

The Outdoor Education Advisers Panel

Overseas Expeditions

A guide to current good practice for local authorities and other interested bodies, when producing policies and procedures to inform and guide their employees.

A guide to current good practice to help inform expedition groups and commercial companies concerned with overseas expedition activity.

Endorsed: March 2002

Overseas expeditions

Using the guidance

Please find attached an up to date copy of the document endorsed recently at the Panel Conference. As is stated on the document, it is a guide to current good practice to help inform local authorities and other interested bodies when producing policies and procedures, or when advising others.

You will be fully aware that when looking at an individual expedition plan or proposed programme, a series of risk assessments have to be made. This may be helped by the fact that it is a well known area or route, or made more complex by being more remote or little used – factors discussed in the text. However it is hoped that the guidance will:

- provide an insight to the factors to be considered and discussed
- provide a clear picture of current good practice and provide a base line on which to make judgements.

It is accepted that each section can stand alone, but will also be used in conjunction with others in any risk assessment context. This process will enable the guidance to be interpreted flexibly, without any loss of safety or quality. For example – two contrasting scenarios:

I. expedition one:

- has a well qualified leader in the terrain and context, but who has not been to the specific locality/area before (does not meet the guidance criteria recommendation).
- the leader is complemented by a guide(s) who is known, has been used before to good effect (meets the criteria).
- The group has a local contact, well versed in supporting local expeditions with ongoing and emergency issues. (good practice)

Risk assessment: If these routes have been used successfully before it may well be felt that these three factors together mean that the expedition can go ahead, despite the leaders lack of specific local knowledge. However, good evidence of each of these statements would be required.

II. expedition two:

- has a similar leader and context
- guides are available and may have been used before, but they are of unknown quality (no evidence or limited evidence)
- there is a contact, but some distance away, without a great deal of experience of supporting an expedition in this area (limited evidence)

Risk assessment. There are too many unknown factors linked to support where there is no clear evidence of the quality. The group should be asked to improve one or more aspects e.g. provide a leader who does know the area and routes and named guides who have been successfully used before (with evidence).

Note! Increasing the evidence of the guides alone may still not be sufficient if the remoteness of the area requires better local support.

Without such control measures, the expeditions should not be recommended to go ahead.

These are limited examples in that they make no attempt to explore the depth of research required. However, it is hoped they do illustrate how risk assessments require a variety of facts to be considered by someone with knowledge of the process.

It is hoped however that the guidance offered does meet its key focus of providing information on current good practice. As such, it will remain a moving document contributed to by all major agencies and of course the Panel itself.

Good luck with your endeavours!

The Outdoor Education Advisers Panel

Overseas expeditions

‘Overseas expeditions’ typically take place in remote areas of the world and/or in developing countries, both of which present significant hazards and organisational challenges not normally encountered in the UK or Europe. These guidelines have been prepared by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel to support local authorities, schools or other relevant bodies in the key role of providing advice and guidance, and the process of approval. It is intended that the guidelines will help such bodies in the formulation of their own guidance policies and statutory risk assessments on critical issues such as duty of care, current good practice and leader competencies. In this regard, it is hoped that expedition groups and commercial companies will also find the information relevant and useful.

It is the view of the Advisers’ Panel that such experiences can be of great value, indeed the experience of a lifetime. It is important that we challenge and not over protect those for whom we are responsible. However, in order to do this effectively, we must properly assess, prepare for and manage the risks involved.

Participants in such ventures, as well as those with parental responsibility, need to understand that they are potentially hazardous and that they require the acceptance of a certain degree of risk.

The guidance contains comment on:

- **target expeditions**
- **who is responsible for advice, guidance and approval**
- **what responsibilities and accountabilities need to be considered**
- **leader competencies.**

Target expeditions

Whilst it is hoped that these guidelines can provide generic information for all expeditions, it is targeted at a particular style of expedition **that**:

- in essence remains a school/college/youth group expedition
- is developed or commissioned as an educational package for the under19s (or under 26 in some Special Needs contexts)
- has trekking into remote areas as a component, which may involve fieldwork and community projects
- visit or journey through one or more challenging environments

Note: *Challenging* as compared to the current experience of the young people concerning high mountains, jungle, deserts or similar

- is placed in a considerably contrasting culture(s) to those of the participants
- is usually in the range of two to four weeks duration (although this will vary)
- is designed to be of a team building nature
- raises young people's awareness and skills in assessing and managing risks.

It is not

- an individual or small independent group's self led expedition
- an over 18 expedition (except as above, in Special Needs situations)
- an extreme challenge in hazardous environments
- a highly technical expedition
- an expedition requiring the young people to manage unknown risks; making decisions without training or relevant information; or to manage known risks without the support of a competent leader.

