



**CLIMBING WALL AWARD
& ABSEIL MODULE
SYLLABUS & GUIDANCE NOTES
Print-friendly version**

Climbing Wall Award and Climbing Wall Abseil Module Handbook

This award is for those who wish to supervise groups climbing and abseiling on artificial structures and walls.

Participation Statement

Mountain Training recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions. Mountain Training has developed a range of training and assessment schemes and associated supporting literature to help leaders manage these risks and to enable new participants to have positive experiences while learning about their responsibilities.

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Prospectus

Preface

Nowadays it is common to begin rock climbing on artificial climbing walls and there are many regular climbers who rarely or never venture onto natural crags. The accessibility, the relatively defined nature and the less serious atmosphere often mean that such facilities are ideal for beginners and are popular places to introduce others to climbing. Artificial walls can allow a high level of performance to be developed and both indoor and outdoor venues are now available for novices not only to start climbing but also to participate, train and climb throughout the year.

The number of organised groups enjoying rock climbing and abseiling on artificial climbing walls has risen over many years. Mountain Training is concerned to ensure that high standards of supervision are maintained, so that both enjoyment and safety are enhanced without compromising either the sport or the participation of others. High standards are achieved through experience, personal qualities, training and validation.

This handbook provides advice for anyone involved in taking groups to artificial climbing walls and particularly for candidates working their way through the Climbing Wall Award scheme and associated Abseil Module. It is designed to support the knowledge and experience of candidates, trainers and assessors without prescribing methods. There are many technical manuals, developed by climbers, which will continue to illustrate evolving techniques and these notes are designed to complement such literature.

This document is divided into the following sections:

- Information about the Climbing Wall Award and Abseil Module from registration to assessment.
- A syllabus that lists the skills of a Climbing Wall Award holder with guidance notes that help advise candidates about protocols and procedures.
- A syllabus that lists the skills of a Climbing Wall Award holder who has also passed the Abseil Module.
- Appendices that provide background information.

1 Introduction

The number of individuals who are introduced to climbing on artificial structures has expanded enormously in recent years. Mountain Training, in consultation with many interested parties, have devised the Climbing Wall Award to seek to ensure that high standards of supervision are maintained, safety techniques are inculcated and that participants may be coached in such a way that both enjoyment and safety are enhanced whilst personal abilities are developed. High standards of supervision and organisation are best achieved through breadth of experience, personal qualities, quality training and rigorous validation.

2 Scope of the scheme

The scheme is for climbers who are in a position of responsibility when supervising climbing activities on indoor or outdoor climbing walls, artificial boulders and towers. This includes a wide range of structures utilised for these activities which will be referred to throughout these introductory notes as 'walls'. It is primarily concerned with ensuring good practice, leading to the safe enjoyment of climbing activities, and to an understanding of the sport. It covers the supervision and management of activities such as bouldering, the teaching of basic movement skills and roped climbing, excluding the teaching of leading.

Completion of a training course alone, without passing the assessment course, should not be considered as a qualification in itself, although it will be of considerable personal benefit to the trainee.

An additional module is available for those candidates who wish to supervise abseiling and top-roping activities on those walls which have top access.

This scheme has been designed to provide a level of basic competence for those who are in a position of responsibility during climbing activities at walls. Whilst the award does include a measure of personal competence it is not designed as a personal proficiency programme, and it should not be used as either an entry requirement or a measure of suitability for individuals who wish to climb on climbing walls.

It is valid throughout the UK.

For the purposes of this scheme, a climbing wall is:

- An artificial structure, designed for the purpose of being used for climbing activities (this includes towers, artificial boulders and mobile climbing walls)
- Indoors or outdoors
- A structure which has safety equipment such as top anchors in place and is maintained through a management regime

It is the duty of the employer or organising authority to decide whether a leader possesses the personal attributes needed to take responsibility for the appropriate care and management of participants and for ensuring that child protection requirements are met. It is the combination of technical skills, breadth of experience and personal qualities that form the basis for effective supervision. This scheme assesses the technical skills and experience; the employer or organising authority must gauge the personal qualities.

It will be the responsibility of the employer or organising authority to develop management strategies if wishing to deploy award holders beyond the scope of this scheme.

