



## **School Visits**

### **NEU guidance for members, reps and local officers**

The NEU believes that school visits can be of substantial benefit to the education and development of pupils. For many they offer opportunities to broaden their horizons and enrich their experiences. Tragic incidents in the past, however, have shown that proper and full concern for health and safety must be an imperative at every stage.

This briefing sets out NEU guidance on planning and undertaking school visits including:

- teachers' rights and obligations with regard to school visits
- practical steps to be taken in organising visits
- detailed advice on supervising pupils
- specific guidance on outdoor adventure activities
- specific guidance on staffing levels for visits, including pupils with special educational needs (see Appendix 1).

### **1. Introduction**

#### **Department for Education (DfE) advice on school trips**

In October 2010, Lord Young's report on health and safety *Common Sense, Common Safety* criticised the "enormous bureaucracy" surrounding school trips. The Government adopted the report in its entirety, and the following summer withdrew the longstanding and popular guidance on school trips *Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits (HASPEV)*. It was replaced with a short summary of the law relating to health and safety, both in schools generally and on school visits specifically, an outline of employer and employee duties, and a synopsis of the requirements of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR). In the view of the NEU, the [current guidance](#) is far less comprehensive and useful for schools than the previous version.

#### **Current sources of guidance**

Schools in England and Wales can draw upon more useful sources of advice on school trips. In particular, the NEU recommends the authoritative information and guidance produced by the [Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel \(OEAP\)](#). NEU reps and local officers should encourage school employers to adopt this guidance through their policy. A number of local authorities have already done this, including Norfolk, Worcestershire, Sunderland and Coventry. In Wales, all the local authorities are acting together to jointly endorse OEAP guidance in order to build on and enhance the advice contained in *Educational Visits: A Safety Guide for Learning Outside the Classroom* (the Welsh equivalent of HASPEV).

Further guidance on safety management of school trips has been published by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). It has produced a ['high level statement'](#) addressing school trips and outdoor learning activities.

The NEU was consulted on this document and is, therefore, able to recommend it. The central message of the guidance is that it is important to strike the right balance between



protecting pupils from risk and allowing them to learn from school trips. Striking the right balance means that:

- schools and staff should focus on managing real risks when planning trips
- those running trips should understand their roles, are supported and are competent to lead or take part in them
- opportunities are experienced to the full.

By the same token, those planning trips should avoid:

- excessive paperwork
- inappropriate risk assessment
- the mistaken belief that all risks can be eliminated.
- The HSE guidance states: "It is important that those running school trips act responsibly by
- putting sensible precautions in place, and making sure these work in practice;
- knowing when and how to apply contingency plans where they are necessary;
- heeding advice and warnings from others, for example those with local knowledge or specialist expertise (especially in respect of higher-risk activities)."

Further to this guidance, the HSE has published five [case studies](#) to illustrate examples of proportionate responses to planning and delivering school trips. [FAQ's](#) about school visits are also available.

## **2. Should teachers organise and take part in school visits?**

The NEU's longstanding advice to members on participation in school visits is that teachers must use their professional judgement in relation to their personal circumstances and aspirations. Unless the visit is in school time and is part of the curriculum for a particular subject, for example, a geography field trip, the involvement of teachers in school visits is entirely voluntary. Teachers are entitled to expect the highest standards of safety and support in the organisation and supervision of school visits.

Teachers need the benefit of a reasonable work/life balance. The two are linked. Many teachers regard school visits as an opportunity to extend their professionalism. If teachers are already pressured and stressed by a heavy workload the further pressures of organising and supervising school visits may be the cause of unacceptable safety hazards.

Teachers who do not choose to take on these burdens are entitled to decline to be involved in voluntary visits and will be supported by the NEU in doing so. The NEU will also support teachers who have a responsibility for curriculum-based visits in demands for the highest safety standards and for acknowledgement of the workload involved.

## **3. What about legal obligations and standards of care?**

### **Legal obligations and standards of care while in the UK**

Teachers involved in school visits should be fully aware of the standards of care demanded of them by the law. Such standards are those which, from an objective point



of view, can reasonably be expected from teachers generally applying skill and awareness of children's problems, needs and susceptibilities. The law expects that a teacher will do that which a parent with care and concern for the safety and welfare of his or her own child would do, bearing in mind that being responsible for up to twenty pupils can be very different from looking after a family. The legal duty of care expected of an individual teacher is, therefore, that which a caring teaching profession would in any case expect of itself.

This means in practice that a teacher must:

- ensure supervision of the pupils throughout the journey or visit according to professional standards and common sense<sup>1</sup>, and
- take reasonable steps to avoid exposing pupils to dangers which are foreseeable and beyond those with which the particular pupils can reasonably be expected to cope.

