



National  
Guidance

## Snowsport Visits

### Rationale

In the context of this document, the term *snowsport* covers both skiing and snowboarding activities. Visit leaders considering snowsport visits overseas should ensure they are familiar with the contents of the document "Overseas Visits" in this section of this Guidance.

Both skiing and snowboarding are active sports that enable participants to learn new forms of movement and balance. They create a new and different appreciation of physical activity in a non-competitive atmosphere that can help develop enthusiasm and confidence to pursue an active lifestyle. Classroom learning, which to some young people may seem abstract, can take on substance and significance through personal involvement and physical challenge.

For many young people, a skiing or snowboarding course is their first (and perhaps only) encounter with a geographical environment that is significantly different from home. First hand experience of this beautiful, yet manifestly fragile environment can provide an opportunity to develop a more responsible and caring attitude towards the world in which we live. However, in many alpine areas, the destructive effects of human activity are all too clear: erosion, congestion, lack of sensitive planning and unforeseen effects like flooding can be observed. When a decision is made about whether and where to organise a snowsport trip, this environmental impact, along with the environmental impact of travelling (often by air) to the mountains, should be taken into account alongside an assessment of the benefits.

The contribution of a snowsport residential visit to a young person's personal and social development is likely to be significant. It is likely to develop:

- an enjoyment of the outdoors.
- respect for self, others and the environment.
- a sense of responsibility for their own safety and the safety of others.
- a sense of achievement and the value of opportunities to succeed.
- self-awareness and self-confidence.
- an interest in a healthy physical activity that may become a lifelong pursuit.
- improved relationships with both peers and teachers.

Participation and success in these extra-curricular activities may be the catalyst for improved motivation in the classroom and lead to step change improvements in such things as attitudes, behaviour and academic performance.

Snowsport courses offer wide opportunities for the integration of studies. Most snowsport Visit Leaders organise courses because of their love of the sport, rather than because they are trained, specialist coaches. It is generally the case that the staff supervising the visit are specialists in other curriculum areas that often have nothing to do with outdoor activities or physical education. This can be an added strength, as there will be opportunities to relate their specialist subject to the skiing or snow boarding, so encouraging the young people to see the relevance of one activity to another. Approached on this basis, a skiing or snowboarding experience can be an opportunity to develop curriculum learning in languages, geology, geography, history and the arts. A visit taking place within term time could therefore be justified.

Anyone seeking to link a snowsport trip to the curriculum is recommended to read Snowsports and Learning Outside the Classroom published by Snowsport England.

## Preparation for the Snow Slopes (Use of Dry Slope or Artificial Snow)

In order to provide good value for money, it is good practice for all beginners to undertake pre-course ski or snowboard lessons on a dry slope or at a snow dome. It is recommended that this should be included in the price of the venture and advertised in the initial information provided to parents.

Young people with poor levels of personal fitness (particularly if they are significantly over-weight) are far more likely to sustain injuries. Injured students will inevitably put greater strain on day-to-day group supervision. Conversely, fit party members are far more likely to get the best out of their experience. It is good practice to ensure that this is properly explained to both young people and parents and it is recommended that a structured programme of fitness training be put in place.

## Planning the visit

Most snowsports visits are overseas: you should refer to the document "Overseas visits" in this guidance.

The majority of group snowsports visits are booked as a package through a tour operator, and this has many advantages. The choice of tour operator is critical: you should refer to the relevant documents in this guidance, including "Provider led study and sports tours", "Preliminary visits and provider assurances" and "Assessing an adventure provider check list". If you are considering using a provider for the first time, you should also seek references from other establishments who have used them.

Whether or not you are using a tour operator, there are a number of key factors to consider before booking a snowsports visit:

- Dates: the choice of dates can affect snow conditions, weather, price and crowds.
- Country: factors to consider include language, climate, culture and diet.
- Travel: in addition to safety and cost, you should consider environmental impact, convenience, comfort and length of journey (including any transfers).

