



The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Expedition Policy Buckinghamshire Council



The Cottesloe School

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| Policy Type: | Non Statutory |
| Reviewed by: | Alex Curtis (Second in PE and Outdoor Education Coordinator) and Carolyn Stirk (Policies Governor) |
| Date: | March 2025 |
| Approved by: | Resources and People Committee - March 2025 |
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Abbreviations & Terminology

AALA – Adventurous Activity Licensing Authority: An organisation that is part of the Health & Safety Executive. AAPs must hold an AALA licence to offer expeditions in ‘Wild Country’.

Assessor Network – A panel covering each ‘Wild Country’ area within the UK. Centres must notify each area using Red, Green and Blue forms at least 6 weeks prior to the expedition. In addition they can provide access to assessors if required (formerly – ‘Wild Country Panel’).

BC – Buckinghamshire Council.

BEAL – Basic Expedition Assistant Leader: A nationally recognised qualification, NVQ Level 2. Governing Body is Sports Leader UK

BEL – Basic Expedition Leader: A nationally recognised qualification, NVQ Level 3. Governing body is Sports Leader UK.

Centre/Unit: An organisation who run the DofE Award under the licence held by the Operating Authority or other Licensed Organisation.

CLA – Countryside Leaders Award: A regionally recognised qualification. Governing body Strong Roots Training.

Close Supervision – where the Supervisor is close enough to intervene if necessary, in order to offer support and guidance and/or to stop mistakes being made. (Ref: DofE Expedition Guide:13th Edition p.111) [DofE Guide](#).

Daily Report Form – A form used to note ‘clear days,’ minor incidents, notes of importance for expeditions.

Direct Supervision – where the Supervisor is in direct contact with the team and is accompanying them. (Ref: DofE Expedition Guide:13th Edition p.111) [DofE Guide](#).

Expedition Team – Must be between 4-7 participants.

Expedition Variation – where participants have individual needs that mean one or more of the 20 conditions cannot be met ((Ref: DofE Expedition Guide:13th Edition p.14 and *The 20 conditions of the Expedition Section* – www.dofe.org). [DofE Guide](#).

Incident Report Form – A form attached to the ‘Serious Incident Cards’ found on EVOLVE, used to note details of severe incidents/crises.

HML – Hill & Moorland Leader: A nationally recognised qualification. Governing body is the Mountain Leader Training Board. Replaces the Walking Group Leader award.

LLA – Lowland Leader Award. A nationally recognised qualification. Governing body is the Mountain Leader Training Board. This must include the Expedition Skills Module.

ML – Mountain Leader: A nationally recognised qualification. Governing body is the Mountain Leader Training Board.

MOD – Ministry of Defence.

NGB – National Governing Body. An organisations that administers an award such as the Mountain Leader Award.

OA - Operating Authority: the organisation that holds the licence to manage the award, maintain good practice & standards and monitor the Units/Centres who operate under their licence. In the case of Buckinghamshire they are employed through Buckinghamshire Council.

Ratios

Please read ratios carefully and understand that at times ratios refer to the number of staff to participants and at other times refer to the number of staff to groups.

Staff to participants will always be written in this format: **1 : 7**

Staff to groups will always be written in this format: **one to four**

Remote Supervision – Where the Supervisor remains out of site and hearing of the team and allows them to get on with the expedition without any intervention. (Ref: DofE Expedition Guide:13th Edition [DofE Guide](#)).

Supervision Plan – A form designed by the DofE for noting potential supervision options for groups, the form can be downloaded from the DofE website (www.dofe.org). This should be used in conjunction with the location specific risk assessment.

Foreword

This document should be read in conjunction with the following **National Guidance** documents.

7b – Duke of Edinburgh’s Award expeditions <https://oeapng.info/download/1206/>

7k – Unaccompanied Expeditions <https://oeapng.info/download/4056/>

It is the responsibility of all schools and academies to obtain a Direct Licence from the DofE offices in order to run the scheme within their establishment see <https://www.dofe.org/>

LA schools that are Directly Licensed must continue to follow the Council DofE Policy and submit their expeditions on Evolve for approval by the Buckinghamshire Council Outdoor Education Adviser (OEA).

Academies and Independent organisations may choose their DofE policy and choose to enter their expeditions on Evolve. If entered on Evolve, ‘approval’ by the OEA will be by request and within the scope described in the document in Evolve. Academies are advised to continue entering their expeditions on Evolve because amongst other reasons it is the usual place to refer for information in an emergency.

