

# Northumberland County Council Educational Off-site Visits



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**Northumberland**  
Northumberland County Council

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# CODE OF PRACTICE

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## 1. Legal Framework

Ensuring the health and safety of pupils and staff on educational visits is a responsibility of the Council under the Health and Safety at Work Act and other statutes which are named below:

- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)
- Activity Centres (Young Persons' Safety) Act (1995)
- Children Act (2004)

This document sets out the supplementary guidance which is unique to Northumberland.

## 2. Scope

This Code of Practice applies to schools which Northumberland County Council (NCC) maintains and Children's Services where the Council is the employer or where a Governing Body has continued to use the Council's services under an SLA.

External Visits are defined as events that involve children, young people or vulnerable adults being away from their normal school, centre or residential home. This includes (although it is not limited to):

- residential visits at home or abroad
- adventurous or water-based activities
- field studies and local, low risk visits
- visits such as an outing to the park, museum, cinema or library.

The Code of Practice applies to all visits regardless of whether the activities take place within or outside of normal working hours and hence includes weekends and holiday periods.

## 3. Outdoor Education Adviser's Panel: National Guidance

NCC has adopted the 'National Guidance' published by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel (OEAP), details of which can be found on their website [www.oeapng.info](http://www.oeapng.info). This site provides detailed guidance covering all aspects of off-site visits and outdoor learning, including information outlining the roles of key staff and parents in the planning and delivery of visits.

Schools, other Children's Services and all Council employees must follow that guidance as well as the requirements of NCC's Code of Practice.

## 4. Notification and Approval of Visits

NCC uses the EVOLVE online system for notification, approval and monitoring of visits. Educational Visits Coordinators (EVCs), Headteachers and Service Managers are able to use EVOLVE to plan, authorise and monitor visits within their establishments. Where Local Authority approval is required the Educational Visits Team is automatically alerted to visits awaiting approval once the Head/Managers have authorised them.

For the purposes of notification and approval, external visits are classified into two categories, as detailed in the table overleaf:

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, which are covered by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a generic risk assessment, regularly reviewed</li> <li>• school/service operating procedures</li> <li>• blanket, informed parental consent</li> </ul>	Notification period is specified by Headteacher/Manager of the school or establishment. (Usually up to two weeks' notice will be required).
Category 2	Higher risk visits, defined as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits which include adventurous activities*</li> <li>• Visits to remote or hazardous locations</li> <li>• All residential visits</li> <li>• Visits outside the UK</li> </ul> * See Appendix 1 - 'Definition of an Adventurous Activity'	Such visits must be authorised by the Headteacher/Manager using EVOLVE at least four weeks before the visit date and then approved by the LA.

The requirement for Category 2 visits to be authorised by Headteachers/Managers at least four weeks prior to the visit date is a safeguard. Its purpose is to ensure that the Local Authority is afforded sufficient time to deal adequately with any issues arising from the proposed arrangements and recommend alternative or remedial actions where necessary.

For more complex visits, such as an overseas expedition, this requires between 12 and 18 months notification. Visit Leaders are encouraged to ask the Outdoor Educational Adviser to comment on unsubmitted draft plans on EVOLVE for visits of this kind at an early stage. Schools and other Children's Services are advised **not** to sign contracts with providers or to make commitments to participants or parents until they are entirely sure that requirements for approval can be met.

For cultural visits to third world countries enhanced planning is required to obtain visas, vaccinations, check sanitation and security etc. Visit Leaders are encouraged to contact the Outdoor Education Adviser as above but within 3 months of the departure date.

## 5. Risk Management

As an employer, NCC has a legal duty to ensure that risks are managed - requiring them to be reduced to an "acceptable" level. This means that proportionate (suitable and sufficient) risk management systems must be in place. This Code of Practice sets out the arrangements that the Local Authority 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 eliminate it entirely. Indeed, the human spirit thrives on adventure and journeys into new territory, both physical and metaphorical. As they grow up, it is important that children and young people learn to understand and manage risk and uncertainty for themselves. If society attempts to overprotect them they not only miss huge opportunities for growth but also emerge into the world at large unable to cope with the uncertainties and challenges of adult life. Well-managed external visits play a vital part in helping children and young people learn about the real world, enabling them to understand and manage risks for themselves.

Schools and other Children's Services are therefore encouraged to provide such opportunities for children and young people. Good planning and management of activities should be about reducing risks to an acceptable level, taking into account the potential benefits.

Although some documentation 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.

EVOLVE contains a list of 'generic risk assessments' for specific undertakings. The visit leader is required to indicate which of these have been used during the planning of their visit. He/she must complete an 'event specific plan'. This should be concise and include the unique hazards associated with the individual visit which are not included within the 'generic risk assessments'.

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

## **6. Inclusion and Equality**

External visits should be available to all children and young people, regardless of background or abilities. Schools and other services which offer such visits and activities must ensure that their provision meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 which replaced previous anti-discrimination Acts and regulations with one single piece of legislation. However, the Disability Discrimination Act Code of Practice for schools has yet to be repealed (see Section 3.2e of the OEAP Guidance for more details).

