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## Using external providers and facilities

When planning an off-site visit, you should thoroughly research the suitability of the venue and check that facilities and third party provision will meet your group's needs and expectations. This is an essential element of risk-benefit management and is critical in deciding how you will supervise the young people effectively.

### Provider or Facility?

A Provider means any third-party person or organisation contracted to organise and/or deliver all or part of a Visit or Activity, and/or supervise Participants.

A Facility means a publicly accessible venue or resource, which will form part of a visit but where the Establishment Leadership Team will remain in charge and deliver any activities. For example: public transport providers, museums and galleries, theme parks, theatres.

### Researching Providers

When choosing a suitable provider you should consider the following questions:

- Do the values and ethos of the provider match your expectations?
- Is there a clear understanding about the responsibility for supervision at all times during the visit?
- What are the respective roles of provider staff and your staff?
- What provision will be made for any special needs?
- How flexible is the programme to meet changing circumstances?
- To what extent will you be able to involve the provider in evaluation of the visit's learning objectives?

You have a duty of care to ensure that any provider you use meets acceptable standards. This may be as simple as checking that the chosen provider(s) hold appropriate accreditation. Where the provider has no external accreditation, or where your needs are not straightforward, checking the provider may involve further questioning and information gathering.

The easiest way to check that the quality and safety of most providers has been externally accredited is to look for the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Quality Badge. For further details of the badge and to check a provider's accreditation status go to: <http://lotcqualitybadge.org.uk>.

Where the visit involves certain adventure activities, within scope of the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 2004, then the provider is required by law to hold a licence from the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA). For further

details and to check a provider's licence details go to: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/aala/>. Further guidance can also be found in document 3.2f *Adventure Activity Licensing Regulations*.

When the provider holds a Quality Badge and/or an AALA licence (if required) there is normally no need to seek further assurances from the provider about the safety of provision. If the specific visit needs, or the needs of your group, are particularly complex; or if your employer or establishment wishes to use the visit as an audit tool to look closely at the visit management process; then further investigation of an accredited provider may be appropriate.

Other accreditation schemes may help to provide reassurances about aspects of a provider's provision and reduce the need for further research or questioning. For example: 'Adventuremark', AHOEC Gold Standard and National Governing Body centre approval schemes.

If a provider does not hold a suitable accreditation which covers all aspects of their provision, then you must use other means of gaining assurances about relevant aspects of their operation including:

- Insurance.
- Compliance with legal requirements.
- Health, safety and emergency policies and procedures.
- Use of vehicles.
- Staff competence.
- Safeguarding.
- Accommodation.
- Sub-contracting.

A Provider Questionnaire is an effective way of obtaining such assurances: see the example in section 8 of this Guidance – document 8p *Provider Questionnaire*.

It is not necessary to look for such accreditation or assurances from facilities that are open to the public and where no arrangements are made for them to provide activities, instruction, teaching or supervision. However, you still need to satisfy yourself about the suitability of such facilities for your group.

## Researching Facilities and Venues

While the wide availability of websites, ease of communication and the LOTC Quality Badge scheme all have an important part to play in information gathering, there can be no substitute for a preliminary visit. This will back up research and enable you to clarify issues face to face. So, wherever reasonably practicable, it is good practice to carry out a preliminary visit to any unfamiliar facility or venue, including those used by a provider. The cost of this can be built into the pricing of the visit.

### **Preliminary visits enable the Visit Leader to address the following questions:**

- Will the venue or facility be suitable to meet the planned aims and objectives of the visit?
- Are there any particular hazards or threats which need to be considered in your risk-benefit assessment and emergency procedures?

- What will be your options if the conditions of daylight, water level, temperature and weather, or under-foot conditions, differ significantly from the pre-visit?
- Do you have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the venue, facilities and activities to feel confident when planning the visit?
- Will the venue be able to cater for the full range of group needs, including any special needs?
- Will the group need any specialist equipment?
- Are there any staff training needs?
- Will participants need to be prepared or trained?

It is sensible for a Visit Leader to take a camera on any preliminary visit, as photographs can be a great aid to briefing both the Visit Leadership Team and the Participants.

Where a preliminary visit is not reasonably practicable, you should consider how you will gather sufficient information to make an adequate assessment of the venue, facilities or provider. In the absence of first-hand observations and credible assurances as set out above, you should seek information from reliable sources such as:

- Your Employer's Outdoor Education Adviser.
- Colleagues.
- Similar groups that have recently visited the venue or used the facility/provider.
- Reputable organisations such as tourist boards.

## Risk Management Planning

Providers are responsible for assessing and managing the risks associated with their provision. They are not responsible for producing an overall visit risk management plan – this is the responsibility of the establishment/visit leader.

A provider's risk assessments are likely to be technical documents of no value to a visit leader (unless the visit leader is qualified to understand, assess and, if necessary, challenge them).

What is useful to a visit leader is information from the provider that helps the visit leadership team to make best use of the facilities or venue, and to plan appropriate supervision for their particular group.

Such information is better gained through a pre-visit or through dialogue with the provider, rather than through attempting to glean it from the provider's risk assessment documents.

