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Good Practice Basics

Good practice brings with it no absolute guarantee of safety or success, but it will make them more likely.

Good practice, in terms of **what** happens on any particular visit can be quite subjective, because it depends so much on the aims and the context. However, if we look at **how** visits are planned, managed and supervised then it is easier to identify what good practice might look like.

We can identify several key areas where good practice makes things easier and more effective. You can find further guidance on these in numerous documents throughout National Guidance. The key areas are:

- Employer and establishment systems and personnel.
- Planning based on clear aims, with a plan B where needed.
- Effective leadership teams.
- Matching the aims with the needs and abilities of the young people, the level of difficulty/challenge and the competence of the leaders.
- Sensible risk management.
- Active supervision.
- Effective and tested emergency procedures.
- Critical review.

Good Practice is fundamentally about getting the right leaders doing the right activities with the right young people in the right places at the right times.

This basic premise is explained further in document 1b '*Foundations*'. To achieve this effectively it is good practice to:

1. Have straightforward and practical employer and establishment policy, focussed on enabling safe, high quality learning. Such policy should encourage all staff to engage with learning outside the classroom and include standard operating procedures to facilitate regular activities and visits happening as a matter of routine.

It is also good practice to ensure that all those involved in, or with any responsibility for, the oversight, approval, management, planning or delivery of visits are appropriately competent (or have access to appropriately competent advice), are able to access relevant training and are given sufficient time to fulfil their responsibilities.

2. Consider the four SAGE variables and the interplay between them in your planning:
 - a. Staff – Leaders must be **accountable**, **confident** and **competent** to lead the specific visits or activities for which they are approved. Being

accountable involves the leader being engaged through an appropriate recruitment process. Being confident requires leaders to have the ability to take charge of a situation while being aware of, and understanding, their abilities, as well as their limitations. Being competent means that the leader has demonstrated the ability to operate effectively, and has sufficient relevant experience and knowledge.

- b. Activities - these vary in range and suitability. Both the planned learning activities and any supplementary activities, such as those associated with travelling, 'free time' and accommodation, etc., must be considered. Some activities may require specific training or qualifications; some may need specialist equipment; and some may require a particular level of competence or prior training of the participants.
 - c. Group - The age, competence, maturity and behaviour of the participants must be matched to the other variables, and any individual, medical or special needs addressed.
 - d. Environment(s) - All environments and venues present their own challenges for the management of a group of young people. Considerations include whether the environment is indoors or out; a public space or restricted access; urban, rural or remote; quiet or crowded; within the establishment grounds, close to the establishment or at a distance and the ease of communications between the group and base. The time of day/night, season of the year and weather conditions can also affect the complexity of the environment, and hence the considerations.
3. Ensure the effectiveness of the leadership team. While all activities and visits must have a single, designated, competent leader, getting the competence and composition of the leadership team right is the single most important factor in the effective management of outdoor learning and offsite visits.
- Competence is a combination of skills, knowledge, awareness, judgement, training and experience. It is not necessarily related to age or position within the establishment. It is situational – a leader who is competent in one activity or environment may not be so in another, and it involves breadth as well as depth. Relevant experience is not necessarily gained by repeating the same thing several times, but by experiencing a range of different activities and environments.
4. Identify clear aims and benefits: Answer the WHAT, WHO, WHY, WHERE and WHEN questions. Be clear about what you want to achieve, with whom and why. A clear understanding of aims makes it easy to identify suitable choices for many other aspects of planning (such as venue, transport, competence of leaders, preparation of the group etc). Identifying the potential benefits is essential in making sound judgements as to whether the plan is sensible, acceptable and viable.
 5. Employ proportionate risk management, which, in the context of outdoor learning and off-site visits, is a two stage process:
 - a. The identification of the potential benefits to be gained from an activity, along with any risks to the health and safety of those involved.
 - b. The implementation of a plan to best realise these benefits, using

professional judgement to ensure that the level of risk does not exceed that which can be justified by the benefits.

Most human activity involves balancing benefits and risks. We cannot have all of the benefits but none of the risks. We can eliminate all of the risk only by stopping the activity - but we then lose all of the benefits. Risk management is not about risk elimination. If young people work in an area of nettles and brambles they may get scratched or stung. This is not necessarily a problem - appropriately planned, it is experiential learning and part of growing up.

6. Employ active and effective supervision. Supervision is not simply a passive presence, it is an active employment of good leadership habits – supervision is about what leaders do, not just that they are there.

The responsibility for supervision is continuous, 24 hours a day. It is important that care and supervision are maintained during periods outside structured activities, as well as during the activities themselves. This does not mean that young people need necessarily to be constantly watched, but rather that leaders need to achieve a sensible balance of activities and supervision methods.

7. Ensure emergency procedures are in place and that they are tested and effective. Serious incidents on Off-Site Visits are rare but they do happen. Minor incidents, whether accidents or other emergencies, are more common. Effective planning means that the likelihood of any of these is reduced, and that, when they do happen, their impact and consequences are minimised.

Emergency/Critical Incident Plans can never provide a step-by-step guide to responding to an emergency: they must be implemented and adapted by competent people. Thought should be given to the provision of appropriate, initial, incident response training for relevant staff. Whatever initial training is provided it is essential that periodic scenario-based training and testing of the system (at all levels from Visit Leadership Team to Employer) is undertaken in order to keep people fresh, build adaptability and problem solving skills and highlight any flaws and weaknesses.

8. Review activities and visits in terms of aims, learning outcomes, planning, risk management, supervision arrangements, any incidents or accidents. Ask yourself: what worked well? What didn't work so well? What will we change next time? What learning needs sharing with colleagues?

