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PLANNING VISITS

Planning

35. Whether the visit is to a local park, museum or swimming pool, or includes a residential stay in the UK or abroad, it is essential that formal planning takes place before setting off. This involves considering the dangers and difficulties which may arise and making plans to reduce them. In practice, the head teacher - who is responsible for planning visits - will often delegate the detailed planning to the organiser of the visit or the group leader. Head teachers must satisfy themselves that the person planning the visit is competent to do so and has the necessary relevant experience.

36. Many LEAs have detailed guidance on visits, including risk assessment, which county and controlled schools must follow. For residential visits at home or abroad, or for potentially hazardous activities, some LEAs require schools to obtain the LEA's approval before the visit takes place. In other schools, the governing body should satisfy itself that the visit has been planned effectively and that risks are minimised.

Risk assessment

37. In practice, risk assessments, which employers are legally required to do (see Legal framework in Chapter 1 paragraphs 11 - 14), are usually carried out by the group leader. An assessment should be completed well before the visit, and should be approved by the head teacher.

38. A risk assessment for a visit need not be complex but it should be comprehensive. It does not generally require technical formulae or professional health and safety expertise. But specialised information for some visits may be necessary and head teachers should ensure that the person

assessing the risks is competent to do so.

39. A formal assessment of the risks that might be met on a visit should have the aim of preventing the risks or reducing them. Pupils must not be placed in situations which expose them to an unacceptable level of risk. Safety must always be the prime consideration. If the risks cannot be contained then the visit must not take place.

40. The risk assessment should be based on the following considerations:

- ▼ what are the hazards?
- ▼ who might be affected by them?
- ▼ what safety measures need to be in place to reduce risks to an acceptable level?
- ▼ can the group leader put the safety measures in place?
- ▼ what steps will be taken in an emergency?

41. The person carrying out the risk assessment should record it and give copies to all teachers/supervisors on the visit, with details of the measures they should take to avoid or reduce the risks. LEAs, head teachers and governing bodies should also be given a copy so that approval, as necessary, can be given with a clear understanding that effective planning has taken place.

42. Frequent visits to local venues such as swimming pools may not need a risk assessment every time. Nevertheless, it is essential not to become complacent. A generic assessment of the risks of such visits should be made at regular intervals, and careful monitoring should take place.

43. The group leader and other supervisors should monitor the risks throughout the visit and take appropriate action as necessary.

44. Before booking a visit the group leader should obtain a written or documentary assurance that providers such as tour operators have themselves assessed the risks and have appropriate safety measures in place.

45. Detailed advice on risk assessment can be obtained from the LEA's health and safety officer, and from the Health and Safety Executive, which has issued a revision of its booklet, Five Steps to Risk Assessment. At the time of writing another version of the booklet is in preparation to include references to outdoor education. See Annexes A & B for details and Model Forms 3 and 4 in Chapter 11 for a basic risk assessment format.

46. The group leader should take the following factors into consideration when assessing the risks:

- ▼ the type of visit/activity and the level at which it is being undertaken;
- ▼ the location, routes and modes of transport;
- ▼ the competence, experience and qualifications of supervisory staff;
- ▼ the ratios of teachers and supervisory staff to pupils;
- ▼ the group members' age, competence, fitness and temperament and the suitability of the activity;
- ▼ the special educational or medical needs of pupils;
- ▼ the quality and suitability of available equipment;
- ▼ seasonal conditions, weather and timing;
- ▼ emergency procedures;
- ▼ how to cope when a pupil becomes unable or unwilling to continue;
- ▼ the need to monitor the risks throughout the visit.

Exploratory visit

47. An exploratory visit should be made by any teacher who is to lead a group abroad or on a residential visit or who is to instruct or lead the group in an outdoor activity such as trekking in a location that is not familiar to them.

48. In other cases the group leader should undertake an exploratory visit, wherever that is possible, to:

- ▼ ensure at first hand that the venue is suitable to meet the aims and objectives of the school visit;
- ▼ obtain names and addresses of other schools who have used the venue;
- ▼ obtain advice from the manager;
- ▼ assess potential areas and levels of risk;
- ▼ ensure that the venue can cater for the needs of the staff and pupils in the group;
- ▼ become familiar with the area before taking a group of young people there.

49. If in the last resort an exploratory visit is not feasible then the group leader will need to consider how to complete an adequate assessment of the risks. A minimum measure would be to obtain specific information by letter from the venue, from other schools who have recently visited it, and from local organisations such as tourist boards.

50. Detailed advice on particular categories of visits which carry specific risks is provided in Chapters 8 Types of Visit and 9 Visits Abroad. Advice may also be sought from the LEA and from specialist bodies listed at Annex B.

