

# Warwickshire County Council



## Off-Site Activities Overseas Expeditions Guidance 2005



THE NATIONAL OUTDOOR EDUCATION ADVISORS' PANEL



## Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Overseas expeditions</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Target expeditions</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Who is responsible for advice, guidance, statutory risk assessments and approval?</b>	<b>4</b>
	4.1 LA's – Local Authorities	4
	4.2 Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools	4
	4.3 Independent Schools	4
<b>5.</b>	<b>What are the responsibilities and accountabilities?</b>	<b>5</b>
	5.1 Local Authorities	5
	5.2 Governors, Trustees, Owners	5
	5.3 Third party providers, commercial companies, expedition groups and travel firms offering an 'expedition' package	6
	5.4 Responsibilities carried out in partnership	7/8
<b>6.</b>	<b>Leader Competencies</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>The matrix</b>	<b>10/11/12/13</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>The use of guides</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>The use of porters</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Additional leader requirements</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>11.</b>	<b>Additional recommendations</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>12.</b>	<b>Recommended Approval and Liaison System for Overseas Expeditions and Complex Ventures</b>	<b>16</b>

## **1. Introduction**

Overseas expeditions often involve physically demanding and mentally challenging activities over longer periods of time, in remote settings. These settings provide unique learning environments for young people. Opportunity is afforded for personal development, and to work closely with peers as part of a team. Diverse local cultures, tradition and language are absorbed along with hands on experience of being involved in community work schemes.

Most school or youth groups will choose a recognised provider with whom to arrange the venture. A successful venture usually requires a long lead in time to allow for planning and to raise the necessary funds. Most planning is at least 18 months prior to the venture.

This document is designed to support teachers and youth workers when considering the potential for overseas visits for their groups. It should also act as a reminder to staff that are involved with these types of venture on a frequent basis, as to accepted national good practice and the requirements of the local authority. The Offsite Activity (2003) guidance should always be used in conjunction with this document.

## 2. 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 follow the advice of the DfES and the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel to support schools, youth groups and other organisations linked to the local authority. It is hoped that expedition groups and commercial companies will also find the information relevant and useful.

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**It is the view of Warwickshire County Council and the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel that overseas 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.**

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The young people and staff participating in such ventures, as well as those with parental responsibility, need to understand that these types of ventures are potentially hazardous and that there needs to be a realisation and acceptance of risk within all overseas ventures.

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.**

### 3. 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 under-19s (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.**

## **4. 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 DfES 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.

### **4.1 LA's – Local Authorities.**

- have particular responsibility for community, voluntary controlled and special agreement schools.
- they also have responsibilities for the youth service and the groups they control including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and other expedition groups.
- where LA systems are 'corporate' i.e. agreed across county, then this also includes 'partnership' groups such as Young Offenders, Young Fire-fighters or similar project groups and groups initiated from agencies such as social services.

### **4.2 Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools.**

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

### **4.3 Independent schools.**

These 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.**

## **5 What are the responsibilities and accountabilities?**

### **5.1 Local Authorities**

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

- provide written guidelines for governors, headteachers and teachers including advice on risk assessment
- assess proposals for certain types of visit (category B and C)
- 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.

### **5.2 Governors, trustees, owners**

Responsibilities are the same as LA; 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 DfES documents go on to consider the detailed roles of:

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

For up to date information please visit - [www.teachernet.gov.uk/visits](http://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 anyway, then the LA 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.**

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

- Where different agencies are involved, a written contract with the roles, responsibilities and agreement recorded, e.g. the school, LA and commercial company.

**Note:** School staff accompanying the expedition do so as employees of the LA/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 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 including Community Projects.

- 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.

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**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 LA risk assessments, financial regulations and insurance arrangements).

#### 5.4 Responsibilities carried out in partnership

- 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, e.g. 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, i.e. number of expeditions, expedition 'overload'. The Young Explorers Trust/British Ecological Society *Environmental Responsibility for Expeditions* is recommended guidance.

The responsibilities to be carried out in partnership with others should be recorded as part of the contract between the school or group and the third party provider:

- The establishment, with the active involvement of the young people, of clear aims, expectations and purposes, in accordance with their age, ability and needs, and the principle of 'minimum impact' on the area to be used.
- Young people charters/contracts/codes of behaviour etc are also recommended.
- Clear and detailed information to parents. Their consent must be based on a full understanding of the expedition characteristics and programme. Without this knowledge regarding activities or the nature of the supervision, the 'consent' may not be valid in law. For example:
  - codes of practice
  - communications systems
  - the pace and intensity of the expedition
  - injury, illness, incident and emergency procedures
  - the leader's qualifications and experience, including in the precise location for the expedition.