The scheme does not cover:

- The rock-climbing skills needed to climb and/or supervise others on natural crags (these are covered in the Single Pitch Award scheme)
- Multi-pitch rock climbing skills
- The teaching or supervision of leading
- The use of leader-placed protection
- The supervision of high or low ropes courses
- The supervision of ice climbing walls, including dry tooling
- The assessment of candidates' personal qualities

If you are in doubt about a particular venue, the appropriate people to approach for advice are qualified Mountaineering Instructors (MIA or MIC) or British Mountain Guides. The officers of Mountain Training may also be consulted for advice.

3 Stages in the scheme

Register for the Climbing Wall Award

To register for the scheme you must be at least 17 years old, have at least six months experience of using a variety of climbing walls and have a genuine interest in climbing and the supervision of

groups on climbing walls. You must also be a member of a mountaineering council (British Mountaineering Council, Mountaineering Scotland or Mountaineering Ireland) and have an account on the Mountain Training database (<http://mt.tahdah.me>). Once you have created an account, click on the registration tab and pay the registration fee.

Candidates with particular requirements or special needs may wish to contact Mountain Training staff for advice and guidance.

Record your experience

The Climbing Wall Award scheme is based on experience and it is crucial that you record this experience in some way. Mountain Training has developed a digital logbook (DLOG) to help you keep track of your climbing sessions and other experience. Prior to attending a training course you must have climbed on artificial walls on at least 15 occasions, visited at least three different walls and successfully led climbs on walls.

Attend a training course

Climbing Wall Award training courses are delivered by Mountain Training approved providers and involve a minimum of 12 hours contact time. The course emphasises those skills which a candidate may have difficulty in learning without expert guidance; it is not a basic skills course but a refinement of the techniques of personal climbing and an extension into the skills associated with supervising climbers. Some aspects of the syllabus may not be covered as fully during the training course and candidates should be able to deal with these items themselves.

At the end of the course the course director will complete a course report on the Mountain Training database and record your attendance. Once this has been completed you will have a record in the training tab of your account.

Candidates are encouraged to use the skills checklist provided (<http://www.mountain-training.org/climbing/other/downloads>) to evaluate their current skills and to plan, with their trainers, their particular route towards assessment.

Consolidate your experience

Candidates will generally see new ideas and techniques during training and will therefore need some time to practise and evaluate these before taking the assessment. During this period of consolidation, candidates are advised to climb at as wide a range of venues as possible, both as an individual and when assisting with the supervision of others. Mountain Training recommends that all but the most experienced candidates allow a minimum of three months between training and assessment. There is currently no time limit on the validity of a training course and some candidates may take several years to complete the award.

Attend an assessment course

Before you book onto a Climbing Wall Award assessment, make sure you have done the following:

- You must be at least 18 years old
- You must have attended a Climbing Wall Award training course (or have been granted exemption)
- You must be familiar with the syllabus
- You must have logged a minimum of 30 visits to at least three different climbing walls
- You must have led a minimum of 40 climbs in indoor walls
- You must be confident at leading routes at Fr 4

- You must have assisted in the supervision of at least 15 instructed sessions on at least two different walls including a large public facility in a variety of contexts
- You must hold a current first aid certificate, minimum 8 hours and relevant to your work as a Climbing Wall Award holder

Candidates should be familiar with all aspects of the syllabus before assessment, even if some parts were not covered in detail during training. Assessment courses provide at least six hours contact time between candidates and assessors and candidates are tested in accordance with the syllabus.

Following the assessment the course director will complete a course report on the Mountain Training database which will record one of three possible results:

Pass: awarded where the candidate has demonstrated appropriate knowledge and application of the course syllabus and the necessary experience and attributes have been demonstrated.

Defer: awarded where the candidate has generally performed well and has shown the necessary experience and attributes, but where complete proficiency has not been attained in certain aspects of the syllabus or where a lack of experience has been identified.

Fail: awarded where the candidate's performance has been generally weak, or the necessary experience and attributes have not been shown. A complete assessment course will need to be subsequently attended.

In the case of a deferral, candidates will generally return to their original assessment provider, however they can be reassessed by any appropriate provider. Practical reassessments cannot take place within three months of the initial assessment to allow sufficient time for practise and preparation. All deferral reassessments must be completed within five years.

Continue to gain and record experience and any relevant additional training

All Mountain Training award schemes are based on the current and relevant experience of the individual award holder.

