

# Council Health & Safety Policy

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## External Visits – Code of Practice

Distribution: To be brought to the attention of all Heads of Service, managers, supervisors, employees, trade union representatives and Head Teachers.

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### 1. Scope

This Code of Practice applies to Sunderland City Council services and to schools where the Council is the employer or where the Governing Body has opted to use it.

It applies to all External Visits involving children, young people and vulnerable adults. It applies regardless of whether the activities take place within or outside of normal working hours, including weekends and holiday periods.

External Visits are defined as events that involve children, young people or vulnerable adults being away from their normal school, centre or residential home premises, while in the care of the school or other service. This includes educational visits, outings, school trips and off-site activities such as: local visits to parks, museums, libraries and sports facilities; cultural, educational, recreational and exchange trips; outdoor activities; residential; field trips.

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## 2. Outdoor Education Advisers Panel (OEAP) National Guidance

Sunderland City Council has adopted the national guidance published by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel (OEAP) on the website [www.oeapeg.info](http://www.oeapeg.info). This provides detailed guidance about many aspects of off-site visits and outdoor learning, and includes Essential Reading for all key staff roles. Specific information can be found by using the site's search function.

Schools, Council services and all Council employees must follow that guidance as well as the requirements of this Code of Practice and other Council policies. Should there be any conflicting areas, then the Council's policies must be followed, and clarification should be sought from either the External Visit Advisory Service or the Corporate H&S Team.

## 3. Benefits

All children, young people and vulnerable adults should be given the opportunity of benefiting from participation in a wide range of visits and activities, including Learning Outside the Classroom, local activities, day visits, residentials, field studies and outdoor adventure activities. Whether their emphasis is adventurous, academic, sporting, cultural, spiritual or creative, off-site visits and outdoor learning provide first-hand experiences that inspire and enhance learning and development in ways which are powerful and lasting. They provide a foundation for life-long learning and healthy lifestyles, as well as complementing classroom learning and enriching the curriculum.

## 4. Assessment of Risk

As an employer, Sunderland City Council has a legal duty to ensure that risks are managed - requiring them to be reduced to an "acceptable" or "tolerable" level. This requires that proportional (suitable and sufficient) risk management systems are in place. This Code of Practice sets out the arrangements that the Council has made for managing the risks inherent in External Visits.

Risk is a natural part of everyday life: all activities involve risk, and it is impossible to entirely eliminate it. Indeed, the human spirit thrives on adventure and journeys into new territory, both physical and metaphorical. It is important that children, young people and vulnerable adults learn to understand and manage risk and uncertainty for themselves. If we attempt to 'wrap them in cotton wool', they not only miss huge opportunities for growth but also emerge into society unable to cope with the uncertainties and challenges of adult life. Well-managed external visits, including outdoor and adventurous activities, play a vital part in helping children, young people and vulnerable adults to learn about the real world, and to understand and manage risks for themselves.

Schools and other services are therefore encouraged to provide such opportunities for children, young people and vulnerable adults. Good planning and management of activities should be about reducing risks to an acceptable level, taking into account the potential benefits. The starting point for such a risk-benefit assessment should be a consideration of the targeted benefits and learning outcomes. This appreciation of the benefits to be gained through participating provides objectivity to a decision that any residual risk (i.e. the risk remaining after control measures have been put in place) is

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acceptable. The Health & Safety Executive endorses this approach through their “Principles of Sensible Risk Management”, and advocates that it is important that young people are exposed to well-managed risks so that they learn how to manage risk for themselves.

Employees who follow this Code of Practice, work within the limits of their own competence, and use their common sense and professional judgement will be fully supported by the Council.

Although some paperwork is required in order to record and communicate the decisions made, risk management should be largely a common-sense process centred upon competent staff. It should focus on significant risks, not trivial ones, and it should not become a restrictive and onerous bureaucratic exercise.

Risk assessment is a legal requirement and assessing risks associated with external visits is no different. However this does not need to be a complicated process. It is simply a systematic examination of what might harm people, and should be based on common sense. Although an assessment is always required, a written risk assessment is only required when significant risks have been identified, and the Council’s [HSRA2 form](#) should be used. The reasons for recording significant risks in HSRA2 format include:

- Deciding whether to proceed, modify or cancel a proposed visit or activity
- Deciding what precautions need to be taken to prevent unnecessary harm
- Making the planning process systematic and thorough
- Informing all those involved about the risks and precautions
- Providing evidence for those responsible for approving a visit
- Demonstrating that good practice has been observed in the case of an incident.

It is also necessary to include an assessment of risk to staff members during visits that may not be identified during the assessment of risk to the children/vulnerable adults taking part (for example, violence at work).

Further information about risk assessment can be found in the Council’s Guidance on the Conduct of Risk Assessment Code of Practice and on the OEAP National Guidance website (see section 2 above).