**Note:** It is recommended that it is explained that whilst every step will be taken to ensure the safety of the young people, such activities are by their very nature hazardous. It is important to identify the risks and have them acknowledged.

- Clear guidance needs to be given on insurance and indemnification, including public liability and personal accident. The school or group would need to ensure that its own or the LA's liability insurance extends to the expedition. This is best obtained as a written statement.

- A comprehensive training and induction programme should be planned to identify and improve:
  - appropriate levels of fitness for the expedition concerned
  - group dynamics and team work
  - personal confidence in the skills required
  - risk assessment and risk management awareness.

**Note:** Expedition fitness is quite specific and requires progressive and well-structured training.

- Considerable research time is required to be prepared for the expedition, including providing information on:
  - medical considerations and arrangements ) particularly essential for effective emergency planning
  - transport considerations and arrangements )
  - communication systems, availability and options
  - insurance requirements
  - local financial arrangements
  - accommodation possibilities and quality
  - cultural aspects and their likely impact on the expedition
  - local issues, positive and negative (e.g. the local crime situation).
- Agreement over reducing the environmental impact of the expedition to a reasonable level.

## 6. 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, experience and needs. This person would have a nationally recognised qualification, teacher, youth worker, and 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 LA 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 expedition 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.

## **7. 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*

- 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.
- 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. Others able to make a judgement would have evidenced their competence

- 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:**

<b>Activity/ hazard level</b>	<b>Terrain</b>	<b>Expedition Leader Qualification</b>	<b>Expedition Assistant Leader qualification</b>	<b>Additional Experience</b>	<b>Essential local knowledge</b>
Day Treks and Trekking to fixed or mobile camps	Walking terrain in summer conditions  Jungle travel	Summer ML European Mountain Leader  Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence	Assessed competence in this terrain e.g. Summer ML training where assessment of competence available or Walking Group Leader (assessed)	journey or expedition 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  Jungle travel	MIA  Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence of competence	MIA training or Summer ML plus SPA	journey or expedition and scrambling in the region concerned	- emergency support - guides - accommodation
Day Treks and Trekking to fixed or mobile camps	Walking terrain above the snow line (non glacial)  Jungle travel	ML Winter or EML where a winter component has been assessed Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence of competence	ML Winter training EML training with winter component	journey or expedition in the region concerned	* local culture: - advantages/issues - crime - gender - religions

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	Scrambling Terrain requiring the use of ropes or fixed cables including snow and ice conditions (non glacial)  Jungle travel	MIC  Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence of competence	MIA with Winter ML	good awareness of the region and its routes	<b>Jungle travel</b>  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,
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  Suitable MoD qualification or specific evidence of competence	MIC	good awareness of the region and its routes	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, e.g. arctic travel.)

## **8. 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 is 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.

## **9. 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.

## **10. 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 e.g. into water based activity, then the LA/governing body of sport qualification guidance should be followed or agreed.

## 11. 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 expedition 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.

## 12. Recommended Approval and Liaison System for Overseas Expeditions and Complex Ventures

<b>24 – 18 months before the venture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Proposal initiated</li><li>- Several companies approached</li></ul>
<b>Note – contract should be between school and provider not parent/provider</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Area/location(s) proposed</li></ul>
<b>Ensure all aspects of venture including rest/recuperation periods are covered by provider</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Itinerary options outlined</li><li>- Current risk assessments /research made available</li></ul> <p>↓</p>
<b>Outline approval</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Company to inform LA advisor (or)</li><li>- School group to inform advisor (or)</li><li>- Approval framework agreed e.g. Leadership team requirements and LA requirements</li></ul> <p>↓</p>
<b>Continuous preparation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Group formed – communication with parents etc.</li></ul>
<b>Group Liaison and communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Research continues – EM</li><li>- Group training programmed</li><li>- Contact with major agencies, e.g. RGS</li></ul> <p>↓</p>
<b>3 months before (absolute minimum 8/9 weeks) final approval</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- All final details agreed</li><li>- Leader confirmed and agreed</li><li>- Training programme and preparation underway</li><li>- Medical and other requirements complete</li><li>- Confirm arrangements with LA advisor</li></ul>
<b>If issues still exist beyond that date</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Agree alternative location</li><li>- agree different leader</li><li>- Consider postponement</li><li>- cancellation (liase with LA and company over liability)</li></ul>