Holders of this award may, through additional training or breadth of experience, have competencies over and above those assessed as part of this award. If award holders are to be deployed to operate beyond the strict scope of this award then the employer or organising authority should develop a strategy for managing such deployment. This management should include the involvement of a suitably experienced and qualified technical advisor who can assess the suitability of the award holder to operate on specific venues, routes or activities and testify to their competence to do so. (See Mountain Training's National Guidelines for more information on technical advisors.)

4 First aid requirements

For any leader, first aid is an essential skill and the Climbing Wall Award assessment requires a current first aid qualification. The minimum requirement is that such a course must involve at least eight hours of instruction, include an element of assessment and cover basic life support and emergency aid. It is the responsibility of award holders and/or their employers to evaluate their likely work and the type of situations that they can reasonably expect to encounter and to maintain current appropriate first aid training and qualifications.

5 Exemption from training

Experienced climbers who already have substantial personal climbing experience and experience of supervising groups on climbing walls may apply for exemption from training. To qualify for

exemption candidates must, at the very least, meet the minimum experience requirements for attendance at an assessment course.

Further details of the exemption process can be found on the Mountain Training [website](#).

There is no exemption from assessment.

6 Equal opportunities

Mountain Training is committed to promoting equal opportunities for all participants in climbing, hill walking, and mountaineering. Candidates, trainers and assessors should express a positive attitude towards equal opportunities and act as positive role models.

Mountain Training ensures that wherever possible the design of a qualification ensures there are no disadvantages for people with a protected characteristic (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) compared to learners who do not share that characteristic. However in some circumstances it may be necessary for a reasonable adjustment to be made. Further information on making an application for a reasonable adjustment can be found on the website:

There are also arrangements for special consideration for any learner suffering illness, injury or indisposition. The website includes information on how an application for special consideration may be made.

7 Complaints and appeals procedure

The Climbing Wall Award scheme is subject to regular monitoring and review. Candidates who have any feedback to give on their courses, both conduct or content, are encouraged to submit written comments to the provider and/or to Mountain Training as a part of that review process.

If for any reason you find it necessary to complain about an aspect of the delivery of your training or assessment then you should contact the course director.

If the dialogue with the course director fails to resolve your concerns then you should contact an officer within the relevant national Mountain Training board.

Candidates are encouraged to decide whether their concerns take the form of a complaint, where some aspect of the course was unsatisfactory but the outcome is uncontested or an appeal, where a candidate believes the assessment result is incorrect and wishes the board to arbitrate.

Climbing Wall Award Syllabus & Guidance Notes

The Climbing Wall Award syllabus is based on the assumption that candidates have experience of bouldering and roped climbing at a variety of walls, including leading climbs and belaying other climbers. The emphasis on a training course will be to provide opportunities to share ideas and refine techniques.

Climbing Wall Award courses take place at a variety of walls, all with their associated hazards. Therefore courses are for candidates with independent personal experience. Whilst trainers and assessors will endeavour to maintain a safe working environment, candidates also have a duty to exercise judgement and care regarding personal safety and the safety of other group members.

1 Technical Competence

Candidates must demonstrate competence in the following areas. They should be able to:

1.1 Equipment

- a. Identify equipment suitable for personal and group use at any given climbing wall
- b. Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of equipment and ensure appropriate care and maintenance
- c. Demonstrate the ability to use climbing wall equipment appropriately
- d. Demonstrate an understanding of the use and limitations of different types of surface, hold, safety mats and anchors
- e. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the safety chain

1.2 Belaying

- a. Connect self and others to the rope
- b. Attach self and others to the belay system
- c. Demonstrate the use of direct and indirect belays
- d. Use a variety of different belay techniques/devices competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation
- e. Set up bottom-rope systems and choose the most appropriate system for a given situation
- f. Hold falls and lowers
- g. Supervise others belaying

1.3 Personal Climbing Skills

- a. Choose and lead routes suited to personal ability (minimum Fr 4)
- b. Move with confidence on appropriate routes and boulder problems

1.4 Background Knowledge

Demonstrate an understanding of:

- a. The history, traditions and ethics of UK rock climbing
- b. The national Mountain Training boards
- c. The club system and the Mountaineering Councils
- d. The development of climbing walls in the UK
- e. Competition climbing
- f. Grading systems

Guidance Notes

This part of the syllabus focuses on the need to be able to operate safely in a climbing wall environment which involves being familiar with a variety of skills and techniques associated with equipment, belaying and personal climbing.