## **7. Employers Other than Northumberland County Council**

Where another employer (such as Academies or the Governing Body of a Voluntary Aided School) has bought into the Health and Safety SLA they must adopt this Code of Practice and the OEAP National Guidance and this should be clearly stated in their establishment's policy for external visits.

## **8. Commissioning**

Organisations outside the Council that are commissioned to provide a service which includes educational off-site visits must adopt this Code of Practice and the OEAP National Guidance.

## **9. Educational Visits Coordinator**

All schools and Children's Services that undertake off-site activities must have an EVC in post.

Appointed EVCs must undertake an initial EVC training and attend refresher courses as and when required. The Outdoor Educational Adviser delivers these courses. The course programme includes the following:

- training to assess the visit planning
- risk assessments
- leader and staff competence
- guidance on the use of the documentation required for any visit
- Instruction on the use of the EVOLVE system (Headteachers and Managers are also welcome to attend EVC training).

## 10. Outdoor Educational Team

The Council's Outdoor Educational Team is based at County Hall, Morpeth. Details of contact names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses can be found on the EVOLVE home page by clicking on the phone icon.

The Outdoor Educational Team offers the following services:

- The provision of advice and guidance to EVCs and staff in respect of visit planning, and clarification (when required) regarding this Code of Practice or the OEAP National Guidance
- An approval and monitoring role for visits using the EVOLVE online system, as well as the monitoring of visits in the field, when required
- The provision of training for EVCs, Visit and Group Leaders

## 11. Role-specific responsibilities

The OEAP National Guidance sets out in detail the responsibilities and functions for the key staff roles required during the planning of off-site visits for the following persons and groups:

- Head/Manager
- Educational Visits Coordinator (EVC)
- Employer
- Visit Leader
- Assistant Leader
- Parents

## 12. Policy on the Management of Off-site Activities

Schools and Children's Services establishments must have their own Off-site Activities Policy that sets out the arrangements within their establishment. All staff should be aware of its contents. The policy should stipulate the intention of each school and establishment to implement this Code of Practice and also make reference to the adoption of OEAP National Guidance for further information and reference. Upon completion, the EVC should upload that policy to the 'Establishment Documents' section on EVOLVE to allow easy access for all staff planning visits.

A draft 'model' policy can be found by clicking the 'NCC Guidance' tab within the 'Resources' section on EVOLVE.

## 13. Approval for Staff to Lead an 'Adventurous' Activity

Members of staff in schools and Children's Services who wish to lead adventurous activities must have approval to do so from the Outdoor Educational Adviser on behalf of the Local Authority. Approval will be based upon the level of competence, which will include evidence of relevant qualifications, a current first aid certificate, and documentation showing continuing professional development in the form of a log of experience.

All staff planning to deliver any of the following very high risk activities must apply for Leader Approval for every adventurous activity they plan to lead:

- Caving
- Climbing
- Trekking and Watersports

Definitions for each category are given in the appendix and replicate those contained in the HSE document “Guidance from the ‘Licensing Authority on Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 2004” [L77].

Leader approval is managed through EVOLVE. Comprehensive information and instruction to help applicants through the process can be found by clicking the ‘NCC Guidance’ tab within the ‘Resources’ section on EVOLVE.

Note: Any planned adventurous activity visit will require the completion of the ‘Activity Leader Form’ (ALF) section on the visit form. Members of staff that hold a Leader Approval Request only need to state this in that section. Activities which do not need leader approval, but are defined as ‘adventurous’, require the visit leader to complete the ALF in full.

## 14. Emergency Planning and Critical Incidents

Definition of a Serious Incident

A serious incident is one where a group member participating in an off-site visit activity:

- has suffered a life threatening injury or fatality
- might be at serious risk or have a serious illness
- has gone missing for a significant and unacceptable period **or**
- any situation in which the press or media are or might be involved
- when a seemingly routine incident escalates to such a level that the Visit Leader no longer feels able to cope without outside assistance

Establishments should ensure that their ‘Health and Safety Off-site Visits Activities Policy’ includes a section on what to do in the event of an emergency incident. All staff involved in a visit must be aware of and adhere to their establishment’s policy on emergency procedures for local visits and implement the Local Authority’s policy for other types of visits.

As part of the planning and preparation for all visits, two home based emergency contacts should be identified on the visit form and on the ‘Serious Incident Guidance’ form. Completed ‘Serious Incident Guidance’ forms must be held by the Visit Leader, supervising staff and the home based emergency contacts at all times. Copies of this document can be found in the ‘Forms’ section on EVOLVE.

Following a serious incident the school or establishment will initiate the Emergency Incident Procedure.

## 15. Supervision

OEAP National Guidance comprises two documents “Ratios and Effective Supervision” and “Group Management and Supervision”.

NCC does not prescribe minimum staff: participant ratios for visits (except where the law requires minimum ratios for Early Year’s pupils). However, where specialist adventurous activities are involved the ratios advocated in the document ‘Group Sizes in Adventurous Activities’ published by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) will apply.

