouraged to help, in the risk assessment process. However, since, in some instances, hazards and risks may not easily be recognised universally it is important that those who lead the activities are in a position to easily identify situations which may cause harm and to take appropriate action to reduce the risks to the lowest acceptable level. This may not necessarily be by removing the hazard as in some instances this will be physically impossible and in others the hazard may be the prime mover or purpose of the activity.

In essence those leading an activity must be competent in the task with which they are charged. It is for this reason that the LEA require the holding of at least the appropriate nationally recognised qualification in the activity to be one indicator of their competence.

Many aspects of outdoor education will be designed to challenge the individual whilst still ensuring their health and safety. It is essential that risk assessments apply to the activity being undertaken by one particular individual or group at one particular time.

Accordingly risk assessments should be dynamic and subject to frequent review.

It is incumbent on the Heads of Establishments to ensure that risk assessments are both rigorous and relevant and that they are prepared by those leading the activity who are best placed to implement the required measures identified in the assessments.

A pre-visit is most important in gathering all relevant information for use when undertaking the risk assessment.

Where evidence of the risk assessment process is required, it can take a variety of forms so long as these are drawn to the attention of those involved in implementing the control measures put in place as a result of the assessment. These forms can include:

- a statement that standard operating procedures apply and are in place for the activity or visit. These may have been produced by a National Governing Body, an LEA or the individual establishment itself, or
- a list of specific additional arrangements that are considered necessary because of the circumstances specific to the particular visit, or
- a visit approval application form designed to lead a group leader through the process of assessing the risk or
- one of many other formats which individual authorities, establishments or leaders have found helpful in encouraging a systematic approach to the management of risk and the protection of all participants.

Role of the LA

Despite the fact that managerial responsibility for day to day matters is delegated by the LA to individual establishments, an advisory, guiding, approval and monitoring role is retained by the LA.

Supplement 1 to the DfES publication "Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits: a Good Practice Guide" sets out the role of the LA and indicates that it should:

- monitor the educational visits carried out by the LAs schools and other educational establishments;
- review policies and procedures in the light of lessons learned and sharing of good practice;
- monitor the work of the Educational Visits Coordinators including giving advice and guidance and ensuring access to appropriate training both for the EVC and for employees leading or otherwise supervising visits;
- determine which visits will require LA approval;
- advising on adult : participant ratios and whether ratios can include competent on employee adults ;
- ensuring all those involved in educational visits are assessed as competent in their specific tasks;
- ensuring training is available for those who need that competence.

This latest guidance from DfES makes abundantly clear the need for better co-ordination of visits by establishments themselves by means of their own Educational Visits Co-ordinator together with greater monitoring of educational visits by LAs.

In fulfilling their responsibility in determining which visits will require direct LEA approval consideration has been given to the categorisation of visits in line with Part 2 of the supplement to HASPEV.