You should be aware of the range of equipment suitable for use by novices, as well as that for personal climbing use, including harnesses, helmets, ropes, anchors and belay systems. The maintenance of fixed safety equipment such as anchor points, auto-belays, extenders and in-situ bottom ropes is the responsibility of the climbing wall, not of its users. However, you should be aware of the most common means by which such equipment wears out or can become damaged through extended use and be capable of basic visual inspection to detect obvious problems.

As the first point of contact for many climbers, it would be expected that a Climbing Wall Award holder could offer advice on choice and suitability of equipment, its care, maintenance and life expectancy as well as sources of useful information such as those produced by the mountaineering councils and Mountain Training.

Candidates should understand the range of grades used at walls: the French grading system for roped climbs, the V and Font grading system for boulder problems and the less commonly used traditional grading system. Just as when using a wall for personal climbing, the selection of appropriate climbs and boulder problems is a vital skill when working with groups.

The Climbing Wall Award is a UK-wide award and it is important that you are confident about climbing at unfamiliar walls by the time you approach assessment. The ability of the award holder to lead climbs at Fr 4 or above is a fundamental requirement of the scheme, as leading a climb requires many of the skills of a competent supervisor.

The popularity of climbing on artificial walls is connected to the development of rock climbing and whilst you may not have experience of climbing outside, you may play a pivotal role in introducing novices to a sport with many disciplines. You are therefore expected to be aware of current issues in climbing through access to mountaineering council information and by reading the climbing press or appropriate websites.

1.1 – 1.2 Equipment, Anchors and Belaying

The CWA syllabus is based on the assumption that candidates have experience of bouldering and roped climbing at a variety of walls, including leading climbs and belaying other climbers. The emphasis on a training course will be to provide opportunities to share ideas and refine techniques.

Candidates should be aware of the range of equipment suitable for use by novices as well as that for personal climbing use. It would be expected that a CWA holder could offer advice on choice and suitability of equipment, as well as having a reasonable knowledge of its care, maintenance and life expectancy. In addition to being able to offer advice on the selection and use of equipment, candidates should be aware of sources of information, including current publications and materials produced by the Mountaineering Councils.

The maintenance of fixed safety equipment such as anchor points, extenders and in-situ bottom ropes is the responsibility of the climbing wall, not of its users. Candidates should be aware of the most common means by which such equipment wears out or can become

damaged through extended use and be capable of basic visual inspection to detect obvious problems.

There is an expectation that candidates will be familiar and competent with basic skills such as harness fitting, tying on and belaying.

A variety of group belaying methods are commonly used at climbing walls. These include the use of direct and indirect belays, and peer belaying, where group members belay each other. The choice and management of appropriate methods and equipment is an important skill, which will be discussed throughout training and assessment.

1.3 – 1.4 Personal Climbing Skills and Background Knowledge

A sound knowledge and experience of using climbing walls is fundamental to the CWA scheme. The CWA assumes at least six months experience of using walls prior to registration and is therefore not a basic skills course but a refinement of the techniques of personal climbing and an extension into the skills associated with supervising climbers. Candidates must have led routes at a climbing wall prior to attending a training course. The CWA is a UK-wide award and it is important that candidates are confident about climbing at unfamiliar walls by the time they approach assessment.

The three Mountaineering Councils are not governing bodies that impose rules but representative bodies that work on behalf of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers. At the point of registration on the CWA scheme candidates must be current members of a Mountaineering Council or a club affiliated to one. This ensures contact with organisations that helped devise the award and conduct work on behalf of the whole climbing community.

Candidates may not themselves have experience of climbing outside, but they may play a pivotal role in introducing novices to the sport of climbing. Therefore, candidates are expected to be aware of current issues in climbing through access to Mountaineering Council information and by reading the climbing press or appropriate websites.