51. Many schools will take new groups of pupils to the same location each year. As some factors will change from year to year, it is prudent to re-assess the risks each time - even when the group leader stays the same. It may be useful to evaluate each completed visit and keep a record. Model Form 5 in Chapter 11 provides a suggested format.

Other considerations

52. Other factors which should form part of the planning stage include:

- ▼ the facilities/equipment the group will need to take on the visit;
- ▼ the facilities/equipment to be provided at the venue;
- ▼ staff training needs;
- ▼ the designation of someone to record the details of the visit and to carry accident forms etc;
- ▼ transport arrangements;
- ▼ insurance arrangements;
- ▼ information to the provider;
- ▼ communication arrangements;
- ▼ supervision ratios;
- ▼ contingency measures for enforced change of plan or late return;
- ▼ information to parents;
- ▼ preparing pupils;
- ▼ emergency arrangements;
- ▼ arrangements for sending pupils home early.

53. Further information on these issues is provided in subsequent chapters.

Financial planning

54. The group leader should ensure that parents have early written information about the costs of the visit, how much will come from school funds, and how much each parent will be charged or asked to contribute. Parents should be given enough time to

prepare financially for the visit. It may be useful to break the costs down into subheads such as travel, hostel, meals etc.

55. The head teacher should ensure that banking arrangements are in place to separate the visit's receipts from other school funds and from private accounts.

56. The head teacher/group leader should reach a pre-agreement with parents on whether any funds left surplus after the visit will be returned to parents or retained for another visit.

Charging for visits

57. In schools other than independent schools the education provided wholly or mainly during school hours is free. This means that head teachers may not impose a charge on parents for any visit that occurs during school hours. The head teacher may, however, ask for a voluntary contribution.

58. Parents should be made aware that the contribution is not compulsory, and the children of parents who do not contribute may not be discriminated against. It is permissible to ask parents to contribute more than the minimum amount in order to subsidise those pupils whose parents have not contributed. In the last resort, the visit may have to be cancelled if there are not enough voluntary contributions and the shortfall cannot be made up.

59. The head teacher may, however, charge parents for board and lodging on residential visits as well as the full costs when a visit is deemed to be an optional extra. An optional extra:

- ▼ falls wholly or mainly outside school hours;
- ▼ does not form part of the National Curriculum;
- ▼ is not part of a syllabus towards a Prescribed Public Examination; and
- ▼ is not in scope of the statutory requirements

relating to religious education.

60. So, a skiing holiday during the school holidays would be an optional extra.

61. The head teacher should obtain the parents' agreement to meet the costs of an optional extra visit before the visit is planned in detail. Charging parents for an optional extra visit may not include an element of subsidy in respect of other pupils whose families do not meet the full charge.

62. On residential visits which are not optional extras, or which take place during school hours, some parents may have board and lodging costs remitted. These are parents in receipt of Income Support, Income-Based Jobseekers Allowance, Family Credit or Disability Working Allowance.

63. LEAs will have a charging policy which their head teachers should follow. For further information on charging see the DES Circular 2/89 Education Reform Act 1988: Charges for School Activities. Available from DFEE Publications Centre, see end of Annex A for address details.

First aid

64. First aid should form part of the risk assessment. Before undertaking any off-site activities the head teacher or the group leader should assess what level of first aid might be needed. On any kind of visit the group leader should have a good working knowledge of first aid and ensure that an adequate first-aid box is taken. For adventurous activities, visits abroad or residential visits it is sensible for at least one of the group's teachers to be a fully-trained first-aider. All adults in the group should know how to contact the emergency services.

65. The minimum first-aid provision for a visit is:

- ▼ a suitably stocked first-aid box;
- ▼ a person appointed to be in charge of first-aid arrangements.

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- ▼ the numbers in the group and the nature of the activity;
- ▼ the likely injuries and how effective first aid would be;
- ▼ the distance of the nearest hospital.

66. First aid should be available and accessible at all times. The Health and Safety Executive recommends the following minimum contents for a travelling first-aid box where no special risk has been identified:

- ▼ a leaflet giving general advice on first aid;
- ▼ six individually wrapped sterile adhesive dressings;
- ▼ one large sterile unmedicated wound dressing approximately 18 cm x 18 cm;
- ▼ two triangular bandages;
- ▼ two safety pins;
- ▼ individually wrapped moist cleansing wipes;
- ▼ one pair of disposable gloves;
- ▼ a resuscitator (for hygienic mouth to mouth resuscitation) would also be useful.

67. All minibuses are required by law to carry a first-aid kit. See Chapter 6 Planning Transport .

68. For further advice on first aid see Guidance on First Aid in Schools available from DfEE Publications Centre, see end of Annex A for address details. This also lists a range of publications by the Health and Safety Commission/Executive on first aid, including

training and qualifications.



PLANNING THE VISIT

This page charts the likely stages of planning a visit