This does not imply constant 24-hour direct supervision. The need for direct supervision has to be judged by reference to the risks involved in the activities being undertaken. Employers have "vicarious liability" for the negligence of their employees at work. This means generally that employers take responsibility if their employees do not properly fulfil their safety obligations at work. Where a legal claim is made following an accident to a child in a community school, for example, and there is a suggestion of negligence on the part of the teacher, the claim will most likely be made against the local authority or other teacher employer if the teacher was at the time working "in the course of his or her employment".

### **Legal obligations and standards of care while abroad**

If the proposal is to take a journey abroad, contact should be made at an early stage with the embassy or tourist office of the country or countries concerned to check how the law of those countries may differ from that of the UK. Some countries have expectations of adults supervising children and young people which may differ from those in England and Wales. It is very important to build this consideration into planning and indeed even into whether the visit should go ahead.

Particular attention is needed with regard to foreign laws on hazardous activities. Dangerous ski-ing, for example, can attract heavy legal penalties both for the skier and for any adult supervisor. Advice should be obtained on the safety approval regimes governing any activity centres you intend to visit abroad and the regulations governing safety of accommodation. Only centres and residential facilities satisfying these local standards should be used.

More information on the legal framework for school visits is available in the [OEAP guidance](#).

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<sup>1</sup> Including regular head counts and occasional register checks



## **4. Organising a visit**

### **England**

Teachers should not be expected to start from square one without assistance and advice when asked to organise a school visit. No teacher should become involved in organising a school visit unless they have been provided with supportive documentation derived from the experience of others.

As mentioned earlier, the NEU believes that the current [DfE guidance](#) is of limited use to teachers in schools planning educational visits. It appears to be the product of a desire to reduce documentation and so-called red tape at the expense of in-depth advice. The result is a document which includes a brief overview of the core elements of running a school trip, but one that lacks the detailed content of previous government guidance. Most local authorities and other teacher employers, such as academies, foundation and voluntary aided schools have also issued guidance on this area, which is likely to be more detailed than that provided by the DfE.

The NEU therefore advises teachers to follow school guidelines, which should be in accordance with teacher employer advice such as that issued by local authorities. As previously stated, some local authorities have adopted the very good guidance produced by the OEAP.

### **Wales**

Teachers should not be expected to start from square one without assistance and advice when asked to organise a school visit. No teacher should become involved in organising a school visit unless he or she has been provided with supportive documentation derived from the experience of others. See also the section of this document on using tour operators.

The Welsh Government has adopted the framework set out by the OEAP and local authorities in Wales should use the OEAP national guidance as a framework for ensuring that they meet their requirements under health and safety legislation when organising educational visits. Welsh Government guidance on school visits is available at: [cadw.gov.wales/learning/educational-visits/](http://cadw.gov.wales/learning/educational-visits/)

The OEAP guidance is at: [oeapng.info](http://oeapng.info)

### **The planning process**

#### **Educational visit co-ordinators (EVCs)**

Until 2011 the DfE recommended that each school should have a designated educational visit co-ordinator (EVC), who may be the head teacher or some other member of staff with “a keen interest in the value of educational visits”. The current DfE guidance states however that there is no legal requirement for schools to appoint an EVC. By contrast, the OEAP guidance, which is adopted by the Welsh Government, states that “it is good practice for all establishments to have an EVC” who is “specifically competent”. Many employers do make it a requirement for schools to have an EVC in place.

The NEU expects that, where such post holders exist, they should be paid appropriately to their additional responsibilities and receive such support, including non-contact time,



as is necessary to discharge these responsibilities. In many cases, the role of the EVC will be taken on by the head teacher, though it can be fulfilled by any teacher with appropriate training and experience.

OEAP guidance states: “When appointing an EVC, establishments should ensure that the appointed person meets the criteria required or recommended by employer guidance. The EVC should be specifically competent. The level of competence required can be judged in relation to the size of the establishment as well as the extent and nature of the visits planned. Evidence of competence may be through qualification, but more usually will be through the experience of practical leadership over many years. Such a person should be an experienced visit leader with sufficient status within the establishment to guide the working practice of colleagues leading visits.”

Some schools could be tempted to confer the role of EVC on to a member of support staff. While this might be acceptable if the post holder concerned had the relevant skills cited above, the OEAP guidance emphasises that the role of EVC is “not an administrative role, although certain functions may be delegated to an administrator”.

Where the EVC role is attached to an administrative post or where a post holder is not an experienced visit leader, the OEAP states that “the EVC will require structured access to, and support from, a designated colleague who fits the recommended criteria”.

Furthermore, in the case of local authority (LA) schools, it is good practice for each LA to designate a named LA officer, generally an education adviser, who has responsibility for overseeing school educational visits and advising and assisting schools on their proposed activities.