Important note

The latter and similar expeditions would require additional and different risk assessments, guidance and advice, for example from The Royal Geographical Society's Expedition Advisory Centre, or the Code of Practice for Youth Expeditions produced by the Young Explorers Trust.

Hazards and the risk they involve must be seen holistically when considering the welfare of the group or an individual. That is, they could involve physical, emotional, cultural, psychological or similar dimensions in parallel, rather than standing alone.

Who is responsible for advice, guidance, statutory risk assessments and approval?

It is essential to determine at the onset who has the 'duty of care' of the young people and staff concerned. This will determine the accountability, roles and responsibilities, including providing guidance and approval for each of the agents in the process.

Typically these agents might be:

- the school, youth group or educational establishment.
- the expedition group (non commercial) that draws young people from educational establishments and/or their community
- the commercial company, expedition group or travel firm.

The DfEE good practice guide *Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits* (DfEE 1998) provides the legal framework, based on Health and Safety legislation and regulation. It articulates the main roles and necessary distinctions. These have been confirmed and further clarified by the Health and Safety Executive.

1 LEAs – Local Educational Authorities.

- Have particular responsibility for community and special agreement schools.
- They may also have responsibility for the youth service and the groups they control and Duke of Edinburgh and other expedition groups. This will vary from area to area.
- Where LEA systems are 'corporate' ie agreed across county, city or authority areas, then this would also include 'partnership' groups such as Young Offenders or similar project groups and groups initiated from agencies such as social services.

2 City technology colleges, voluntary aided, non-maintained and foundation schools.

Here the governing body has the responsibility. Many such schools have a service level agreement or similar with the LEA, which may mean that the LEA systems are used. If not, systems of at least equal quality should be in place.

3 Independent schools are the responsibility of their owners, governors or trustees. Once again, if their health and safety requirements are to be met then systems should be in place of comparable quality to other sectors.

Important note

Should litigation arise each of these sectors may be asked to show how they respond to these responsibilities in a comparable way to other sectors. A dual system, where one could be shown to be inferior to the other could lead to a challenge of negligence or similar in the event of an incident or accident.

What are the responsibilities and accountabilities?

1 LEAs

Have the following main roles as defined by the DfEE good practice guide:

- provide written guidelines for governors, head teachers and teachers including advice on risk assessment
- assess proposals for certain types of visit
- provide emergency telephone contact for the duration of the visit where necessary
- ensure training needs have been addressed
- provide access to named staff for advice
- maintain appropriate insurance cover, including medical cover
- have in place procedures to monitor and review safety during off-site visits and activities.

2 Governors, trustees, owners

Responsibilities are the same as an LEA; in order to satisfy themselves that a proper risk assessment has been carried out, appropriate safety measures put in place and training needs addressed.

The DfEE document goes on to consider the detailed roles of:

- the headteacher
- the group leader
- teachers
- adult volunteers
- pupils
- parents

and is recommended for further reading.

At the time of writing it is being updated and the work in progress can be seen on www.teachernet.gov.uk/visits.

Important note:

- **Where the activity is initiated by the educational establishment or group, there will be a 'reasonable expectation' by parents (or person with parental responsibility) that the activity is approved. This is also true if the activity is advertised or recommended through them. This means that if the establishment is involved in any way, then the LEA or governors are likely to be considered accountable in law.**
- **If the opportunity is made available through the establishment, but no responsibility is taken, then it must be made very clear that it is not an official or approved activity. Exact roles and responsibilities or relationships will have to be set out. It is important to limit the information given in these circumstances.**

What are the responsibilities and accountabilities?

3 Third party providers, commercial companies, expedition groups and travel firms offering an 'expedition' package

- Where different agencies are involved, a written contract with roles, responsibilities and agreement recorded should be prepared, eg the school, LEA and commercial company.

Note: School staff accompanying the expedition do so as employees of the LEA/school. They should not compromise this situation by agreeing an alternative relationship or signing a contract. Any contract with parents or young people should also reflect and not compromise this relationship.

- Written risk assessments and operating procedures are in place and agreed, with a clear management ethos or culture, in order to show their duty of care to leaders and young people.

Note: These must include all elements of the expedition, including any rest and recuperation periods or activity choices offered.

- The prior knowledge and experience of the leaders must be provided. This includes the location area for the expedition and routes to be used.
- Written and agreed emergency procedures and contingency plans are in place. It needs to be accepted that not everything will go to plan.