## 5. Inclusion & Equality

External visits should be available to all children, young people and vulnerable adults, regardless of background or abilities. Schools and other services which provide such visits and activities must ensure that their provision meets the requirements of Sunderland City Council’s Equality Scheme (under the Equality Act 2010), and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Guidance about inclusion can be found on the OEAP National Guidance website (see section 2 above).

## 6. Review & Evaluation

All visits should be reviewed after the event, with particular regard to any accidents, incidents or other significant occurrences during the visit, followed by any necessary review of procedures and/or risk assessments.

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The Ofsted report "Learning Outside the Classroom – How Far Should You Go?" (October 2008) (available on the OEAP National Guidance website) makes statements in the strongest terms to support the value of Learning Outside the Classroom, including the fact that it raises achievement. However, it also highlights the finding that Learning Outside the Classroom is rarely evaluated with sufficient rigour. A methodology to address this is provided within the document "Rigorous Evaluation of LOtC: Meeting Ofsted Expectations and Assuring Quality" in the OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above).

## 7. Employers other than Sunderland City Council

Where another employer (such as the Governing Body of a Voluntary Aided school) has opted into this Code of Practice, they should clearly state this in a policy document.

## 8. Commissioning

If an organisation outside the Council is commissioned to provide a service which may include External Visits, it must have either adopted this Code of Practice, including the OEAP National Guidance, or have its own policies and procedures in place which at least meet the same standards. Headteachers/Managers must satisfy themselves that this is the case.

## 9. Role-specific responsibilities

OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above), sets out the responsibilities and functions, regarding external visits, of specific roles including:

- Director of Children's Services
- Lead Member for Children's Services
- Line Manager of an Outdoor Education Adviser
- Outdoor Education Adviser
- Health and Safety Officer
- Manager of an Outdoor Centre
- Member of Board of Governors or Management Board
- Headteacher
- Manager of an establishment other than a school
- EVC
- Visit or Activity Leader
- Assistant Visit leader
- Volunteer Adult Helper

## 10. External/Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC)

All schools and Council services which provide External Visits must have an External (or Educational) Visits Coordinator (EVC) in post. The role of the EVC is described in the OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above). EVCs must undertake an EVC training course and a refresher / revalidation course every three years, both of which are provided by the External Visits Advisory Service. The course includes training on visit planning, risk assessment, leader competence and required procedures. Headteachers/Managers are also welcome to attend EVC training.

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Services which provide very few External Visits may decide to group together with other services and to share one EVC between them.

## 11. External Visits Advisory Service

The Council's External Visits Advisory Service is based at Derwent Hill Outdoor Education & Training Centre, and may be contacted by phone on 017687 72005 or by email to [EVAS@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:EVAS@sunderland.gov.uk). The Advisory Service:

- provides advice and guidance to EVCs about planning visits, and clarification when required regarding this Code of Practice or the OEAP National Guidance. Requests for advice will receive a response within one week of the request being received (except over the Christmas / New Year holiday period).
- provides information on the Advisory Service pages of the Derwent Hill website [www.derwenthill.co.uk](http://www.derwenthill.co.uk) and on the Evolve system at [www.sunderlandvisits.org.uk](http://www.sunderlandvisits.org.uk)
- monitors and approves visits using the Evolve online system
- provides training for EVCs, Visit Leaders and Group Leaders.

## 12. Establishment Visit Policy

Schools and Council services should have a policy that sets out how this policy is implemented in practice, and makes reference to the OEAP National Guidance. There is a document on "How to write an establishment visit policy" in the National Guidance (see section 2 above).

## 13. Notification and approval of visits

The Evolve online system is used for notification, approval and monitoring of visits. EVCs, Headteachers and Service Managers are able to use Evolve to plan, authorise and monitor visits within their establishments, and visits requiring Local Authority approval are automatically brought to the attention of the Council. Key information about a visit is available through Evolve in the event of an emergency.

Directorates may arrange to use the Evolve system, or must have their own equivalent procedures in place for ensuring that visits are notified and approved. N.B. If they provide Category 3 visits, then Evolve must be used.

EVCs should normally be responsible for setting up staff to use Evolve in their establishment.

For the purposes of notification and approval, external visits are classified into three categories. These are based on the 'Radar' model described in the OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above).

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Category	Definition	Requirement for notification & approval
Category 1	Straightforward routine visits defined as Category 1 in a written policy by the school or service concerned, covered by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a generic risk assessment, regularly reviewed</li> <li>• blanket informed parent/carer consent</li> <li>• school/service operating procedures</li> </ul>	Evolve may be used but is not required.
Category 2	Visits requiring enhanced planning with event-specific risk assessment, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All residential visits not in Category 3</li> <li>• Non-residential visits not in Categories 1 or 3</li> </ul>	Must be authorised by the Headteacher / Manager, using Evolve. This provides automatic notification to the Council of the visit.
Category 3	Higher risk visits, defined as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits outside the UK</li> <li>• Visits which include adventure activities</li> <li>• Visits to remote or hazardous locations</li> </ul>	Must be authorised by the Headteacher / Manager using Evolve at least four weeks before the visit, and then approved by the Council.

