

Lowland Leader

Guidance notes for trainers and assessors

Definition: Quality low-level day

In terms of experience, the quality of a low-level walking day lies in such things as the conditions experienced both overhead and underfoot, the exploration of new areas and the journey undertaken. Usually some or all of the following criteria would be fulfilled:

- the individual takes part in the planning and leadership
- navigations skills are required to navigate through complex footpath networks
- experience must be in terrain and weather comparable to that found in the UK and Ireland
- knowledge is increase and skills practised

These criteria mean that days as a course member under instruction, a member of a group practising skills, or days spent repeating familiar routes are very unlikely to meet the requirements of a Quality Day. However, these can be recorded in the appropriate place in your logbook even though they are not suitable for use in meeting the minimum requirements for attending assessment.

Introduction

- These guidance notes should be used together with the Lowland Leader candidate handbook and the relevant national Mountain Training organisation quality manual.
- It is important that candidates have the appropriate level of experience to allow engagement with course content. Candidates must satisfy the prerequisites for training and assessment courses and this must be evidenced in writing, ideally in DLOG, before attending their course.
- Overseas quality walking days can be counted up to 50% of the minimum number required for training or assessment if they are in equivalent terrain and conditions to UK and Ireland lowland walking.
- Course staff should support and facilitate candidates to engage in reflective practice.
- Lowland Leader courses are for participants with personal walking experience. While course staff should endeavour to maintain a safe working environment, participants also have a duty to exercise judgment regarding their own personal safety and that of other members of the group.

General principles

Trainers

- Courses should concentrate on the skills that candidates may have difficulty in learning without expert guidance, whilst not forgetting that in reality the skills of effective leaders are integrated into a holistic performance. It is valuable to review the course programme and the candidates' progress at the end of each day.
- Trainers should be mindful of experience levels of candidates when introducing content especially if techniques shown are on the fringe of the qualification scope. Training and assessment courses should facilitate open discussion.
- At the end of the course trainers should assist candidates to develop their action plans, while referencing the Lowland Leader skills checklist.
- Candidates should be given individual debriefings and should leave the training course with a good idea of what is required of them during the consolidation period.

Assessors

- Assessors evaluate the performance of a candidate against the syllabus requirements. Assessments should enable everyone to perform to the best of their ability under suitably testing conditions.
- Assessors should ensure that candidates understand the tasks required of them and are given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their competence. If assessment candidates are unable to demonstrate competence initially, other opportunities should be given where possible or appropriate.
- An assessor should make a realistic and objective assessment against the nationally recognised standard and not decide results by comparing candidates' abilities. They should set tasks or scenarios rather than request that specific techniques be demonstrated. Tasks set should not demand solutions that use techniques beyond the scope of the qualification.

1. Leader responsibilities

Trainers

Trainers should ensure that candidates are made aware of the importance of assessing the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the group and planning the journey accordingly. Trainers should discuss with candidates how best to carry out initial preparation and how to complete detailed planning before leading day walks. Candidates should be made aware of some of the formal requirements of the planning process such as gaining parental consent, organising insurance and obtaining organisational permissions.

Assessors

Assessors should examine the candidate's ability to undertake risk assessments for planned journeys and their strategies for dealing with emergency situations. Planning skills can initially be assessed with a presentation or written task but they should not be looked at in isolation from a candidate's ability to lead a group effectively in open countryside. Questioning and tasks can be set to examine candidates' knowledge on safeguarding, duty of care, obtaining informed consent and information on participants, contingency and emergency planning, supporting group/individual needs and planning appropriate objectives.

Top tips

- Setting scenario-based open questions or tasks, whether verbally or in writing, will best determine the candidates' knowledge and thought processes with regard to planning.
- Candidates' route planning should show considerable adaptability to anticipate changes in conditions, the group or the environment. This can be tested on the walk either for real or by setting different scenarios.