### **The group leader**

The group leader responsible for organising the journey should ensure that the school EVC is fully informed of the proposed arrangements during the planning process. The proposals for the journey, including all of the matters set out below, should be presented to the co-ordinator for agreement. All colleagues who will be involved in, or otherwise affected by, the journey should also be fully informed of arrangements. While in the case of routine visits, the task of assessing and approving a visit would rest with the school EVC, it is good practice for all other visits to be directly approved by the employer, such as the local authority adviser with responsibility for school visits.

### **Risk assessments**

The risk assessment process is an important tool in ensuring health and safety at work. It means, simply, that employers set out to identify hazards to health and safety, evaluate the risk of harm resulting from those hazards, and take appropriate action to protect employees and others.

Regardless of the type of visit being planned, due consideration of the likely dangers and difficulties inherent in the trip must take place. Many local authorities and other employers have detailed guidance on visits, including risk assessments, which schools must follow. Additionally, the OEAP has produced comprehensive [guidance](#) on risk assessment for school trips.



A risk assessment for a visit need not be complex but it should be comprehensive. Safety must always be the prime consideration, even on low risk trips to a local historical site or museum. If the risks cannot be contained then the visit must not take place.

The risk assessment should be based on the following considerations:

1. What are the hazards?
2. Who might be affected by them?
3. What safety measures need to be in place to reduce risks to an acceptable level?
4. Can the group leader put the safety measures in place?
5. What steps will be taken in an emergency?

A good risk assessment for a school trip would consider, among other things:

- the venue – site and environment, including accommodation where relevant
- the group, including age range, fitness, competence and temperament
- the special educational or medical needs of pupils
- the programme of activities
- the staffing and issues relating to effective supervision
- transport issues, including suitable seat belts and seat restraints, and driver accommodation
- quality and suitability of available equipment
- seasonal issues such as 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.

Copies of the risk assessment should be given to all teachers/supervisors on the visit – in addition to EVCs, head teachers and employers as required – so that everyone can be clear about the nature and level of risk management required for each individual trip. Frequent visits to local venues such as swimming pools may not need a separate risk assessment for each visit. But circumstances change – for example, changes to an existing risk assessment might be needed for different groups of pupils with different needs across a period of time.

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.

When planning trips abroad or those involving longer journeys, the suitability of overnight travel should be considered. Factors that should be taken into account include fatigue, weather conditions and traffic density etc. In many cases it may be more suitable to arrange overnight accommodation to allow pupils, staff and drivers to get a sufficient period of rest. However, when overnight journeys are unavoidable, consideration must be given to allowing the driver/s sufficient rest during the previous day. It may also be necessary to monitor drivers during the overnight drive, especially if the drive involves long periods of driving on the motorway.

When carrying out the risk assessment for residential trips, the group leader should check that suitable accommodation is provided for the driver. Tour operators have been



known to provide unsuitable driver accommodation including rooms shared with strangers and rooms of a poorer standard than those provided to the rest of the group. Unsuitable accommodation can prevent drivers getting suitable rest and can increase fatigue, thus increasing dangers when on the road.

It is important to remember that a risk assessment is to an extent a 'work in progress' and constant monitoring of risks throughout the visit by the group leader is vital. For specific advice on adventure activities see section 6 of this document.

### **Staffing and supervision**

OEAP guidance states that "ratios are a risk management issue, and should be determined through the process of risk assessment". The guidance goes on to say that "it is not possible to set down definitive staff/student ratios for a particular age group or activity, although the law does specify minimum ratios for early years".

Adequate levels of supervision and staffing must be established for the journey based on such factors as the sex, age and ability of the children, the presence of pupils with special educational needs, the nature/length of the journey, the nature of activities to be undertaken and the experience and competence of the staff involved.

Guidance issued by the Government in 1998 suggested the following 'starting points' for consideration of staffing ratios. These were intended as a general guide for visits to local historical sites and museums or for local walks.

- One adult for every six pupils in school years 1 to 3 (under-5s reception classes should have a higher ratio).
- One adult for every ten to 15 pupils in school years 4 to 6.
- One adult for every 15-20 pupils in school year 7 onwards.

The Welsh Government's recommended staffing ratios are in line with the above. The above guidelines make it clear that higher ratios may be appropriate in particular cases, such as for higher risk activities, for particular groups of pupils or for all trips abroad. Higher ratios are also recommended for swimming activities.

The NEU's advice on this issue is set out below:

- These ratios should be regarded as the minimum appropriate staffing ratios for school journeys.
- These ratios should preferably be interpreted as referring to the number of staff needed to supervise the party. Voluntary helpers may be involved in assisting teachers with the organisation and supervision of visits but teachers will retain primary responsibility for supervising the party at all times.
- A minimum of two teachers should be involved in every school journey, regardless of how many other adults are helping. Given the possibility of members of the group needing to be taken home or back to school or to hospital, at least two teachers are needed in order that one teacher may remain in charge where another is called away.
- With a mixed party it is desirable that there should be teachers or other responsible adults of each sex accompanying the group.