The guidance and ratios set out in this document are the minimum requirements expected by the OEA for approval to be granted for a visit submission. If you or your AAP are unable to meet these standards please contact the OEA at the earliest opportunity.

This document primarily covers walking expeditions; however suggested ratios/qualifications have been added for water based activities as these have become more popular. For expeditions using other modes of transport please request specific guidance.

All resources named in this policy can be requested from Buckinghamshire Outdoor Education Advisor.

If you have any questions or are in need of advice, then please do not hesitate to contact the Outdoor Educational Advisor, details below.

Buckinghamshire Council Contact:

Outdoor Education Adviser: Mike Harwin
Email: mike.harwin@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Mobile: 07890 395028

Walking expedition staffing ratios and supervision

Training exercises – Direct supervision

Practice Expeditions – Direct and close supervision

| Expedition Type | Minimum Expedition Leader Qualification | Minimum Leader to Team ratio | Minimum Expedition Staff Qualification | Minimum Staff to Team ratio |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Practice | LLA/BEL/CLA | One to four | Experienced Adult | One to two |
| Assessment | LLA/BEL/CLA | One to four | Experienced Adult | One to two |

Assessment Expeditions – Normally remote supervision, using close when necessary

- Groups must be trained and supervised by appropriately qualified staff
- Ratio of 1:7 (1 qualified instructor to one walking group)
- There should be a minimum of 2 staff members on any trip

Qualification and Supervising ratio LOWLAND (e.g. Chiltern Hills, New Forest, Forest of Dean)

MOORLAND/UPLAND (e.g. Dartmoor, Peak District, Yorkshire Dales)

| Expedition Type | Minimum Expedition Leader Qualification | Minimum Leader to Team ratio | Minimum Expedition Staff Qualification | Minimum Staff to Team ratio |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Practice | HML/WGL | One to two | Experienced Adult | One to one |
| Assessment | HML/WGL | One to two | Experienced Adult | One to one |

MOUNTAIN (e.g. Snowdonia, the Lake District, the Cairngorms)

| Expedition Type | Minimum Expedition Leader Qualification | Minimum Leader to Team ratio | Minimum Expedition Staff Qualification | Minimum Staff to Team ratio |
|-----------------|---|------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Practice | ML | One to two | Experienced Adult | One to one |
| Assessment | ML | One to two | Experienced Adult | One to one |

Example

1. 7 young people on a Gold practice in one group would be accompanied by one ML. They would need another competent / experienced adult of the opposite gender on the trip, but this person does not need any specialist skill or experience. HOWEVER, 8 young people undertaking an identical expedition must be in two teams. So they need 2 ML holders, but no assistant.

2. 14 Young people on a gold assessment would only need one ML holder and one competent assistant, as they are deemed competent by their supervisor and the expedition has undergone an approval process, AS LONG AS THEY ARE ONLY IN 2 TEAMS.

3. 16 Young people on a gold practice trip and in 4 groups need 4 ML/WGL holders (one walking with each group). BUT, when they come to the assessed, they need 2 qualified and 2 experienced. However, if 2 drop out, and the groups decide to merge into 2 teams of 7, when it comes to the practice and qualifying, they only need 1 qualified and 1 competent / experienced assistant, as there are only 2 teams.

Expedition Leaders should also hold:

- Current First Aid Qualification: Lowland minimum 8hrs, Moorland/Mountain minimum 16hrs (more details in first aid section)
- DofE accredited Expedition Supervisors Course
- Enhanced DBS check (previously CRB check)

An Experienced Adult should have:

- Knowledge of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- Knowledge of the expedition environment
- Should have sufficient technical abilities to be self-sufficient in the environment
- Should be known to the Expedition Leader
- Should **not** be a parent of a participant

A designated Expedition Deputy Leader should be named who is competent to perform the duties of the Expedition Leader should the need arise.

If you are unsure about any of the above, please contact the Outdoor Education Advisor.