Important note – evacuation and rescue

- **It is essential to have an accurate knowledge of the scope and limitations of the rescue services before making decisions on the viability of an area or specific route and its suitability for the group concerned.**
- **It is essential to understand the implications of any individual or group evacuation if an incident or injury occurs.**
- **It is an essential part of any risk assessment of an area or route that the rescue and evacuation procedures are fully considered. In this way it should be extremely unlikely that an educational expedition, of the target group described earlier, would enter areas where the difficulty of evacuation could make an injury or illness life threatening. Similarly, if a life-threatening injury or illness could not be evacuated effectively, then the area should also be considered inappropriate.**
- Commercial companies should illustrate the financial systems and financial bonding arrangements they operate to protect all aspects of the expedition's finances, including training weekends etc. An itemised account should be prepared, balancing income and expenditure. This should be available to parents whether the school is involved or not.

Note: Where the desire to undertake the expedition is generated by the school or group, they should consider formulating a specification, or outline what they want, and then obtain quotes/tenders for the work (assisted by the LEA risk assessments, financial regulations and insurance arrangements).

- Where the leader is external to the group then sufficient time in training must be made available to:
 - become personally acquainted with the young people and their leaders to decide if they can work together, as well as to formulate aims and expectations.
 - make a proper assessment of individual, group and assistant leader competencies.
- Written child protection procedures should be available and evidence of policies in action, eg Criminal Records Bureau/list 99 male/female leader ratios for mixed groups/accommodation/camp security.
- Commercial companies should illustrate the known impact of their own and other groups in the same area, ie number of expeditions, expedition 'overload'. The Young Explorers Trust/British Ecological Society *Environmental Responsibility for Expeditions* is recommended guidance.

- Agreement over reducing the environmental impact of the expedition to a reasonable level.

Leader competencies

In this expedition context it would be reasonable to see leadership and duty of care in two forms. It is essential that the technical and pastoral aspects of the expedition leadership are understood:

- technical competence - to plan, lead and manage the activities undertaken in an active, on-going risk management context. This person would have the level of experience and qualifications outlined in the matrix (see below)
- pastoral competence - to manage the care, welfare and experience of young people successfully according to their age, and needs. This person would have a nationally recognised qualification: teacher, youth worker, lecturer for example.

Just as pastoral competence is developed through positive experience, technical competence, must be complemented by the experience of making active judgements/ risk assessments in realistic contexts, gaining and developing the leaders experience. The Advisers Panel recognises the importance of this process.

- In all circumstances relating to the welfare of the group it is the pastoral or group leader who has the final say, for example:
 - the technical expedition leader may decide the group is not able to go on and explain their reasoning. The pastoral leader may ask for and challenge their reasons, but would not override any such technical decisions
 - the pastoral/group leader may ask for an activity to stop, or request a rest or an alternative where their greater knowledge of the group health and welfare leads them to such a decision. The technical leader may again ask for reasons, but would not override any such decisions.
- Should a leader have both technical and pastoral competence, they need to be very clear about their responsibilities. Dual competence cannot mean a reduction in ratios, they would need a competent assistant.

Important note – Supervision

It is assumed that the young people will be directly supervised throughout their expedition. Should the aim of the expedition include more self-reliant activity, the decision to move to indirect supervision must only be made on observed evidence of the competence of the whole group.

Indirect supervision still requires considerable monitoring and the capacity to intervene quickly and directly.

Any remote working where the group, or part of the group, does not have quick and direct access to the technical expedition leader or pastoral leader is inappropriate for this type of expeditioning and should not occur.

Ratios will vary considerably, based on the risk assessments in the particular environment and if the technical-pastoral roles are split. The major considerations are:

- the ratio of leaders/guides to participants **must** reflect the risk assessment process, taking account of the group's age, ability and experience, for example:
 - a minimum of two leaders (see technical/pastoral comments)
 - a good practice guide of one leader to three/four participants
 - a maximum recommendation of one leader to six participants

- there should be a balance of gender to reflect the group.

The matrix

In presenting the matrix of technical leader competencies, its principles need to be understood.

Where the matrix does not cover the exact terrain or circumstances, these principles need to be applied to that context.

The basic principles are:

- a leader should be able to demonstrate current good practice
- there should be evidence of that competence through an assessment or judgement, made by a person of sufficient status, qualification and/or experience to make that judgement, and be recognised as being able to do so.