- Supervision arrangements for swimming activities should include provision for supervision by qualified lifesavers.
- At least one member of staff should be a qualified first aider and aware of the special medical needs of any member of the party.
- Newly qualified teachers should not normally lead school parties in their first year of teaching.

A note on staffing ratios for pupils with special educational needs can be found appended to this document (Appendix 1).

The [Early Years and Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#) sets out specific legal requirements for minimum ratios in this age group, which apply both indoors and on outings. These are complex, and include requirements about the qualifications of the staff. In summary, they require a minimum of two adults with a group, including at least one person who has a current paediatric first aid certificate, with minimum ratios as follows:

- age under 2, 1:3
- age 2, 1:4
- age 3+, 1:8 or 1:13 depending on setting, time of day and staff qualifications.

The framework states that, for each type of outing, providers must carry out a full risk assessment, which includes an assessment of required adult:child ratios. This assessment must take account of the nature of the outing, and consider whether it is necessary to exceed the minimum requirements: a ratio of 1:1 may often be necessary on an outing. The assessment must be reviewed before embarking on each specific outing.

Although these requirements do not apply to reception classes in maintained schools, they could still provide useful guidance.

Where adult helpers are involved, necessary checks should be undertaken. Schools will need to ask adult helpers to apply for a Standard and Enhanced Disclosure from the Disclosure Barring Service (DBS). The DBS acts as a central access point to criminal records information held on the Police National Computer and to the DfE's List 99, which contains details of people considered unsuitable to work with children. All helpers should be briefed as necessary to ensure they are able to assist effectively.

### **Parents**

It is important that parents should sign a document affirming that they have read and understood what the visit may involve, the activities which will be undertaken and the authority which the supervising teachers will have to deal with problems and emergencies.

Such forms, usually called consent forms, should be obtained signed for each child participating in the journey. It is best to secure these signatures at an early stage after planning has been completed since if a parent does object, it may be necessary to make a harsh decision that the pupil cannot participate. If this happens at a late stage there may be problems about cancellation.





The forms should cover such matters as emergency medical treatment, medical conditions, GP's address, dietary requirements, home telephone number/address and other details. It is particularly important that the teachers supervising the trip know whether the child will need medication or other special attention while on the trip. This information may raise questions about whether the child can participate if the supervising teachers judge that they cannot safely deal with these needs or are unwilling to do so.

Ordinarily teachers will not want to deprive a pupil of the experience of the visit unless that is considered necessary. Where it is necessary, discovering the possible problems at an early stage will at least reduce the disappointment.

Parents should also be given full written details regarding the organisation of the visit, including those involving short trips during the day. Such details should specify the purpose, destination and location of the visit; the programme; relevant dates and times; travel and accommodation; standards of behaviour expected of children; staffing; special clothing required; insurance cover; telephone numbers; and emergency procedures for contacting parents. A meeting might be planned to cover relevant issues and to give parents the opportunity to raise issues of concern to them.

The DfE has published a '[single consent form](#)', intended to be signed by parents when a child enrolls at a school, which will cover that child's participation on any school trip throughout their time at the school. Parents must still be told in advance of each activity (unless it takes place wholly within school hours and no charge is being made<sup>2</sup>) and be given the opportunity to withdraw their child from any particular visit or activity, so it is difficult to see how the single consent form will really reduce paperwork for schools. Some parents may, understandably, object to such an arrangement which will create additional workload and bureaucracy.

### **Excluding pupils from school visits**

The Equality Act 2010 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) have simplified and strengthened the discrimination laws which protect school pupils from unfair treatment. It is unlawful for a school or other education provider to treat a disabled student unfavourably. Such treatment could amount to:

- direct discrimination
- indirect discrimination
- harassment.

Every effort should be made to make school journeys accessible to all who wish to participate, irrespective of disability. Teachers should plan for inclusion from the outset, and should make appropriate 'reasonable adjustments' to enable the participation of disabled pupils.

In some cases, particularly where poor behaviour is an issue, this may not be possible. Where the behaviour is a direct consequence of a child's disability, however, schools will need to demonstrate that they have considered such reasonable adjustments that could

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<sup>2</sup> With the exception of nursery age children



have been made, in order to comply with the law. Pupils should not be permitted to participate in school visits where their behaviour may be such that they present a danger to themselves or to others, until such time as their behaviour can be modified. For more information on taking pupils with special educational needs on school trips, see Appendix 1.