The requirement for Category 3 visits to be authorised by Headteachers / Managers at least four weeks prior to the visit, is to provide time for any issues arising to be dealt with to allow Council approval to be given. For more complex visits, more time should be allowed.

Schools/services are advised not to sign contracts with providers or to make commitments to participants or parent/carers until they are sure that requirements for approval can be met, and are encouraged to ask the External Visits Advisory Service to comment on unsubmitted draft plans in Evolve for complex visits an early stage, which could be a year or more before the visit.

For establishments where the employer is not Sunderland City Council (such as a Voluntary Aided school), approval of visits by the Council is made on behalf of the establishment's governing body, which retains overall responsibility as the employer for the authorisation and monitoring of visits.

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## 14. Adventure activities

Adventure activities are defined as including:

- Abseiling
- Air activities (excluding commercial flights)
- Camping (except 'official' campsites)
- Caving, potholing, mine exploration
- Climbing (including indoor climbing walls)
- Coasteering, coastal scrambling, sea-level traversing
- Fishing in hazardous environments (e.g. sea, fast rivers, on deep water)
- High level ropes activities
- Horse riding & equestrian sports
- Motor sport – all forms
- Mountain Biking
- River/gorge/ghyll walking or scrambling, canyoning
- Shooting, Archery, Paintballing
- Skiing (including Indoor or Dry Slope)
- Snorkel and aqualung activities
- Snowboarding (including Indoor or Dry Slope)
- Swimming (all forms, excluding UK public pools with lifeguards)
- Walking (hills, mountains, open country)
- Watersports - powered craft, waterskiing (excluding commercial transport)
- Watersports - Canoeing/Kayaking
- Watersports - Rafting or improvised rafting
- Watersports - Rowing
- Watersports - Sailing / windsurfing / kite surfing
- Watersports – Surfing

Remote or hazardous locations include:

- areas more than 30 minutes walk from a road or refuge
- coastal areas with significant tidal hazards
- hazardous quarries
- steep terrain

These lists are not exhaustive: if in doubt advice should be obtained from the External Visits Advisory Service.

If a school/service organises adventure activities routinely and finds the requirement for Council approval on each occasion to be a disproportionate barrier, there are two possible options.

- The school/service may apply to the External Visits Advisory Service to delegate the authority to approve visits involving adventure activities to the Headteacher/Manager (thus in effect defining them as Category 2). They would need to demonstrate that they have the knowledge and systems in place to make the required decisions. External verification, such as an AALA licence or Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge, may be appropriate. Such delegation should be subject to regular review.
- The school/service may choose to define a specific type of visit as Category 1 in a written policy. If this includes adventure activities, then approval from the

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External Visits Advisory Service is required (unless it is a non-residential visit to a Sunderland City Council facility), which will be based on an assessment of:

- The definition of the type of visit
- The generic risk assessment
- The operating procedures
- Leader Approval for specific school/service staff if they are to lead the adventure activities

Normally this approval will be given for a limited time, subject to review.

## 15. Leader competence and approval

A Visit Leader is the person responsible for planning and leading a visit, which may involve other members of staff and volunteers, including Group Leaders. A Group Leader is responsible for the supervision of a group of children or young people during a visit.

Headteachers / Service Managers must ensure that Visit Leaders and Group Leaders are competent to carry out their responsibilities. The External Visits Advisory Service provides Visit Leader and Group Leader training courses and can advise about competence requirements.

The OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above) includes documents on “Assessment of Competence” and “Good Practice Basics”. Visit Leaders, Group Leaders and other staff who require guidance or support should contact their establishment’s EVC.

School/service staff who wish to lead adventure activities must have approval to do so from the External Visits Advisory Service on behalf of the Council, unless the authority to approve visits involving adventure activities has been delegated to the Headteacher/Manager. Approval will be based upon evidence of competence, which may include evidence of relevant qualifications, training and experience.

Leader approval for adventure activities is managed through Evolve.

- For a specific visit, evidence of the leader’s competence is required by the Activity Leader Form (ALF) which is part of the normal Evolve visit planning process.
- If a leader wishes to apply for generic approval to lead a specific adventure activity, then they should complete a Leader Approval Request (LAR) in Evolve for endorsement by their Headteacher/Manager who submits it to the Council for approval. When this approval is given, it may be attached to future ALFs as evidence.

