

OEAP EG: Good Practice Basics

Good practice alone brings with it no absolute guarantees of safety. It requires risks to be managed, reducing them to a level that is “acceptable” or “tolerable” within the implementing culture - but will not eliminate all risk. However, it will enhance the quality of an activity and will also demonstrate due concern and consideration for:

- The Individual (the young people, parents and colleagues)
- The Community (including that affected by the venture)
- The Environment.

Good practice is essentially common sense. It arises from a consideration of all the circumstances that apply to the planning, preparation, execution and review of any activity.

Careful planning is essential with regard to:

- knowledge of the nature of the activity, the location and/or the facilities to be visited;
- consideration for the particular needs of the specific group of young people;
- awareness and anticipation of situations that could arise, and thorough preparation for all reasonably foreseeable eventualities.

Staff participating in off-site activities and visits must be aware of the extent of their duty of care and should only be given such responsibilities as are in keeping with the employer’s guidance on assessing competence of Visit and Assistant Leaders.

It is particularly important that careful consideration of competence issues is applied to both newly qualified and newly appointed staff.

All staff and helpers must be competent to carry out their defined roles and responsibilities.

To be deemed competent, a Visit Leader, or Assistant Leader must be able to demonstrate the ability to operate to the current standards of recognized good practice for that role.

Within the context of MOL guidance, a competent Visit /Activity Leader (or an Assistant Leader where they may take sole responsibility for a sub-group) requires:

- Knowledge and understanding of their employer’s guidance supported by establishment-led training. It is good practice for employers to provide formal and accredited training to support their guidance e.g. EVC Training, Visit Leader Training and such training may be a requirement prescribed by some employers.
- Knowledge and understanding of establishment procedures supported by a structured induction process specified by the establishment.
- Knowledge and understanding of the group, the staff, the activity and the venue.
- Appropriate experience
- In some circumstances (e.g. first aid, adventurous activities) a formally accredited qualification.

The staffing team should ask the following questions:

Do we possess the required level of competence?

Is specialist help or instruction required?

Should we recruit further help?

Will this help come from within the establishment/setting or from elsewhere?

Will the activity benefit from parent, governor or other volunteer assistance?

The venture **must** have a formally designated Visit Leader (and possibly a Deputy Visit Leader). To ensure a clear audit trail of responsibility allocation, there **must** be only one designated Visit Leader. Regardless of whether there are two (or more) leaders who wish to share responsibility, a sole leader **must** be identified as having the ultimate responsibility for making the final call on difficult decisions - and this should be the person designated as Visit/Activity Leader. The designated Visit Leader must take responsibility for recording and documenting the risk-benefit assessments at the planning stage, but this is best achieved if the process involves as many of the assistant supervisors as possible. However, the staffing team should understand that the most effective part of the risk management process is the on-going application of judgment and awareness by competent staff. This should be supported by the dynamic/on-going risk-benefit assessment and appropriate group management strategies.

All helpers should be appropriately vetted and careful consideration should be given as to whether voluntary helpers may require a Criminal Records Bureau Enhanced Disclosure. In general, those helpers with frequent, intensive or regular contact must be checked, e.g. those who may be in sole charge of a young person, those involved in accompanying residential visits or those assisting in sensitive areas (such as changing rooms) without any direct staff supervision. (See Vetting and CRB checks)

Common Law does not prescribe specific staffing ratios, but it does require that the level of supervision is “effective”.

Effective supervision should be determined by proper consideration of:

- age (including the developmental age) of the group;
- gender issues;
- ability of the group (including special learning 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.

Where a Volunteer Helper is a parent (or otherwise in a close relationship to of a young person taking part in the visit) they should be made aware of the potential for their relationship to compromise the Visit Leader's plans for group management, particularly if there is a serious incident. There is a probability that the Helper may be distracted by the needs of their own child, rather than looking to the needs of the whole group. This requires that the Visit Leader should directly address this issue as part of the Risk-Benefit assessment and not assign a Volunteer Helper to a leadership role that gives them a direct responsibility for their own child, unless this is a risk-managed part of the master plan.