2. Leadership and decision making

Trainers

Trainers should emphasise to candidates that underpinning our role as a leader are the values, beliefs, ethos and philosophy that shape our view of what leadership should be.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' model used by Mountain Training provides a framework that candidates can use to plan, execute and review their leadership behaviours. In this way, followers who receive the right balance of the three categories can be encouraged to perform beyond their own expectations.

Transformational leadership is a model of positive (INSPIRE) behaviours that leaders can use to promote the best outcomes for their groups. Mountain Training's ethos of developing competence and independence should be contrasted with other approaches.

Training in leadership needs to be a balance between a theoretical and practical approach to group management and the leader's responsibilities. Trainers should highlight that leadership attributes can be learned, trained, and developed.

Trainers should highlight that whilst leadership attributes allow us to make good decisions and lead well, our decision making is influenced by the 'situation and environment', the leader, and the group. All leaders tend to have preferred behaviours that are heavily influenced by their personality, experience, ethos and beliefs, as do their groups. Trainers should stress that leaders will need to adapt their preferred behaviour to an appropriate behaviour required by balancing the needs of both the situation and the group.

Teaching of leadership works best if it is integral to every task and situation during training. Trainers should include the more commonplace leadership tasks that occur, for example managing a group across a busy road as part of a planned journey. Training staff should recognise that they are acting as role models for candidates through their own practice during a course.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' (VSC) model can help trainers 'frame' discussions, sessions, and feedback regarding leadership and decision making. They should discuss the seven leadership attributes:

- Leadership Style: controlling versus non-controlling
- Decision Making: what informs this and how to make them
- Leader Observations: what they should be and how to make them
- Leader Communication Skills: verbal and non-verbal, listening
- Experience and Ability: how this influences decision making
- Emotional Intelligence: to support individualised leadership
- Group Management: techniques, styles and influences

Trainers should ensure candidates know what they are trying to achieve with regard to the 'Individual and group satisfaction and performance'. Importantly how do they, the leader, know what this is? How do they monitor it? And how do they achieve it?

Whilst there are challenges with setting scenarios involving peers during training, trainers may find that modelling leadership behaviours, then using the VSC model to review the task, can support candidates' understanding of the practical application of the Mountain Training leadership model. The following are examples of other options for structuring leadership tasks:

- Use of 'scenario' cards to promote discussion and reflection amongst the group.
- Having the group involved in decision making and route choice.
- Having the group plan breaks/food stops for the day.

Trainers should be well versed in the literature on leadership and the responsibilities of a leader, as specified for candidates, in addition to developing their own resources. Trainers should draw on their own and the candidates' experiences to discuss and expand this topic in the classroom and on the walk.

Assessors

It can be challenging to provide genuine leadership situations on assessment. For example, groups of assessment candidates are not likely to react like a novice party. Much assessment however can be achieved by careful questioning throughout the course as situations arise. Assessors should consider introducing the VSC model at the beginning of the assessment and use this to help frame the

assessment process and manage candidates' expectations.

Assessors should be clear in their own minds which aspects of leadership they can assess within the structure of the course. They should carefully consider how they use simulated situations for assessment and should make clear to candidates what is being assessed at any given time. Self-evaluation (using VSC as a framework) should be encouraged because being an effective leader depends upon leaders being aware of their behaviours, strengths and limitations.

Assessors may consider using questions based around the factors underpinning leadership and decision making competencies e.g. can you briefly explain your personal leadership style and beliefs? How does this align with the Mountain Training ethos?

Candidates' understanding of different styles and modes of leadership should be assessed. Candidates should be able to identify their preferred behaviour(s) and therefore the style with which they are most comfortable and be able to make judgements about when changes of behaviour might be appropriate when leading a group. Assessors should give candidates opportunities to show understanding of the issues surrounding effective management in a variety of lowland situations. During the practical assessment candidates should also be presented with some common emergency situations.