- Resort: you should consider: reliability of snow conditions; the number and variety of runs and their suitability; the suitability of slopes in poor weather (eg whether there are runs at lower levels in the trees); accessibility for those with disabilities; the nature and availability of other activities for evenings and bad weather; attractiveness (visual and cultural); the effect of the resort layout on group supervision. If possible, you should have first-hand knowledge of the chosen resort.
- Accommodation: in addition to the type and standard of the accommodation, you should consider accessibility for those with disabilities, distance from the slopes and suitability for group supervision. See the document in this guidance "Group management and supervision".
- Snowsports lessons: You should seek assurances that the snowsports school is accredited and has suitable standards of competent instruction and student care.
- Insurance: needs to be appropriate and cover the activities to be undertaken. Refer to the document on "Insurance" elsewhere in this guidance.
- Financial security: check the bonding or other arrangements if you are using a tour operator; if organising your own trip ensure arrangements are in place to safeguard young peoples' money.
- Approval: Before signing any contracts or making any commitments, you should ensure that you meet your establishment's and employer's requirements for approval.

## Leader Competence Requirements

A residential snowsport visit requires a high level of competence among the staff team. It is strongly recommended that the Visit Leader should have attended a **Snowsport England Ski Course Organiser** course, or be able to clearly demonstrate equivalent competence.

Whenever students are skiing or snowboarding, they should be under the supervision of either an accredited snowsports school, or a suitably-competent adult who:

- is an active and competent practitioner.
- is suitably experienced and conversant with good practice.
- is competent in first aid and ideally holds a current nationally-recognised first aid qualification.
- is able to clearly demonstrate their competence, by holding an appropriate National Governing Body qualification (see below) or through assessment by a competent Technical Adviser.

An appropriate minimum qualification for leading or supervising snowsports is the **Snowsport England Alpine Ski Course Leader Award**. An appropriate minimum qualification for instructing or coaching snowsports is the **British Association of Snowsport Instructors (BASI) Alpine Coach Level 2 Award**.

When a snowsports school is used, it is good practice for a member of establishment staff to accompany each group of students, in addition to the ski school instructor. This has a number of advantages:

- monitoring and supporting the ski school's provision.

- providing encouragement and pastoral care.
- dealing with any inappropriate student behaviour.
- building relationships with students.
- being on hand to assist in an emergency.

However, there can be circumstances when it may be reasonable for establishment staff not to be present during snowsport lessons. For example, staff may be looking after sick or injured young people or may be in need of some 'down time' if they were busy with overnight supervision issues. However, they should always be contactable by the snowsports school, and be able to get to the students quickly if there is an injury or other problem. Any routine 'down time' for staff or opportunities for staff to ski independently should be built into the programme (and therefore into the number of staff planned to accompany the visit) and should not impact on supervision of young people.

All snowsports must be properly supervised, including at times outside lessons provided by a snowsports school. Such supervision might be direct or indirect, but clear boundaries (physical and behavioural) should be set. The nature of the supervision will depend upon factors including staff and student competence, familiarity with the area, terrain and weather. If 'free skiing' is to be contemplated, it must be with fully informed parental consent.

## Equipment and Clothing

These activities require that participants have suitable equipment that is fit for purpose and properly fitted. Visit Leaders should ensure that this is checked regularly, session by session.

It is strongly recommended that all students wear helmets for skiing and snowboarding. An increasing number of resorts and ski schools make the wearing of a properly fitted ski helmet mandatory for young people. In some countries this is a legal requirement.

It is recommended that all young people and staff are given a copy of the *Skiway Code* and that its contents are properly explained. This is equally applicable to snowboarders. Leaders should ensure that this is made clear and that all members of their party understand the implications of crashes at speed. The importance can be further stressed by supplying an extra copy for parental use.

To avoid unnecessary injuries, leaders should ensure that party members are trained to carry their skis or boards properly. Leaders should be prepared to monitor and enforce this.

It is recommended that leaders ensure appropriate spare equipment is carried within each sub-group.

## Student Safety in and around the Resort

The nature of the terrain and weather conditions in and around ski resorts is such that Visit Leaders should ensure that any downtime is covered by suitably rigorous risk management procedures. Tragedies that are known to have occurred during downtime include:

- young people falling into a gorge when the leaders assumed they were visiting the shops.
- young people sliding into a gorge when the leaders assumed they were eating their packed lunch.
- young people falling from a hotel balcony.
- young people developing hypothermia when incapacitated through alcohol.

Sunburn can also be a significant hazard.