### **Preliminary visits**

The NEU recommends that, where possible, the group leader should make preliminary visits so as to become familiar with the places and activities to be encountered. Visits should be followed by reviews to identify problems, consider matters arising which may be relevant on future visits, and to prepare reports to educational visit co-ordinators.

OEAP guidance states: "All visits should be thoroughly researched to establish the suitability of the venue and to check that facilities and third party provision will meet group expectations. Such information gathering is essential in assessing the requirements for effective supervision of young people. It is a vital dimension of risk management ... wherever reasonably practicable, it is good practice to carry out a preliminary visit."

### **Safety and emergencies**

Pupils should be given appropriate information and guidance prior to the visit so that they understand the standard of behaviour which is expected of them and why rules must be followed. Lack of control and discipline can be a major cause of accidents.

A clearly defined safety code for the journey, including rules of conduct and behaviour standards, and routine and emergency safety procedures, should therefore be laid down in advance and made known to all pupils, staff, helpers and parents. Procedures such as regular head counts, and occasional registers, should be built into such routines. A separate copy of the safety code should be kept with the 'named person' – the point of contact at the school for the duration of the trip.

Insurance arrangements – medical insurance as well as liability cover for out-of-school activities – should be appropriately dealt with. OEAP has produced an excellent [summary](#) of the different types of insurance that are needed with regard to school trips.

### **If things go wrong**

Even the best planned visit can be disrupted by unforeseen events such as illness of staff or pupils. Careful emergency planning can, however, mitigate the trauma of being caught up in an emergency. Staff on school visits must be given school and local authority telephone numbers that they can use at any time of day or night in the event of an emergency.

The school educational visits co-ordinator, head teacher or other appropriate named person within the school should be provided with the programme for the trip, contact telephone numbers while on the journey, the planned emergency safety procedures and a full list of all participants and their home contact details. A chain of contact should be arranged in advance from that person for swift communication in case of emergency. A



senior manager, such as a local authority duty officer, should be contactable at all times in the event of an incident.

It is recommended that paperwork, including parental authorisation for emergency medical treatment, insurance documentation, medical insurance cards such as EHICs<sup>3</sup> for EU journeys, and passports for all overseas trips, be carried at all times by staff, instead of being left behind in accommodation. This will prevent any delays in accessing treatment. Additionally, separate copies of all such documentation should be kept at school so they can be made available at short notice, should the need arise.

It is important to re-assess risks as the visit proceeds. Changes in the weather need to be monitored. Changes to the itinerary may introduce new hazards not covered in the original risk assessment. Regular head counting of pupils should take place, particularly before leaving a venue. Pupils should be readily identifiable, either by their uniform or by a brightly coloured cap or backpack.

Finally, should an emergency occur, it is likely that the school will be approached by the press. The school should have proper procedures in place for dealing with media enquiries during an emergency; these should be set out in a school or local authority's emergency procedures policy.

Further, more detailed advice on managing emergency situations can be found on the OEAP website. Off Site Visit Emergencies: the employer's role can be found at: [oeapng.info/downloads/download-info/4-1a-critical-incident-management-the-employers-role](http://oeapng.info/downloads/download-info/4-1a-critical-incident-management-the-employers-role)

## **5. Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) and the Quality Badge scheme**

In February 2005, the Government launched its Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto. One aspect of the manifesto was the development of Quality Badges for providers of outdoor education facilities/residential courses. The badge system was intended to assist those organising school trips to identify easily those organisations and settings providing quality 'outside the classroom' activities. These include venues for field study and activity centres, museums, historic houses, theatres, galleries, zoos, botanic gardens and farms.

The scheme, which has been praised by Ofsted, was launched in October 2008 and the first awards were made from 1 February 2009. The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom took over the management of the award scheme on 1 April 2009 and now has a small team of people working full time to support both providers and users as well as promoting and developing the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Quality Badge in response to feedback.

The NEU has been supportive of the Quality Badge scheme on the basis that it should assist those planning school trips and reduce bureaucracy and workload at school level. It is important to note that the Quality Badge scheme does not cover adventurous activities covered, for the time being, by the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations

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<sup>3</sup> European Health Insurance Cards (EHICs) are renewable, so checks should be made prior to the trip to ensure that all participants have up-to-date cards.



2004. More information on the Quality Badge scheme and other manifesto materials is available at: [lotc.org.uk](http://lotc.org.uk)

## **6. Adventure activities**

Particular care is needed when organising and supervising adventure activities. Commercially-run outdoor activity centres are currently subject to the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 2004 which established a licensing system and specific safety standards that centres must meet.

Enquiries should be made about similar regulatory regimes effective in any foreign countries which are to be visited. Where such local regulations are in force, they should be followed. Only centres approved in accordance with such regulations should be used.

