



Working with young people in the outdoors

Risk assessment and risk management

An introduction to its role and value
in leading and managing young
people safely

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Managing risk – an educative process

The Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP) shares with the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) the view that risk management is a fundamental life skill. Within industry the risk assessment process generally seeks to eliminate all risk. However, as educators we have a statutory responsibility to teach young people how to manage risk. It is an essential ingredient of the teaching and learning process both indoors and outdoors.

Many in the world of education hold a concern that in recent years a culture of blame and legal process has denied young people fundamental experiences, essentially 'wrapping them in cotton wool'. There is a need to teach how to deal with and manage the challenge and adventure that life can offer.

Teachers, youth workers and other leaders, with appropriate training and experience, should feel confident in using their professional judgement. They can in their planning, manage risk and so provide suitable levels of challenge for given groups of children and young people.

The OEAP is confident that the approach to risk management set out in this document will contribute to safe and successful practice on educational visits and off-site activities.

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Introduction

This document describes a risk assessment and risk management process. It is intended to assist those involved in giving advice on educational visits and offsite activity.

It is aimed principally at the Local Education Authority (LEA) Outdoor Education Adviser (OEA). It may also be useful to those in other educational contexts who offer advice and support to Senior Managers, Educational Visits Coordinators and Group Leaders.

The document focuses on explaining the key issues of this process and indicating their importance in supporting the successful management of educational visits and offsite activities.

The purpose of this document

The document has been formulated by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel and the DfES has endorsed it to encourage consistency in approach. It represents a collective view of current good practice to support and inform local guidance.

It could be used to:

- review current guidance and materials
- help generate new local guidance
- help make the process manageable and realistic
- support the training of leaders and other supervisors, including support staff and their managers.

The risk assessment and management process

The process should be:

- simple
- proportional
- suitable
- sufficient
- manageable

It will concentrate on managing risk by:

- being an integral part of the overall planning process for the visit
- ensuring leaders have the experience and competence to manage the process positively and successfully
- providing confidence in the process for those involved
- focusing on the users and recognising their current competence
- building upon current good practices within the establishment
- enabling this process to be collaborative
- ensuring all those that need to know do know
- concentrating on **significant** hazards in order to assess the risks
- ensuring that the control measures are suitable and sufficient for the leader and the individuals within the group, and responsibilities have been defined.

The process will be realistic and effective when it:

- is flexible by not insisting on a rigid format
- recognises the experience and professionalism of leaders in applying relevant policies and procedures
- provides sufficient detail to give confidence in the event
- provides evidence that the process has been followed
- allows leaders, children and young people with varied experience, motivation and training to be treated according to their needs

The three levels of risk assessment

(Ref Standards for LEA's Overseeing Educational Visits – Part 1 DfES 2002)

Generic risk assessments

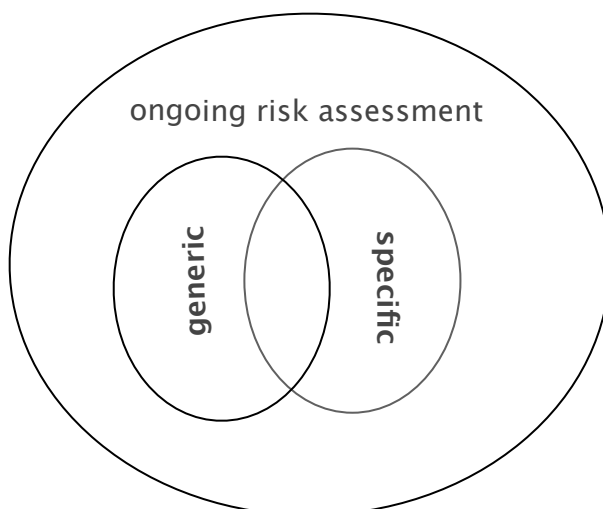
These are statements of current good practice which apply to the activity wherever and whenever, it takes place. They may take the form of LEA policies, NGB guidance, or the establishment's own policies and operating procedures.

Event specific risk assessments

These assessments will be undertaken by the group leader and will be unique to each occasion. They will take into account the site, individuals within the group and activity specific needs including the environment, accommodation, the leaders and factors such as transport.

Ongoing risk assessment

This involves professional judgements in response to changing circumstances. It is critical that control measures are monitored and confirmed or adapted as required. **It is these ongoing decisions that will determine the safety of the group and success of the activity.**



Generic Risk Assessments are the starting point. They are tested against the event and the group to see whether they can stand as they are or they require adapting. Together with other **Specific Risk Assessments**, they inform the plan.

The safety of the visit lies with the **Ongoing Risk Assessment**, which monitors the plan as it unfolds and confirms or adapts it according to other immediate influences such as adverse weather forecasts.

The lessons learnt from Ongoing Risk Assessments will inform future Event and Generic Risk Assessments.

All staff should be involved in this process and have confidence in the management procedures.

Recording sheets

The recording sheet must be an active document. It will:

- provide confidence and a sense of ownership to those involved
- provide up to date help in planning and management
- be customised to the educational establishment and the event
- be used for staff briefings and understood by everyone concerned and possibly signed by all to acknowledge this
- be part of a process which is signed and dated by the group leader and authorising officer/head of establishment (if involved)
- draw upon, and refer to generic risk assessments and other operating procedures that are current and approved and communicated to staff

Key features

- a manageably sized document
- a header section with essential details: establishment, leader, location/ purpose, date
- two main sections:
 - identifying significant hazards and assessing the risk
 - control measures and managing the risk

Prompts used

- site and environment, including accommodation where relevant
- group, including any individual special needs
- activity
- transport
- a section for recording summary reference to generic risk assessment
- a section for alternative 'Plan B' and further alternative as necessary
- a space for group leader signature, name and date

[An alternative to using prompts on the recording sheet is to have a separate checklist]

Additional features for consideration

- header section to include: other staff, group size, age, ratio
- a risk rating added to the two main sections to illustrate that a 'high' or 'medium' risk rating has been reduced/managed to 'low' in column two
- a second signatory for an authorising officer
- reference to emergency procedures
- prompts used in the ongoing risk assessment section
- who needs to be informed/involved as a vertical section
- a place for review comments

Benefits of information technology (IT) in support of an effective risk management process

- An IT system allows the exemplars of colleagues to be placed on a network so that they can be shared. It helps to avoid duplication of effort by the use of Generic Risk Assessment from a shared databank.
- Typed risk assessments are easy to read, more easily shared and may be included in information sent to parents.
- Having blank forms or forms pre-prepared on the system can help to overcome any lack of access or misplacement. This can also help to bring risk assessment and management more easily into the planning process.
- The facility to download and share previous records will assist in the effective implementation of the process.
- E-mailing colleagues can be an effective means for circulation of information such as safety notices, near misses and investigation outcomes.