2 The Climbing Wall Environment

Candidates must demonstrate competence in the following areas. They must be able to:

2.1 Using Climbing Walls

- a. Interpret and use effectively the information given at walls and through other sources of information
- b. Show an awareness of both general and locally important rules and regulations, and demonstrate an ability to obtain and comply with this information
- c. Demonstrate evidence of ongoing access to climbing walls for personal use

2.2 Etiquette

- a. Demonstrate an awareness of responsibilities to the general public, including other facility users and the wider climbing community
- b. Operate a flexible programme of activities in order to accommodate other site users or other specific considerations (e.g. maintenance operations)
- c. Be aware of the hazards presented to other site users by the actions of a group, and act in such a way that these are minimised
- d. Demonstrate an awareness of the site-specific requirements and agreements relating to different climbing walls and artificial structures

Guidance

Climbing Wall Award holders must be aware of common regulations associated with personal and group use of walls and know how to access relevant information such as codes of conduct. You should be aware of commonly used registration systems and make yourself familiar with the chain of responsibility for the maintenance of the walls you use, so that you know how to report any concerns you may have.

Those working with groups need to have a sympathetic understanding of the needs of other climbers and groups. Unless specific arrangements have been made, all wall users have an equal right to use the facility, and you need to adopt a flexible approach to your work. You should be conscious that inappropriate group management could impact upon the enjoyment and safety of other climbers and spectators.

Some climbing facilities may be open access and free to use - such as a purpose-built boulder in a public park - some may be housed in dedicated buildings and others may be located at the end of a sports hall, sharing space with other activities. You should make yourself aware of how groups may use these facilities differently.

The Climbing Wall Award does not include the skills and techniques of wall management and maintenance. However, some award holders may find themselves as the sole supervisor of a private facility, such as a school wall, and be in a position where they have to also manage a wall. Where appropriate, they should be aware of how to obtain relevant outside expertise to help deal with such issues.

2.1 Using Climbing Walls

Walls have become justifiably popular climbing venues for supervised groups, as they offer a wide variety of climbing and bouldering opportunities. Whether introducing novices through 'taster sessions' or providing long-term programmes such as children's clubs, the versatility of walls is one of their attractions.

However, as with other sport facilities, walls are managed environments with user guidelines, some of which may apply to groups. For example, those responsible for a group may be required to produce specific documentation before commencing their session. Candidates must be aware of common regulations associated with group use of walls and know how to access relevant information. The CWA does not include the skills and techniques of wall management and maintenance. However, some award holders may find themselves as the sole supervisor of a private facility, such as a school wall, and be in a position where they have to also manage a wall. Where appropriate, candidates should be aware of how to obtain relevant outside expertise to help deal with such issues.

As with all purpose-built sport facilities, those designed for climbing can suffer wear or become damaged. It is rare for a climbing wall to 'fail' structurally in any way, such as a hold breaking off, and climbing wall users are not responsible for wall maintenance. However, candidates should make themselves familiar with the chain of responsibility for the maintenance of the walls they use, so that they know how to report any concerns they may have.

Some climbing facilities may be open access and free to use - such as a purpose-built boulder in a public park - some may be housed in dedicated buildings and others may be located at the end of a sports hall, sharing space with other activities. Candidates should make themselves aware of how this variety can affect the way in which groups use facilities.

Candidates should understand the range of grades used at walls: the French grading system for roped climbs, the V and Font grading system for boulder problems and the less commonly used traditional grading system. Just as when using a wall for personal climbing, the selection of appropriate climbs and boulder problems is a vital skill when working with groups.

Prior to training, candidates will have climbed at a variety of walls and should be aware of commonly used registration systems.

2.2 Etiquette

Those working with groups need to have a sympathetic understanding of the needs of other climbers and groups. Unless specific arrangements have been made, all wall users have an equal right to use the facility, and candidates need to adopt a flexible approach to their work. Candidates should be conscious that inappropriate group management could impact upon the enjoyment and safety of other climbers and spectators.