### **Centre-led adventure activities**

The Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 2004 require that persons offering certain adventure activities on a commercial basis to young people under the age of 18 must hold a licence to do so. The regulations cover LA-run centres but do not cover non-commercial centres or schools offering activities to their own pupils.

Schools which use activity centres run either by commercial bodies or by the LA should check that centres offering the activities listed below have an up-to-date licence as required by the regulations:

- caving (including pot holing, mine exploration and cave diving)
- climbing (including rock climbing, abseiling, gorge walking, ghyll scrambling and sea level traversing)
- trekking, ie journeying on foot, horse or pedal cycle or ski-ing over terrain which is moorland or more than 600 metres above sea level and from which it would take more than 30 minutes travelling time to reach any accessible road or refuge (including walking, fell running, orienteering, pony trekking, mountain biking, off-piste ski-ing, off-piste snowboarding, skating and sledging)
- watersports, including canoeing, kayaking, dragon boating, wave ski-ing, white water rafting, sailing and sailboarding.
- The Adventure Activities Licensing Service, which carries out inspections and issues licences on the HSE's behalf, must ensure in granting a licence that:
  - the centre's operators have assessed the risks to young persons engaged in the particular adventure activity and instituted the necessary safety precautions to control the risks
  - the instructors have the training, experience, qualifications, personal qualities and communication skills to ensure the safety of participants, taking into account their age and any special educational needs.

The Adventure Activities Licensing Service keeps a register of licences, including the names of licensed centres and the activities for which they are licensed. Licences do not have to be held for all dangerous activities, just those described in the regulations, and some activity centres will offer a mixture of activities of which only some fall within the licensing scheme. Centres are obliged, however, to describe in their publicity material exactly which adventure activities are covered by their licence and which are not. The NEU advises schools to consult the licence [register](#) before making any bookings.



The NEU advises that LA-maintained schools should seek the advice of the LA before booking places at an activity centre offering activities that are not part of the licensing scheme. Foundation and independent schools and academies will need to seek other appropriate external/employer advice.

All schools organising visits to activity centres should, nevertheless, satisfy themselves that the activities offered, the type of instruction, the level of supervision and any prevailing conditions on the day an activity is scheduled to take place are suitable for their own particular group of children before embarking on any hazardous pursuits.

### **Proposals to replace the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA)**

In 2018, the HSE consulted on the future of the AALA. The options proposed were to:

1. Retain the AALR regulations and current licensing scheme underpinned by the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and increase fees; or
2. Retain the AALR regulations and current licensing scheme underpinned by the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and increase fees and extend the activities in scope; or
3. Removal of the AALR regulations and move to an industry-led, not for profit accreditation scheme underpinned by the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, to provide assurance to users of outdoor activities.

When responding to the consultation, the NEU sought the advice of the Outdoor Education Advisors Panel (OEAP) who advised that their preferred choice was option 3 – replacement of the AALA with an industry-led scheme. While the NEU had previously been concerned about the possibility of deregulation and had argued against previous attempts to replace the AALA, we support the OEAP position that the proposed industry-led scheme would be far more beneficial to schools than the current AALA. This is because the AALA is limited to four activities, whereas a wider scheme would encompass all activities. It would also broaden the scope to include issues such as the quality of educational provision, child safeguarding and transport safety, and would make it easier for schools to select providers.

As of June 2018, the current position is that the AALA regulations were still in place. The HSE board reviewed the consultation responses in June 2018, but was unable to reach a decision. It has asked for more information about option 3 before coming to a final decision. Therefore, if it proposes changes to the regulation of adventure activities, the NEU will advise members accordingly.

### **Water-based activities**

Although deaths of pupils on school visits are thankfully extremely rare, many of those that have occurred in recent years have involved water-based activities, whether in swimming pools, the sea, lakes or rivers.

The NEU advises that no water-based activity should take place unless at least one qualified life-saver is present, even if pupils are just paddling. Only life-savers whose qualifications have been verified and are up-to-date should be used. Life-saving qualifications remain valid for only 24 months at a time. If teachers are concerned that life-savers are not engaged in proper supervision, or are not able to exercise adequate



supervision, for whatever reason, the teacher in charge should suspend the activity immediately.

### **Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE)**

Comprehensive guidance on running DofE award activities can be found on the [DofE website](#).

DofE programmes are delivered under licence by more than 400 'operating authorities' throughout the UK (eg local authorities, uniformed organisations, charities and businesses). They are responsible for the administration of the DofE in their area and for authorisation of awards. Each operating authority has a number of DofE centres, managed by a centre co-ordinator. In each DofE centre there can be one or more DofE groups, each run by a DofE leader.