Ratios and other arrangements for the effective supervision of children and young people should be determined as part of the risk assessment process by giving proper consideration to pertinent factors including:

- Age (including the developmental age) of the group
- Gender issues

- Ability of the group (including issues relating to special needs, behaviour or medical needs)
- Nature and location of the activity (including the type of activity, its duration, skill levels involved, as well as the time of year when it takes place and prevailing conditions)
- Staff competence

## 16. Monitoring

Headteachers and 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, however, it is the responsibility of the visit leader as well as other staff to monitor arrangements continually during the visit. The visit leader also has the right to withdraw students from any activity where they think their safety is being compromised.

All visits should be reviewed to assess whether or not the objectives of the visit have been met. Where issues have arisen during the visit these must be addressed and, where necessary, changes to the event specific plan must be made for any future visits.

Where an incident of a more serious nature has occurred the visit leader must contact the Educational Visits Team at their earliest opportunity to discuss the problem.

## 17. Assessing Venues and Providers

Visit leaders must assure themselves that the Provider they intend to use to deliver adventurous activities has appropriate safe systems in place to deliver the activity. NCC has several ways of confirming the suitability of providers, as follows:

- Requiring the Provider to complete the 'Provider' statement form (a copy of which is available in the forms section on EVOLVE) or
- Checking that the Provider holds a Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge (LOtC) or
- Checking that the Provider holds an AALA Licence

The LOtC 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 at [www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk](http://www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk). Where a Provider holds this Quality Badge, the completion of a 'Provider' form is **not** required.

However, if the Provider does not hold the Quality Badge, then detailed checks should be made to ensure that the required standards are met by asking them to complete and sign NCC's 'Provider' form as stated above.

## 18. Insurance

**School Journey insurance cover is automatic where visit forms have been submitted and approved** on EVOLVE. Advice regarding unusual visits or where pupils have specific requirements or conditions may be sought from the NCC's Insurance Section at [insurance@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:insurance@northumberland.gov.uk).

A copy of Zurich Municipal's 'School Journey Insurance Cover' for the visit must be made available to all party leaders, volunteers and parents to ensure the cover meets their needs. A summary of which is available to view on EVOLVE by clicking the Guidance tab within 'Resources'.

For travel within the European Union (and the following non-EU countries: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) all participants must hold a valid European Health Insurance Card (E111). Further information can be obtained at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk).

Academies should seek advice from their own brokers or insurers to ascertain the levels of cover required and provided.

## **19. Accident and Incident Procedure**

Any accidents and incidents that occur during off-site visits and activities will be reported and recorded in accordance with Northumberland County Council's accident reporting procedures. In addition to this the Visit Leader must either put a note on the Evolve visit form outlining the issue/s addressing this to the LA or telephone the Outdoor Educational Advise to brief him on the incident.

## Appendix - Definition of an 'Adventurous Activity'

The following activities are regarded as 'adventurous' and are classified as Category 2 visits. As such, each of them requires LA approval via the Educational Visits Team:

- All activities in 'open country' (see below \*)
- Swimming (all forms, excluding publicly lifeguarded pools)
- Camping
- Canoeing/kayaking
- Sailing/windsurfing/kite surfing
- Rafting or improvised rafting
- Use of powered safety/rescue craft
- All other forms of boating (excluding commercial transport)
- Water skiing
- Snorkel and aqualung activities
- Hill walking and mountaineering
- Rock climbing (including indoor climbing walls)
- Abseiling
- River/gorge walking or scrambling
- Coasteering/coastal scrambling/sea level traversing
- Underground exploration
- Fishing in hazardous environments (for example sea, fast rivers, on deep water)
- Shooting and archery
- Snowsports (skiing, snowboarding and related activities) including dry slope
- Air activities (excluding commercial flights)
- Horse riding
- Off-road cycling
- 'Extreme' sports
- Motor sport – all forms
- High level ropes courses
- Visits to industrial sites.

\* 'Open Country' is normally defined as any place which is moorland (open uncultivated land at any height above sea level) or on a mountain above 600m and from which it would take more than 30 minutes travelling time to walk back to an accessible road or refuge.

The following Category 2 activities although adventurous do not require NCC Leader Approval. However, the visit leader will be required to complete an ALF so that the visit can be classified as adventurous.

- Field study activities which require access to water
- Forest and beach schools and rock pooling
- Visits to industrial sites, such as recycling centres

For the purposes of NCC approval, the following activities are not regarded as adventurous and are classified as Category 1 visits. Therefore, they only require Headteacher/Manager approval. However, these activities must be supervised by a member of staff who has previous relevant

experience and who, in the opinion of the EVC and Headteacher/Manager, is competent to supervise the activity:

- walking in parks or on non-remote country paths
- field studies - unless in the environments stated are in 'open country'
- swimming in publicly lifeguarded pools
- visits to theme parks
- visits to tourist attractions
- using pedal go-karts
- farm visits
- local traffic surveys
- visits to museums, cinemas or libraries
- sports fixtures

Please note that these lists are not exhaustive. If in doubt advice should be obtained from the Educational Visits Team.