3 Supervision

Candidates must demonstrate competence in the following areas. They must be able to:

3.1 Planning

- a. Plan both individual sessions and programmes of activities
- b. Assess the abilities and objectives of the group participating in this plan
- c. Check the underlying aims and objectives of the event
- d. Demonstrate an awareness of responsibility to any authorising organisation, parents, individual group members, the group as a whole and other site users
- e. Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of weather on climbing, if appropriate
- f. Have built in flexibility when planning activities in order to respond to changing circumstances
- g. Know where to find and use basic first aid equipment in the case of an accident or injury and know how to call for expert help if necessary
- h. Be aware of and comply with current legislation regarding children and vulnerable persons

3.2 Organising

- a. Brief individuals and the group appropriately
- b. Issue appropriate rock climbing equipment and check correct fitting and use
- c. Store equipment appropriately after each session

3.3 Managing

- a. Know a range of appropriate group management strategies and techniques and use them effectively
- b. Demonstrate the safe and responsible management of all group members irrespective of whether or not they are directly involved in the climbing activity
- c. Demonstrate an understanding of how to avoid common problems, such as a stuck climber, and how to deal with them should they occur
- d. Manage the individuals and the group effectively by:
 - Good communication skills
 - Setting and reviewing targets. Identifying and reacting to the needs of the group in relation to involvement, interest, enjoyment and achievement
 - Supervise a group belaying
 - Supervise a group bouldering
- e. Manage time appropriately in relation to the plan, activity and conditions

For roped climbing:

Deliver technical instruction to individuals and the group including:

- f. Choice and fitting of suitable harnesses
- g. Attaching the rope to the harness
- h. Demonstration of effective use of chosen belay device

3.4 Movement Skills

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of warming up and injury avoidance techniques
- b. Demonstrate the use of bouldering activities with groups, including using appropriate games and activities, including setting simple boulder problems
- c. Advise, demonstrate and coach participants in basic climbing movement skills
- d. Be able to aid the development of climbing movement skills over a period of time
- e. Understand the dangers of overtraining for different age groups
- f. Understand the needs of those with physical and mental disabilities and medical conditions

Guidance

3.1 Planning

The Climbing Wall Award syllabus does not prescribe ways in which climbing groups should be supervised. Different groups require different approaches. When planning a session you should consider the implications of factors such as the group's experience and expectations, the venue, authorising organisations (where applicable) and other wall users. It is also important to consider whether the session is a one-off or part of a long-term programme as this will have implications upon the way in which it is planned and executed.

Within a climbing wall there is often a great range of climbing varying in difficulty, steepness and height. Consider the type of climbing that may be most appropriate for your group and be prepared to modify your plan if necessary. Only by developing a wide range of personal climbing wall experience will you be able to plan an effective group session.

3.2-3.3 Organising and Managing

Clear briefings are a great way to make your group aware of how to use equipment and how they should behave during a climbing session. A badly organised group may be a danger not only to themselves but also to other wall users. Think about who's climbing and who's not climbing; are they engaged in the session? You need to develop a range of group management strategies and if you have developed good communication skills, managing a group of people is much easier. For example, you will be able to identify the varying ability and motivations within the group and know how to adapt your session accordingly. This takes practice as working with each group member as an individual is challenging for even the most experienced supervisor.

Clear communication is also the basis of safe and effective group work; making the group aware of hazards associated with climbing and bouldering and getting them involved in the management of these risks engenders an atmosphere where all group members feel actively involved. Remember, climbing should be fun! Managing a group effectively should not detract from a group enjoying themselves.

3.4 Movement skills

This part of the syllabus is not about climbing grade but about feeling confident coaching climbing movement. The FUNdamentals of Climbing workshops run by the British Mountaineering Council and Mountaineering Council of Scotland are a very useful way to expand your understanding on this subject.

A clear understanding of the concept of 'Centre of Balance' and its relevance to climbing is important, as well as an understanding of how different climbing styles affect it and how that impacts upon the way in which the different muscle groups within the body are used. Verbal explanations, games (both climbing and non-climbing) and non-climbing exercises can be used, but candidates should consider how the principles they are trying to teach are encapsulated within any games or exercises they choose to employ.

Climbing walls cater to climbers of all abilities, and some climbs or bouldering areas may be inappropriate for some groups. Inadequate warm-ups or climbing too far beyond personal ability can lead to injury. You should be aware of these issues and manage sessions appropriately.

Mountain Training's [Coaching Scheme](#) is a great opportunity to develop all of these skills.

Climbing Wall Award Abseil Module

This module is optional and is designed to equip candidates with the skills and techniques required for managing top-roping and abseiling groups on purpose-built artificial climbing walls and structures. Awareness of the skills outlined in the main Climbing Wall Award syllabus is assumed and not repeated here.

