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Risk Management – an overview

Further guidance on the law, and on the concept of duty of care can be found in the document 3.2a "*Underpinning Legal Framework and Duty of Care*".

What is Risk Management?

Risk management, in the context of outdoor learning and off-site visits, is a two stage process:

1. The identification of the potential benefits to be gained from an activity, along with any risks to the health and safety of those involved.
2. 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.

This is recognised by both the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Department for Education (DfE):

"HSE fully recognises that learning outside the classroom helps to bring the curriculum to life – it provides deeper subject learning and increases self-confidence. It also helps pupils develop their risk awareness and prepares them for their future working lives. Striking the right balance between protecting pupils from risk and allowing them to learn from school trips has been a challenge for many schools, but getting this balance right is essential for realising all these benefits in practice". (School trips and outdoor learning activities: Tackling the health and safety myths, HSE).

"School employers should always take a commonsense and proportionate approach, remembering that in schools risk assessment and risk management are tools to enable children to undertake activities safely, and not prevent activities from taking place. Sensible risk management cannot remove risk altogether but it should avoid needless or unhelpful paperwork". (The Department for Education's advice on health and safety for Schools updated February 2014)

Categories of Visit

There are two broad categories of visit requiring different levels of planning. You can find further guidance in the document 1b "*Foundations*".

The categories are:

1. **Routine visits that involve no more than an everyday level of risk**

and are covered by establishment procedures and policy. Such visits should require minimal planning or preparation beyond what is needed to make best use of the learning opportunity. In a school context, they are simply lessons in a 'different' classroom.

2. **Visits requiring additional planning, and some level of specific risk assessment.** A visit moves into this category because one or more aspects cannot be managed adequately by existing procedures and policy. This may be due to distance from the establishment, the nature of the activities, the environment or venue(s), the nature of the particular group, the need for specialist leader competencies, or any combination of these. For some visits this will involve detailed planning over an extended period of time. The additional steps needed to manage these aspects should be identified and recorded.

Three levels of risk management

Risk management involves answering two basic questions:

- a. What could go wrong?
- b. What are we going to do about it?

This process happens at three levels:

1. **Generic** – Policies and procedures that apply across a range of visits (normally **recorded**)

This is guidance or practice that remains constant regardless of the nature of the visit. It covers the management of risks identified as relevant to all visits involving similar activities.

2. **Visit-specific** – Carried out before the visit takes place (**may need to be recorded**)

This is the identification and management of any risks not already covered through generic risk management. It is unique to each occasion and should address staffing, activity, group and environment (the 'SAGE' variables from the document 1b "*Foundations*").

For guidance about what should be recorded, and how, see the document 4.3g '*Risk Management – what to record and how*'.

3. **Dynamic/on-going** – Carried out continuously throughout the visit (**not necessary to record**)

This refers to the on-going monitoring of all aspects of the visit/activity by the visit leadership team. The group and the level of risk must be monitored and assessed throughout and, if circumstances dictate, activities should be curtailed or amended (e.g. change to plan B). In practice, it is often these on-going decisions of the Visit Leader(s) that determine whether the group remains safe and whether the activity is successful. Hence a competent visit leadership team is essential.

Risk Management Implementation

Employers should ensure that their establishments manage the benefits and risks

created by any learning opportunity in such a way that maximises the benefits, while ensuring that any remaining risk is proportionate.

This requires employers to be clear about who does what within the planning and management of outdoor learning and off-site visits, and to provide establishments and employees with sufficient guidance, training and support to do this effectively.

The ways to achieve this should be neither paper intensive nor overly bureaucratic but should be practical and focus on real and significant risks.

Establishment systems should ensure that:

- Visits and outdoor learning are an integral part of the work of the establishment.
- Leaders are given time and support to gain experience in a planned and progressive fashion – not ‘thrown in at the deep end’. Learning how to manage a group of young people effectively on public transport, for example, or walking through a busy town centre, is not a skill that can be learned by reading a good practice manual.
- Leaders plan and manage visits within their own, and the visit leadership team’s experience, knowledge and capability.
- Benefits and learning outcomes are clearly identified and maximised as much as possible.
- Appropriate training and advice is available to the establishment, the EVC and to Leaders.
- Straightforward and practical plans and procedures exist to cover the generic risk management of ‘routine’ visits.
- Appropriate information on any visit is shared with colleagues, participants, parents etc.
- All leaders and, where appropriate, young people are involved in the planning process.
- Risk assessment is a part of the overall planning process and not ‘tagged-on’ afterwards.
- Risk assessment recording is not unduly onerous, but is supportive and helpful for the leadership team.
- Visits are approved or authorised as required.
- There is a prepared ‘Plan B’, should things go wrong. For most routine visits this may simply be to return to base. However, be aware that in some settings, the temptation to ‘push on’ when things start to go wrong has led to serious accidents and this temptation may be stronger if the only alternative is to ‘give up and go home’.
- Visits are monitored and reviewed, and, where appropriate, any lessons learned are shared and acted upon in future visits.
- Where consent is required, parents are provided with sufficient information to make an informed decision about their child.