All DofE centres have to be authorised by a licensed operating authority to ensure they meet specific standards of safety, child protection, training etc. Anyone wishing to set up a centre or run a group should contact their local DofE operating authority – go to: [dofe.org/takepart/](http://dofe.org/takepart/)

### **Adventurous activities abroad and BS 8848**

There are an increasing number of organisations and individuals that offer a wide variety of overseas experiences to people of various ages and ability. Many take a very responsible approach and give much useful information to prospective travellers.

Nevertheless, there have been a number of widely-publicised incidents and deaths. In order to provide some rigour and uniformity of standard to the provision of adventurous travel abroad, the British Standard for Adventurous Activities 8848 (BS 8848) was developed by the British Standards Institute (BSI) working in partnership with a number of expert bodies, such as the AALA, the Royal Geographical Society, Girlguiding UK and the Young Explorers Trust.

The standard is designed to help venture providers demonstrate to prospective participants that their ventures are properly managed and well organised. The NEU believes that, especially given the current shortage of detailed advice in this field, BS 8848 could provide a valuable benchmark against which the health and safety standards of venture providers might be judged.

There are, however, caveats to consider.

BS 8848 recommends that potential participants can initially determine that their selected venture provider conforms to the standard by checking that it claims compliance on its marketing materials and by comparing the processes and procedures used by the venture provider with those required by the standard. The NEU does not regard this as being a robust means of checking compliance with BS 8848. BS 8848 goes on to state that, ultimately, compliance should be verified by an independent third party. This should be carried out via the employment of an appropriately competent body to assess their scheme and confirm that it does indeed meet the requirements of the standard. The NEU recommends that schools should



always seek evidence of rigorous third party verification, by a demonstrably competent body, before embarking on any plans.

All British Standards are voluntary. Nevertheless, the BSI states that if there should ever be circumstances where a consumer and provider have gone to law over a dispute, British Standards are one of the established sources of reference for judging whether organisations have behaved in accordance with recognised good practice.

It should be noted here that some venture providers target schools to disseminate details of ventures such as voluntary charity fundraising trips and gap year projects. Schools should be wary of acting as the go-between in such situations, and should certainly refrain from co-operating with any organisation whose compliance with BS 8848 is in the slightest doubt. Copies of BS 8848 can be bought [online](#).

## **7. Using tour operators**

Many school trips, particularly residential visits either abroad or in the UK, are arranged through tour operators. When selecting a tour operator it is important to choose a reputable company with externally verified safety management systems. The NEU supports the School Travel Forum (STF), a group of tour operators which have developed a rigorous code of practice to which all its member companies must adhere. STF member companies must undergo an annual external verification of their safety systems and suppliers, including spot checks on all key components of the arrangements they offer to schools.

Choosing a STF member tour operator does not mean that schools do not have to undertake risk assessments. It does mean, however, that teachers can be confident that the main components of a school package – for example, travel arrangements, food, accommodation and fire safety – have been organised with health and safety as the chief concern. Choosing an STF member should also reduce the workload involved in organising trips as well as providing a large degree of protection for teachers and pupils. School party leaders can select STF members displaying the STF Approved logo or via the [website](#).

The website will enable schools to verify a tour operator's membership of the STF and the site contains full information on the STF code of practice, as well as offering a wide variety of useful information and links for party leaders. Party leaders will also be able to make use of the STF's email advice line on all matters relating to school journey arrangements.

## **8. School swimming**

NEU health and safety guidance on school swimming is available on the NEU website. It includes detailed advice on appropriate qualifications for those involved in swimming and lifesaving activities, safe supervision ratios, operating procedures, emergency procedures and a range of other relevant matters.



## 9. Transport

### Coaches

School trips, especially those which include overseas travel, are likely to require coach travel. When using hired coaches, the key safety factors to consider are: the driver, the coach and equipment, the company and the route or itinerary.

When choosing a coach provider:

- Check that the coaches have appropriate seat belts for the age of the pupils (see below for more information on seat belts).
- Ensure that the chosen coach company will not subcontract to another company, as the subcontractor may have different standards.
- Ask for copies of the operators vehicle, public liability and employer's liability insurances.
- Confirm that the coach company has a specific risk assessment for group travel with children and young people.
- Confirm that vehicles undergo four-weekly safety checks.
- If travelling abroad, check that the driver has experience in driving the coach in the expected conditions, eg mountain roads and in snowy conditions.
- Ask if the coach company has any external accreditation or audit such as the BUSK Benchmark, CoachMarque or Guild of British Coach Operators.

School employers should be wary about providers that offer significantly lower prices, as this could be at the expense of less rigorous health and safety standards. They should instead choose providers based on value rather than cost alone.