Two principal routes are taken in this matrix

- 1 recognised qualifications PLUS additional experience and local knowledge. The matrix accepts and promotes the value of a base line of technical competence given by a governing body award such as a mountain qualification. It also accepts that in these contexts it is insufficient without additional experience of the activities in the region concerned and the need for essential local knowledge. These elements need to be seen as complementary requirements.
- 2 Where there is no recognised qualification (in the specific terrain, region or culture) then it is most important principles are applied as realistically as possible.
 - Where is the evidence of current good practice/competency?
for example the person should be an expeditioner known to recognised expedition groups or major agencies. Their competence would have been evidenced by others able to make a judgement.
 - The person(s) making the judgement would need to be nationally recognised or recognised by others of such a standing; or part of an organisation that has such a clearly recognisable standing. In the absence of the moderation of an award, this person should be external to the expedition group or company concerned.

Applying the principles in this way allow for a realistic comparison to the first route in terms of the consistency of judgements made

The technical qualification and additional experience matrix recommended follows on the next page:

Activity/ hazard level	Terrain	Expedition Leader qualification	Expedition Assistant Leader qualification	Additional Experience	Essential local knowledge
Day Treks and Trekking to fixed or mobile camps	Walking terrain in summer conditions <i>Jungle travel</i>	Summer ML European Mountain Leader <i>Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence</i>	Assessed competence in this terrain eg Summer ML training where assessment of competence available or Walking Group Leader (assessed)	journeying or expeditioning in the region concerned	* the availability and efficiency of: - transport systems - medical facilities
Day Treks and Trekking to fixed or mobile camps	Scrambling Terrain requiring the use of ropes or fixed cables; in summer conditions <i>Jungle travel</i>	MIA <i>Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence of competence</i>	MIA training or Summer ML plus SPA	journeying or expeditioning and scrambling in the region concerned	- emergency support - guides - accommodatio n
Day Treks and Trekking to fixed or mobile camps	Walking terrain above the snow line (non glacial) <i>Jungle travel</i>	ML Winter or EML where a winter component has been assessed <i>Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence of competence</i>	ML Winter training EML training with winter component	journeying or expeditioning in the region concerned	* local culture: - advantages/ issues - crime - gender - religions
Day Treks and Trekking to fixed or mobile camps	Scrambling Terrain requiring the use of ropes or fixed cables including snow and ice conditions (non glacial) <i>Jungle travel</i>	MIC <i>Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence of competence</i>	MIA with Winter ML	good awareness of the region and its routes	Jungle travel In order to obtain an equivalent to the 'assessed competence' in other activities, an MoD qualification or similar endorsement would be required from a recognised source, which in turn would need to be able to provide evidence of their ability and experience to make such an assessment. (This could be true of other journeying, eg arctic travel.)
Day Treks and Trekking to fixed or mobile camps	Mountaineering requiring the use of ropes or fixed cables including glaciated snow and ice <i>Jungle travel</i>	UIA Guide <i>Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence of competence</i>	MIC	good awareness of the region and its routes	

The use of guides

If the use of guides is to be considered as a part of the leader competency in that they supply some of the local knowledge, then similar questions must be asked as far as practical:

- where is the evidence of current good practice/competency of the actual guides to be used?
- are they a recognised company or individual guide? Have they been used before and to what effect? Evidence would need to be collected, in particular where there is no recognised guiding system
- guides are normally employed for specific route-finding and technical knowledge, and do not have any direct pastoral responsibility
- it needs to be remembered that a good guide can complement the leader but not replace them
- where there is not good evidence of their competence then the leader should have sufficient experience and local knowledge to manage without them. This would need to be considered before routes are agreed
- where an additional risk assessment is required to manage changing circumstances such as weather, fitness, injury, local conditions etc, the leader must satisfy themselves that the guide and local information are of sufficient quality for them to go ahead, or plan an alternative.

The use of porters

- Where the length of the expedition requires porters to support the carrying of equipment, the leader must ensure that sufficient numbers are available, including the ability to cope with incidents of injury or sustained poor weather.
- The experience and fitness of the young people allied to the demands of the terrain, environment and weather should determine the weight of the pack or load they can carry.

Additional leader requirements

- A minimum four-day First Aid at Work certificate is required appropriate to working outdoors. Further, in almost all circumstances, a two-day 'far from help' or expedition first aid certificate is also required. (This will be dependent on speed of access to medical help.)
- The assistant leader's qualification should be sufficient to successfully apply the emergency or incident management strategies and evacuate the group from the area should the leader become incapacitated.
- Where activities move beyond walking/journeying eg into water based activity, then the LEA/governing body of sport qualification guidance should be followed or agreed.

Additional recommendations

- An ‘apprenticeship’ scheme is recommended for leaders, from assistant to deputy to leader. This is an essential ingredient to gaining experience.
- For this form of expeditioning a good knowledge of the area concerned is required. The *Additional Experience* column of the matrix illustrates the experience required, related to the leader’s overall competence.