

## Developing excellence in outdoor provision: enhancing training pathways for outdoor qualifications

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### 1. Introduction

This collaborative KESS PhD project between Mountain Training UK (MTUK) and Bangor University (BU) will allow MTUK to conduct an evidence-based review of their qualification pathways by examining the factors affecting pathway progression and then the impact of strategies that seek to enhance progression. This research will benefit both the outdoor and research communities as well as MTUK. Helping MTUK to improve their qualification pathways will allow an increasing number of people engage safely with the outdoors helping to improve these people's mental and physical health. Furthermore it will add to performance psychology's limited understanding of individual progression along pathways to achieving excellence.

### 2. The Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS)

KESS is a major European Convergence programme led by Bangor University on behalf of the Welsh higher education sector. KESS offers collaborative research projects linked with a local company partner, with scholarships supported by European Social Fund funding. The first round of KESS funding, which closed at the end of September 2015, achieved 230 PhD and 223 Research Masters projects across Wales.

The £36m EU-backed KESS 2 scheme will partner over 500 businesses with academics and postgraduate research students to develop innovative research projects aimed at driving business growth. Led by Bangor University in partnership with other Welsh universities, KESS 2 will operate in North, West Wales and the South Wales Valleys over the next six years.

### 3. What is the project?

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the UK an increasing number of people are making use of the outdoors for recreation. The Welsh government aims to make Wales the capital of "Adventure Tourism" and to further promote outdoor activity, which will benefit the tourism industry as well as improving participant's mental and physical health.

Being led in the outdoors often allows inexperienced individuals to make the most of their time and sometimes is essential for them to experience the outdoors safely. MTUK oversees a large number of qualification pathways concerned with walking and climbing. Whilst the skills and experience required for each qualification varies, the structure of the pathway is broadly similar and has been for the last 51 years: prerequisite experience, training/instruction, specific experience and consolidation of relevant skills followed by an assessment. MTUK feels that the current system has strengths but also recognises that there are problems within the training pathway (notably completion rates) that they wish to better understand in order to improve on.

There are mismatches between the numbers of people registering for, training for and passing each qualification in a given year, some greater than others. Some awards take longer to complete than others and whilst this will have an effect on completions rates it does not fully explain why some people complete and others do not. Therefore it is important to better understand the individual factors affecting completion rates.

Table 1 CMS data for 2015

Award	Registrations	Trainings	Passes
CWA	1303	890	515
SPA	943	1176	478
ML(S)	2043	1505	670
ML(W)	137	140	86
MIA	87	78	39
MIC	34	26	16

### 3.2 The Project

There are three separate but interlinked phases planned for this project. Phase 1 will be a multi-method study to establish the factors affecting completion and non-completion of MTUK's training pathways. This will be done by firstly looking at factors affecting completion rates of qualifications pathways in near-neighbour sports, following interviews with high-level co-sport tutors and examination of qualification syllabuses. Secondly, finding out what the MTUK qualification pathway looks like in each region by interviewing the home board executive officers. Thirdly, using the Candidate Management System database to look at differences between individuals at various stages in MTUK qualification pathways. Finally, a retrospective study looking at a sample of experienced instructors with higher level qualifications (i.e. MIA & MIC) as well as experienced individuals who hold lower level qualifications (i.e. ML & CWA).

Phase 2 will comprise a series of dissemination and implementation events, where the findings from Phase 1 will be presented to relevant stakeholders. This will be an opportunity to gain recommendations from the stakeholders about how best to make use of the findings to positively influence the qualification pathways. Phase 3 will see the completion of either one large scale or several smaller scale interventions aimed at trying to improve various aspects of the qualification pathways. This project will primarily aim to improve the number of people attending and passing an assessment having attended a training course as this group is already more engaged with the process than those who have registered and not attended a training course.

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