## 16. Minibus driving

The Council’s Minibus Operation Code of Practice must be followed. It should be noted that there are no Council employees classed as volunteer drivers, and so all drivers require a D1 licence to drive a minibus.

## 17. Emergency Planning and Critical Incidents

A critical incident is an incident where any participant in a visit:

- has suffered a life threatening injury or fatality
- is at serious risk

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- has gone missing for a significant and unacceptable period

Services and establishments should follow their Directorate's code of practice on responding to crises and critical incidents. The OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above) also includes information on planning for and managing critical incidents on visits, which can be found using the site's search function. The Children's Services Critical Incidents Code of Practice provides resources on planning to deal with a school emergency.

## 18. Accident/incident reporting

The Council's [Incident Reporting Procedure](#) must be followed i.e. all accidents or near-misses involving employees or service users are reported on an IR1 form. Serious incidents must be notified immediately to the Health & Safety Team on 0191 561 1738. If support is required from the Council, the Civic Centre Control Room should be contacted on 0191 553 1999, which is available 24 hours a day and includes emergency Health & Safety cover. These numbers should be carried by leaders during visits, but should not be given to young people, service users or their parents/carers.

After any significant incident, schools/services must undertake an investigation of the incident, and review their risk assessments and emergency procedures, and should share the findings with the External Visits Advisory Service for the benefit of other schools and services. It is also good practice to record and learn from 'near misses'. Establishments should establish a system for doing this and should consider how best to share the learning outcomes of such incidents. Key information can then be passed to the External Visits Advisory Service to enable others to benefit from the lessons learned. Any "near misses" should also be reported to the Corporate Health & Safety Team using the IR1 form, who will investigate where appropriate to enable preventative strategies to be developed.

## 18. Supervision

OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above) includes documents on "Ratios and Effective Supervision" and "Group Management and Supervision".

Sunderland City Council does not prescribe minimum staff to participant ratios for visits (except where the law requires minimum ratios for Early Years). Ratios and other arrangements for the effective supervision of children, young people and vulnerable adults should be determined as part of the risk assessment process by proper consideration of factors including:

- age (including the developmental age) of the group
- gender issues
- ability of the group (including special needs, behavioural, medical and vulnerability characteristics etc)
- nature and location of the activity (including the type of activity, duration, skill levels involved, as well as the time of year and prevailing conditions)
- staff competence.

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## 19. Monitoring

Headteachers/Managers are responsible for ensuring the monitoring of visits organised by their school/service. The EVC is often best placed to carry out routine monitoring. The OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above) includes a document on monitoring. In case of doubt or concern, advice may be obtained from the External Visits Advisory Service.

Overall compliance with this Code of Practice is monitored by the External Visits Advisory Service. Monitoring may take place by:

- a review of visits using the Evolve system, including approval of Category 3 visits.
- a review with Service Managers / Head Teachers / EVCs / Visit Leaders of specific issues and relevant procedures and documentation, including policies, risk assessments and plans for specific visits
- direct observation of a visit in progress

The monitoring process is intended to be positive, supportive and developmental, and feedback and recommendations will be given. Areas of significant risk will be referred to the Service Manager / Headteacher, and high risk issues which cannot be resolved at the school/service level will be referred to the relevant Director.

## 20. Assessing Venues and Providers

The OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above) includes guidance on Preliminary Visits and Provider Assurances.

The Learning outside the Classroom Quality Badge provides sufficient reassurance that a provider meets nationally required minimum standards of safety and quality. Details of a provider's status can be checked on the Quality Badge website [www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk](http://www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk).

If a provider of activities does not hold the Quality Badge, then detailed checks should be made to ensure that it meets required standards. The most straightforward way of doing this is to use a Provider Statement Form (available on the External Visits Advisory Service website and on Evolve).

## 21. Insurance

The OEAP National Guidance (see section 2 above) includes guidance about insurance for visits.

Schools and other services are strongly advised to arrange Cancellation and Personal Accident cover for external visits, unless they already have blanket insurance cover in place. This should cover cancellation of contracts with external providers (including with Council services such as Derwent Hill), in the event of circumstances such as travel difficulties or illness or injury to participants, staff or their families. The Council provides an opportunity for schools and other services to arrange annual travel insurance via the Insurance Section (0191 553 5084), and most Sunderland schools opt to take this. This insurance includes cover for personal effects.

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When buying insurance cover from any source, the terms of the policy should be studied carefully, paying particular attention to the exclusions. Separate insurance or extensions to the policy should be arranged for any items for which the standard cover is inadequate.

## 22. Further Information and Advice

Further information and advice is available from:

- External Visits Advisory Service, Derwent Hill  
017687 72005 [EVAS@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:EVAS@sunderland.gov.uk)
- Corporate Health & Safety Team, Civic Centre  
0191 561 1738 / 2375