Abseil Module Syllabus and Guidance Notes

Candidates must demonstrate competence in the following areas. They should be able to:

1 Equipment

- a. Identify equipment suitable for top-roping and abseiling at any given climbing wall
- b. Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of abseiling equipment and ensure appropriate care and maintenance
- c. Demonstrate the ability to use abseiling equipment appropriately

Guidance

This module does not prescribe methodologies for all situations. Instead, a range of techniques is covered which will be appropriate for different circumstances.

It is worth being aware that walls may not permit public access to their top-roping and abseiling facilities, and even where access is available, it may be necessary to undergo a separate induction before such facilities can be used. There is an assumption that all candidates undertaking this module will have belayed at the top of a climb. Prior to training this experience could be gained either indoors or outdoors.

Equipment

Some climbing and abseiling equipment may be suitable for use in a variety of situations and other equipment may be best suited for specific tasks. It is important to understand the different uses and limitations of a range of equipment.

2 Belaying

- a. Connect self and others to the rope
- b. Utilise belay systems at the top of a climbing wall
- c. Attach self and others to the belay system and abseil ropes
- d. Demonstrate the use of belay techniques
- e. Use a variety of different belay techniques/devices competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation
- f. Set up top-rope systems and choose the most appropriate system for a given situation
- g. Hold falls and lowers
- h. Manage the safety of those arriving at the top of a wall
- i. Be aware of potential common problems and how to avoid them.
- j. Demonstrate an understanding of how to deal with common problems if they occur

Guidance

Belaying

It is important that you are comfortable with setting up a basic but sound anchor system at the top of a climb and be aware of the safety considerations involved in you arriving at the top in the first

place. Setting up involves utilising a variety of pre-existing anchor points, understanding the principles of equalising anchors to a central point and attaching yourself and others to the attachment points. A variety of top anchors are commonly available and you need to be able to adapt your set up for a given situation so that you can choose the most appropriate position for you and the climber/abseiler(s).

Top-roping provides a very different climbing experience for both supervisor and group members. With the climber moving towards the belayer it can be an effective technique for a nervous climber, as eye contact is easier to maintain. With the participant 'topping-out', a greater sense of achievement may also be created. However, this scenario often requires managing a group at a distance or managing parts of the same group simultaneously – one at the top and another at the bottom of a climb. You should be comfortable with different strategies for managing a group in these situations, including the way in which other competent people, who may have no knowledge of climbing, could be used. You should also appreciate when top-roping may, or may not, be an appropriate activity.

A climber falling while being top-roped should amount to no more than taking the weight of the climber, as good rope management would result in a fall being arrested before the climber has gained momentum.

3 Abseiling

- a. Utilise belay points for both abseil and safety ropes
- b. Attach participants to both abseil rope and safety rope
- c. Be aware of potential common problems and their solutions
- d. Be aware of techniques for managing the safety of participants at the top of walls
- e. Abseil without requiring a back-up safety rope

Guidance

Abseiling

You should be able to set up and use fixed and releasable abseils with the rope attached to suitable anchors; the ability to adapt the set up and group management style to suit a range of situations is also required. A releasable system of attaching the abseil rope to anchors is useful in a supervisory situation and should be well-practised. The advantages of each method of attachment in different situations should be evaluated.

Candidates should be made aware of issues regarding abseiling on natural crags, as they will be involved in explaining to others some of the issues specific to rock climbing outdoors.

Abseiling as a personal skill should be assessed during the course as well as the management of group abseil sessions. Candidates should be able to adapt their rope systems and group management styles to suit different locations.

Methods of solving simple problems should be covered at training, but the emphasis should be placed on the skills and judgements required to prevent problems from occurring in the first place.

Solutions to problems such as tangled ropes, a jammed friction device or a student moving to one side resulting in a potential pendulum should be considered.

Candidates should appreciate the specific role of abseiling within the wider activity of climbing on natural crags, namely as a means of descent rather than as an activity in its own right.

Friction Devices

Different abseiling situations may require the use of different friction devices. Factors such as how slick, stiff and thick the rope is, the steepness of the abseil, the confidence, the ability and the weight of the abseiler all affect the choice of device. It may be appropriate to demonstrate a range of techniques and methods of altering the degree of friction.