Expedition Supervision Arrangements

- If the minimum staff Buckinghamshire Council ratios cannot be met contact the Buckinghamshire Outdoor Education Adviser as soon as possible to discuss appropriate supervision plans.
- Expedition staff will employ a range of supervision styles depending on the terrain, weather conditions and competence of the group.
- When NGB qualified staff are supervising two teams on assessed expeditions, the supervisor must be able to reach either team in the event of an emergency. This means both teams must be in the same area.
- Expedition staff will be familiar with the terms 'Direct Supervision', 'Close Supervision' and 'Remote Supervision' as described in the DofE Expedition Guide, 13th Edition. [DofE Guide..](#)
- The Expedition Leader will perform a detailed location specific risk assessment, identify all local hazards on each group's route.
- At Silver Assessment and Gold level, groups may not be directly supervised overnight but participants must be checked into their camp in the evening, especially if wild camping. Participants must also know how to access staff overnight if issues arise, and clearly understand their escape routes and what to do in an emergency. This should also be clearly stated in the parental letter and event specific plan.

Additional guidance:

- Clearly state how participants will be supervised, whether staff will be on the same campsites and define what 'wild camping' actually entails in the parental letters.
- Where necessary set up a base camp for the duration of the expedition and consider access to shelter or bunkhouse/camping barns.
- Assess how realistic it is for teams/leaders to access additional staff in an emergency. This will depend on how remote the routes go and the availability of phone reception.
- Plan for the worst case scenario by ensuring you have thought through and noted contingency plans and escape routes.
- For assessed events try to liaise with your assessor to ensure teams are not over/under supervised.

Late Back Procedure

- A formal written late back procedure should be included with the ESP.
- It is expected that one person will be nominated to control **all** communications with the Home Contact and Mountain Rescue, and then control distribution of search parties.

First Aid

- All staff should hold a current first aid qualification. The recommended course is a 16hr outdoor-based course such as an ITC or REC accredited course.
- Expedition staff should carry a substantial first aid kit and spare personal medication for participants in their group e.g. epipens, inhalers.
- All participants have undertaken at least basic first aid training (in accordance with the DofE training syllabus).
- All participants must carry personal first aid kits/personal medication plus the group must share a larger first aid kit to cover more substantial first aid issues.

Staff documentation

It is expected that all staff on the expedition will carry the following documents:

- Event Specific Plan (or relevant risk assessments)
- Critical Incident Procedures.
- Medical Summary sheet (to include staff details).
- Summary list of all staff contact details & the emergency contact details.

The Expedition Leader & Expedition Deputy will carry in addition to the above:

- Hard copies of all the 'Consent Forms'.
- Emergency contact details including doctors information for all participants & staff.

Serious Incident & Near Miss

Where a 'Serious Incident' or 'Near Miss' has occurred an Incident Report should be completed. This should be attached to EVOLVE and emailed to the Buckinghamshire Council Outdoor Education Advisor who will then investigate & liaise with the Incident Team at DofE Head Office. For severe incidents the events Emergency Contact is asked to keep both Buckinghamshire Council and the DofE Duty Officer up to date on the situation.

Examples of a Serious Incident/Near Miss as defined by DofE Head Office are:

Serious Injury, Fatality, Emergency Services Call Out, Minor injuries (requiring GP or hospitalisation), Conflict with landowners or other members of the public, Near Miss

Centres are also expected to follow their own policies to conform to Health & Safety expectations such as internal investigations & RIDDOR forms.

Walking Expeditions at Gold Level – additional guidance

Gold events are required to take place in Wild Country areas and a thorough training programme should be implemented to prepare participants for the challenges they will face. The practice expedition(s) should reflect the assessment process as much as possible with areas being identified that match the assessed location in terms of:

- Navigation
- Type of terrain, topography & steepness of terrain
- Remoteness
- Style of camping
- Weather (where possible)
- Journeying
- Duration

For direct entrants (those who have not completed the previous level of the DofE award) then a bridging expedition is a good opportunity to bring participants up to the same level as those who hold a Silver award. Normally a bridging expedition is a long weekend in wild country and would still be expected to go through the same EVOLVE notification as any other DofE event and follow the appropriate policies.

Overseas Expeditions

If you plan to run an overseas expedition this must be agreed by the Outdoor Education Advisor before participants are enrolled onto it. Please submit an over view of the plan including information on the training programme, practice and assessment.

