

Using this information effectively

New guidance

The guidance is intended as a reference document – not to be read as a book from cover to cover by all staff.

This document incorporates key elements from the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) documents Health and Safety, Responsibilities and Powers (2001) and the supplements to HASPEV (2002). The HASPEV (2002) supplements are:

- Standards for Local Education Authorities (LEA) overseeing Educational Visits
- Standards for adventure
- Handbook for Group Leaders
- Group safety at water margins.

This guidance embraces features of these documents and expands advice in many areas. However, both the Handbook for Group Leaders and Group Safety at Water Margins are strongly recommended as specific advice and must be available to visit leaders. All five publications can be viewed and downloaded from www.teachernet.gov.uk/visits (see Links table).

In this new web format it should be easier to find content and related sections by internal links. Wherever it has been possible information is provided in digestible size discreet sections. This is supported by attachments that provide additional detail or related topics that may also be of interest. From some of these sections there will be external links to the world wide web where there is reliable information. You will be prompted to these links but only need read what you consider relevant.

How do I find the topics that interest me

The web version of this guidance will enable use of a search facility to pull up lists of relevant text, that relates to your question. As with all searches, the more accurate the key search words are, the shorter and more helpful the found list will be. It may be necessary to exercise some judgement where something has interest but not a direct link. For example there may well be legal or insurance conditions attached to a topic that are too generic to be specifically linked.

Information that is related but not linked

General background information is not usually read by the Visit Leader whose access is more specific. If however they find their question unanswered then the general sections may help them come to a decision. Managers and team leader should always take time to scan through this more general information to see if it has any impact upon their responsibilities and the processes they put in place. In this web format the content is never static, as it would be in a hard copy, for as new interest arises, overnight, it will be added. The outcomes from investigations are a source of particularly valuable information, as are near miss reports, and when these are published they can be quickly linked into the resource.

A much larger volume of useful information is now to be found on other websites and can be reached through a link directly to the source. This avoids it having to be reproduced here although there may be some parts that are not all relevant in Plymouth. Where qualifications and quality assurance schemes are concerned the custodians of this information have a vested interest in its quality and currency. Therefore the best source is a link across and these are provided, and monitored for the quality as it is not always the case and links break.

Referencing qualifications

For sometime it has been the practice to name adventure qualifications rather than use an alpha-numeric reference. Most current award titles adequately describe their scope and certainly once you read the additional explanation this becomes clear. For some activities the whole qualifications progression is not vested in a single managing organisation, there can be two or even three who each contribute a part. Where this occurs the schemes websites are usually linked across so you can with a bit of persistence follow logically. If ever it is not possible to find the answer to a question then there is an email facility for questions and once received this will then be followed up and a response emailed back. As an alternative most of the sports governing bodies offer an email route directly to them if you have a question. This information could be useful to staff who are considering the qualifications a provider offers for their staff or to an Educational Visit Coordinator (EVC) when approached by a member of staff with a leadership qualification.

Important information on other websites

By drawing upon the information that is available on other websites the space this saves is now available for the inclusion of best practice principles. The further justification for this arises from the intricate relationship between safety and quality. It is often said that if you plan to achieve a quality experience then the effort and processes used are similar if not the same as those for safety and that if you get on right the other is almost sure to follow. However the other way around does not follow automatically and it's certainly possible for quality to be almost eradicated by over attention to safety.

Health warning, reliability and use of internet information

With so much information arising from around the country, and yet to be included in the wider policy debate, by providing links to the www then the enquirer is exposed to the whole debate from reasoned fact to wild fiction. Unless there is a clear statement to the effect then it's safer to assume that material is not the policy of the council. However some sources are clearly more reliable than others and it's likely that these will be used as expertise in any investigation. Government sites, the Health and Safety Executive, Sport England, royal societies, professional associations, quality assurance providers, can usually be relied upon. However it is recommended that a secondary check be standard practice to test authenticity and find a balance between opposing points of view. There are even credible sources that would have you over react if you were to take their argument without question. This doesn't create risk but could stifle opportunity and enthusiasm.

The links from the Plymouth City Council policy will be monitored and if they go dead or become unreliable for any reason then these can be removed or replaced. Please report any that you find to be inoperative or unhelpful. There is no control though over the links these providers have to their sites and so anyone progressing beyond the initial reference needs to be aware that anything they find is beyond the scope of the Plymouth City Council recommendation.

By entering key words into a search engine on the internet you could well find contact to other service users who have more experience of a provider you are interested in and thus gain access to an external opinion about them. Treat everything with a degree of caution and after consulting several sites a consensus often appears that can instil greater confidence.

Conditions for non Plymouth City Council users

In the past it has been the practice of some voluntary groups to adopt the council's policy and guidance for the management of their own external visits. Plymouth City Council is happy for this to occur but would want to point out that it cannot accept liability for the content except where it is the employer or where the adoption is formally recognised by agreement or contract. It is essential that the responsible body has sufficient confidence in the measures that are referred too and which in some cases the safeguards rely upon. Any other users would need to satisfy themselves that they too have similar provisions and processes or adapt the content appropriately. There is a principle of self-evaluation and monitoring that applies throughout and is necessary to maintain the effectiveness of the guidance. In particular, as such use is not notified to the council, it has no means to consult over amendments, changes or withdrawals or circulation of related safety information. Therefore any group or organisation adopting these practices and principles needs to ensure that it can reliably provide its own support framework for keeping the contents up to date.

Supplements and additional notices are issued and will be attached to this site from time to time.

There is a facility for organisations to formally adopt this guidance and, by agreement be supported by the council, in return for a fee. They too are able to access telephone support and regular information updates. If requested then the procedures and practices external organisations employ can be monitored and their management will receive a formal reports.

Producing Outdoor Education Activities and Offsite Visits in web format makes the adoption and personalisation of its content easier. It is entirely possible, within the next few years that many parts of it will be produce in a form that is adopted nationally. When this happens it is likely that the council's current guidance will be amended to avoid duplication and focus on local circumstances. A good deal of the remainder can then be integrated into site-specific guidance produced by each council service. It is therefore strongly recommended that non Plymouth City Council organisations begin to personalise guidance and formally adopt it as there own on the basis that they too can use national common practice and concentrate their attention on aspects that are specific to them.