4 Management of Groups Accessing the Tops of Walls

- a. Evaluate risk to participants when accessing the top of walls
- b. Select appropriate management techniques to safeguard participants and supervisor(s)

Guidance

Managing groups accessing the tops of walls

Platforms or stances designed for top-roping and abseiling are incorporated into walls in a variety of ways. Such facilities can be an integral part of a wall, or an existing architectural feature may be adapted, such as the inside of a tower being used for abseiling. Access to these facilities varies. Artificial climbing towers often incorporate a central staircase or ladder, whereas the only access at some indoor walls is by climbing up to a stance. Finally, some stances may be inappropriate for both abseiling and top-roping, and others may be dual use.

Whether managing a group at the top of a wall or managing a group peer belaying, candidates need to evaluate risk and select appropriate management strategies. Candidates should be able to manage groups accessing the top of a variety of walls in a variety of ways. Scenarios that require candidates to be flexible with their systems can help in assessing this element of the syllabus.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Using the Digital Logbook

Mountain Training highly recommends that all candidates use the on-line digital logbook (DLOG) facility in the Candidate Management System to record their developing experience. If you choose to use an alternative method, for example spreadsheet or 'paper' logbook, then the entries should follow a similar format (headings, etc.) as those contained in DLOG. Entries should be concise and easy to read.

The logbook should provide a total record of your experiences and demonstrate, at assessment, that the Board's requirements have been fulfilled. It is an essential tool that can help trainers advise candidates on specific further experience needed before assessment and can also be used by employers after assessment to demonstrate continuing experience.

A key facet of all the Mountain Training Awards is that competence is fundamentally based on extensive quality personal experience of the activity. Having relevant and extensive personal experience is key to success at assessment.

Appendix 2

Further Experience

Award holders should follow the National Guidelines issued by Mountain Training UK. In particular, they should note that their award is only valid where the holder is operating within the scope of the award and the holder has recent logged experience appropriate to the award.

Where there is any doubt advisers should contact the relevant national Mountain Training board.

According to the Health and Safety Executive there are four ways to demonstrate the competence of leaders. These are:

- to hold the relevant qualification
- to hold an equivalent qualification
- to have received appropriate in-house training
- to be competent through experience

Mountain Training endorses this view, while emphasising that national awards are the key components in such an approach. Further training events and opportunities to review new initiatives are valuable components in the continuing development of any leader.

To assist in providing further training opportunities the [Mountain Training Association](#) will make available information on matters of interest to all award holders including Continuing Personal Development (CPD) events.

The responsibility for ensuring that leaders receive refresher training must lie with the provider of the service, or the individual in the case of self-employed leaders. Award holders who wish to operate beyond the scope of their award(s) by virtue of their additional experience and/or training, for example a Lowland Leader award holder leading a party in local moorland terrain which they are familiar with, may be enabled to do so either through in-house training and/or within the context of a local scheme.

Local schemes are for the provision of skills needed to deal with specific restricted tasks, and the accreditation tends to be site or area specific, restricted and non-transferable. Therefore, it should be appreciated that local schemes are only suitable for use by organisations and not by individuals. Individuals (self-employed leaders) seeking additional training and assessment from a suitably qualified and experienced technical advisor, thus enabling them to develop further relevant experience, may find this allows them to demonstrate competence beyond the scope of the award. Award holders using this route to extend their personal remit should clarify the operational responsibility of the technical advisor and the implications for their insurance cover for operating beyond the scope of the award held

Appendix 3

Sample programmes

Sample programmes and course notes for all Mountain Training awards can be viewed and downloaded here <http://www.mountain-training.org/sample-course-programs-and-course-notes>

Appendix 4

Post-assessment support

Becoming a member of the Mountain Training Association is a recommended way of obtaining further relevant training and keeping up to date with developments within the Climbing Wall Award, as well as other Mountain Training schemes. Mountain Training Association also provides networking and social events, for members to keep in touch and up to date. Membership is open to anyone who is registered for any of the national awards overseen by Mountain Training. For more information about Mountain Training Association including benefits of membership <http://www.mountain-training.org/associations/mountain-training-association>

Appendix 5

Ratios

1:6 on training courses, maximum course size 12, minimum 4. Assistant must hold Climbing Wall Award or a higher award.

1:4 on assessment courses, maximum course size 8, minimum 2. Assistant must hold Mountaineering Instructor Award or a higher award.