Using Approved Activity Providers (AAPs)

Approved Activity Providers are organisations that are licensed by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award to offer one or more sections of the Award to participants, usually the Expedition or Residential sections. AAPs are still subject to the same requirements as Buckinghamshire DLC's – an Evolve form must be submitted and is subject to BC approval and all ratios listed in this document must be met. **An establishment staff member is still required to be present at all times for pastoral support.** The AAP Process Map below will show the procedures:

The Variation Process

Where participants have individual needs that mean one or more of the 20 Conditions cannot be met, they may apply for a variation to enable them to complete their DofE expedition.

The Expedition Variations application form must be submitted at least 12 weeks before the planned expedition, and after discussion with the BC Outdoor Education Advisor.

If the variation is for an overseas expedition, then advice should be sought as soon as possible.

The process requests centres to provide:

- An explanation as to why one or more of the conditions cannot be met
- A suitable alternative plan that leads to minimal impact
- Additional risk management (where appropriate)

Some examples of reasons to apply for variation are:

- A participant who is unable to carry a full expedition rucksack for medical reasons
- A participant who requires a carer or worker to support for the duration
- Where a participant is unable to safely cook and requires a member of staff to support

EVOLVE & Notification

For expedition events to count towards a participant's DofE Award the expedition must be approved through EVOLVE.

This is to ensure:

- All expeditions meet the DofE 20 Conditions
- All expeditions meet the policies set by the Operating Authority
- The risk management arrangements are sound, and are supported by the Operating Authority

Timeframes:

- **The event should be submitted by the Head teacher (or equivalent) via Evolve to the Local Authority at least 4 weeks prior to it taking place.**
- **Late submission of an expedition event may result in it not being approved. If an event is not approved then it will not count towards a participant's DofE Award.**

Important Information:

- LA schools / centres undertaking **expeditions abroad** should notify the BC Outdoor Education Advisor as soon as the planning process is initiated.
- Centres **must provide** the Outdoor Education Advisor an overview of the whole training programme to be agreed an overseas expedition is offered to the participants
- The 'Visit Leader' must be a school staff member, even when using an External Provider. The 'Visit Leader' is the school employee responsible for the pastoral duty of care the school owes its students. They should be present throughout the expedition.
- When naming the event include the level of the award, status of the event, centre name and note if it is an overseas expedition.

- If it is an assessed expedition the “accredited assessors” should be detailed in the staff documents with their assessor number.
- Variation forms should be attached onto the EVOLVE form as directed.
- Some events may require ‘notification’ through an assessor network, and Green/Red/Blue forms should be attached.

EVOLVE attachments:

The following documents should be attached to the form:

- Event Specific Plans **including location specific risk assessments**
- DofE Expedition Staff Information Form (qualifications/experience)
- Itinerary
- Variation Forms (as appropriate)
- Incident Reports (as appropriate)
- Green/Red/Blue forms (as appropriate)
- *Daily Report Form(s)

*Daily report forms are not compulsory for any centre event but are a good way of summarising each day of the expedition and consolidating all the information to one location.

In addition to this Expedition Leaders should ensure they review their EVOLVE forms within 2 weeks of returning from the event.

Please see the ‘Evolve Form DofE Guidance Notes’ document for more information.

Quality Assurance & Positive Development Strategy

The Outdoor Education Advisor or a member of staff from a nominated person may ask to visit one of your DofE events. This is part of our commitment to ensure that the DofE and BC standards are upheld and the appropriate support and advice is provided:

Aims:

- To suggest different ways of achieving the expedition event
- To create opportunities to streamline processes and increase efficiency
- Ensure that the 20 conditions are being met and if not, highlight ways to achieve them for the future
- Ensure that these policies are being implemented
- Provide feedback on the running of the event
- To identify opportunities for improvements and continuous development

The process is designed to be supportive and not add additional work to what would already be occurring.

The Process:

- You will be notified that we wish to visit your event a minimum of 4 weeks prior to the event taking place (unless there are areas of concern the notice may be shorter).

- A clear itinerary will be sent across confirming the extent and interaction that a named member of staff from the Local Authority
- The visit will then be conducted with verbal feedback given on the event
- Subsequently, within 30 working days of the event a report will be compiled and lodged with both the School External Visits Coordinator & Expedition Leader
- The opportunity to meet and discuss the report further can be requested if felt necessary and appropriate

This will ensure that Duke of Edinburgh expeditions run at a similar standard across the county.

Mike Harwin 07890 395028

Mike.harwin@buckinghamshire.gov.uk