Before departure, the group leader should check the location of emergency exits in the coach (including rear doors, windows and roof hatches), making sure that access is clear and they are clearly signposted, and the location of any emergency equipment (eg first aid box). Staff should also position themselves around the coach rather than all sitting in the same location, and specifically adjacent to emergency exits to help with evacuation should an emergency occur.

Further guidance on coaches is available from the [OEAP guide](#).

### Minibuses

Full details of rules governing school minibuses, in particular those affecting seatbelt requirements for minibuses and coaches, and licensing requirements for minibus drivers, can be found in the NEU briefing [Safety on School Minibuses](#).

### Private cars

The NEU regards the use of teachers' private cars on school trips as inadvisable. No teacher should be compelled to take pupils in their car. Where teachers volunteer to transport pupils in this way, they should make sure they have the correct type of motor insurance (business use) and should never agree to drive individual children because of the risk of unfounded allegations (unless it is an emergency). Detailed OEAP advice on use of private cars is available on their website.





#### 10. Seat belts and child restraints

When transport for school trips is arranged, the group leader will need to consider when and where seat belts and child restraints should be used. Full details of the requirements on seat belts and child restraints are available in the NEU guidance *Safety on School Minibuses and Child Car Seats*.

Check also the section of the OEAP guidance on seat belts and child restraints.

#### 11. Further Information

NEU guidance available at: [neu.org.uk](http://neu.org.uk)

*Safety on School Minibuses*

*Safety in School Swimming*

[DfE – Health and Safety Advice on Legal Duties and Powers](#)

[Welsh Government guidance](#)

[HSE: School trips and outdoor learning activities: Tackling the health and safety myths](#)

[Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel \(OEAP\)](#)

[Council for Learning Outside the Classroom](#)

#### 12. Action points for safety reps

Make sure that:

1. your school has a designated and appropriately trained educational visits co-ordinator (EVC)
2. your school's procedures on school journeys are in line with DfE/Welsh Government, local authority/employer and NEU guidance
3. the school's procedures, local authority/employer and DfE/Welsh Government guidance are available and made known to all staff
4. these procedures are actually followed in your school.



## **Appendix 1**

### **Staffing levels for visits involving pupils with special needs**

The general guidance on staffing levels for school visits set out in the main body of this document is valid for visits involving pupils with special educational needs (SEN). There are, however, additional points which need to be considered.

Higher staff/pupil ratios than those formerly recommended by the DfE and still recommended by the Welsh Government will be required. Individual risk assessments will be also be required to ensure that the specific needs of individual pupils can be addressed. The results of the risk assessment will indicate the staffing needs of a particular visit. It would not be appropriate to recommend rigid staffing levels for children with special needs, as their needs will differ too greatly. The following factors have been identified as likely to impact upon the decision on staffing levels:

- the need to administer medication
- the need for a member of staff of the same sex to accompany a child to the toilet
- the likelihood of a pupil seeking to abscond – most venues will be less secure than the average special school
- the likelihood of a medical emergency arising
- the way in which being away from the normal setting will affect behaviour – for example, some pupils have unpredictable fears and phobias which will be more difficult to cope with out of the normal school environment
- the need for staffing levels to allow staff working on a 1:1 basis to have a break from watching a child continuously throughout the day
- recognition of the fact that, if a member of staff is driving a minibus, s/he will not be able to deal with emergencies which arise en route and that at least one other member of staff will be required to fulfil that role
- the need to plan for contingencies such as lack of disabled access or parking spaces
- the risk of violence/assault
- the need for manual handling of pupils
- the need for restraint and deployment of trained staff.

Even though all these issues need to be considered in the context of a classroom setting, being away from the normal environment will introduce extra hazards which mean that staffing levels will need to be higher. For example, a child's behavioural problems may be effectively contained within a school setting. Leaving that setting may mean that those behavioural issues become more of a safety issue. For example, some children may have aversions to particular sounds or animals and their intense fear may cause them to behave violently. In many cases, parents will be able to offer helpful advice on how a child is likely to behave out of school.

A further issue to consider is the impact of the experience of the staff upon the safety of the visit. It is important, not only that the group leader and accompanying staff are experienced in special education, but also that they are experienced in, and familiar with, the particular needs and behaviour patterns of the pupils who will be taken on the visit.



Decisions on whether a particular child may be taken on a visit should not rest solely with the teacher. Where a teacher is concerned about the risks involved, it is helpful for a meeting to be held between the head teacher, class teacher, parent, support staff who work with the child, and possibly their GP and any third party provider. This should help identify a way in which the child can be safely taken on the trip.

It is important to note that it is standard accepted practice for mainstream pupils to have better staff/pupil ratios out of school than those which operate in the classroom. The same principles should apply to special needs pupils. Even one-to-one staff/pupil ratios may need to be improved upon.

Where members of staff are not happy about the staffing ratio for a particular visit, the visit must not go ahead.