National
Guidance

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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?

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 eliminating risk - it is about reducing it as low as reasonably practicable and deciding if this is acceptable in order to gain 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 2011).

"School employers should always take a common sense 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."
(Health and Safety: Advice on legal duties and powers DfE 2014).

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

1. Identify the potential benefits to be gained from an activity, and any significant risks to the health and safety of those involved.
2. Plan and implement measures to reduce these risks as low as reasonably practicable without losing the benefits, and use professional judgement to decide whether, in order to gain the benefits the remaining risks are acceptable.

For example:

- A certain activity is known to have great benefits for children. After control measures are implemented, there is still a risk that children will suffer some bumps and scrapes and perhaps very occasionally a sprained ankle or broken arm. However, there is no practicable way of preventing these occasional minor injuries without losing the benefits of the activity. A decision is taken that these risks are acceptable, and the activity goes ahead.
- A different activity has a similar risk of occasional minor injuries, and there is no practicable way of preventing them. However, the activity has few benefits. A decision is taken that in this case the risks are not acceptable, and an alternative activity is chosen.
- Another activity is known to have great benefits. However, after control measures are implemented, there is still a significant risk that children will suffer serious injuries, and no practicable way can be found to prevent these without losing the benefits of the activity. A decision is taken that these risks are unacceptable, and a different activity is chosen.

Risk management therefore involves an assessment of both risks and benefits – i.e. a risk/benefit assessment. This is a **process**. Risk management also requires competent leadership in order to implement the planned control measures.

It is often useful (and a legal requirement) to write down the results of a risk assessment. It is important to recognise that a written 'risk assessment' is not the risk assessment itself – it is a record of the results of a process of risk assessment. It achieves nothing unless it is understood by the visit leadership team and competently implemented by them. It is the **process** of assessing risks and benefits that enables leaders to fully understand the results.

For guidance about what should be recorded, and how, see the document 4.3g "Risk Management – What to Record and How".

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.

   An establishment's generic policies and procedures will normally describe detailed practical arrangements based on its local circumstances and guided by its employer's policies and wider sources such as National Guidance, national governing bodies and professional associations. They might address, for example: staff ratios; staff training/competence requirements; notification/approval requirements; emergency procedures; details of participant information and parental consent; measures for dealing with known local hazards such as busy main roads; local transport arrangements.

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").

3. **Dynamic/on-going** – Carried out continuously throughout the visit
   (not normally 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.

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. **Standard**
   These are 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'. They are based on generic risk management, with visit-specific risk management of anything that is out of the normal.

2. **Enhanced**
   These are visits requiring additional planning, and some level of visit-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.

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. See documents 3.1a "Requirements and Recommendations for Employers" and 3.1b "Establishment Roles and their Interdependence".

The ways to achieve this should not be 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 leaders;
- Straightforward and practical plans and procedures exist to cover the generic risk management of 'Standard' visits;
- Appropriate information on any visit is shared with colleagues, participants, parents etc.;
- All leaders and, where appropriate, participants 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, in some situations, 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 visit;.
- Where consent is required, parents are provided with sufficient information to make an informed decision about their child.

See also the documents 4.1a "Avoiding Accidents and Emergencies" and 4.3f "Risk Management – Some Practical Advice".