Certain aspects of group management, such as pace setting, briefings and communication are relatively easy to evaluate, as are the choice and preparation of personal equipment, selection of routes over varying terrain and reaction to set emergency situations. However, the best course of action for an unanticipated situation has to be weighed carefully against possible alternatives. It is common for these situations to be used as further training for the benefit of all concerned.

Assessors should give daily debriefs, with special regard to leadership aspects. Such sessions will provide a vital platform for discussion and opportunities to compare the perceptions of all parties involved.

Top tips

- Encourage candidates to think of observable behaviours that demonstrate the leadership competencies. The VSC and situational leadership models can help with this.
- Ask candidates to describe or enact leadership behaviours on the course as relevant situations arise e.g. 'What would you say/do to a mixed ability group before setting off on today's walk to create an inclusive and positive team spirit for the day?'
- Set tasks that require technical focus (e.g. micro-navigation, negotiating a diverted path through farmland) and also demand positive group management. Can they manage both?
- Home research tasks and brief interviews can examine candidates' knowledge of leadership models and their own ethos of leadership.

3. Planning and Weather

Definition: Summer and winter conditions

The term 'summer conditions' is used to describe any conditions not covered by the term 'winter conditions'. 'Winter conditions' can be defined as the time when snow and ice prevail, and travel requires the skills and equipment required to cope with the special hazards of winter conditions. Mountain Training Scotland's Winter Mountain Leader scheme provides specific training and assessment for winter conditions in the hills and mountains of the UK and Ireland.

Neither term can be defined by a portion of the year i.e. 'summer conditions' can prevail during the winter months; likewise it is possible, especially in high mountain areas of Scotland, for extensive snow and ice, and hence 'winter conditions', to prevail well into summer.

Trainers

Trainers should highlight the importance of planning each day, taking into account factors such as the expected weather and conditions on the walk, the level of experience, fitness and skill of the group, as well as of themselves. The trainer should identify the basic level of weather knowledge required to enable the candidates to make appropriate judgements based on commonly available information. This can be achieved through presentations and by directing candidates to suitable material such as the Met Office e-learning module.

Additionally, it is recommended that this topic be integrated within the course on a daily basis using practical observation. Candidates should be trained to interpret a range of descriptive weather forecasts and develop an understanding of how this will influence their planning and decision making in the terrain.

Assessors

Weather knowledge might be assessed through written and oral examination including the use of home papers. Asking candidates to make daily interpretations of the weather at the start of the day and then reinforcing this on the walk emphasises and places in context the relevance of weather prediction. The assessor should be confident that candidates are able to understand how to access all the commonly available types of weather forecast and be able to evaluate their relative accuracy and reliability. Finally, they should be able to integrate their understanding of the likely weather conditions into their planning as Lowland Leaders.

Top tips

- Asking candidates to research the weather forecast through various means and to present this with its implications for planning to the group is both a useful training and assessment task.
- Different weather and/or group scenarios can be given to demonstrate or assess how routes and objectives can be changed to suit the conditions and needs of the group.
- Formal route plans and their uses should be addressed, but candidates should also be encouraged to be adaptable to the demands of the day.

4. Hazards and emergency procedures

Hazards

Trainers

Although Lowland Leaders operate predominantly in relatively benign areas, trainers must make candidates aware of, and help develop strategies for dealing with, a wide range of potential hazards. These could be anything from livestock of an unknown temperament to a steep, muddy path by an exposed cliff top on a coastal path or some slippery decking on a badly eroded footpath. Walking a short distance down a country lane without a pavement can be potentially life threatening if not handled appropriately, so trainers need to discuss a wide range of potential scenarios and how to manage the resulting incident if it occurs. Managing a group crossing a busy road is a particular risk that should be covered. Trainers should ensure that candidates are aware that they should, at all times, use bridges or other recognised water crossing points such as stepping stones or fords if the stream or river constitutes a hazard to the party.

Assessors

Assessors need to satisfy themselves that candidates have used the map to gain all relevant information regarding any potential hazards. Not all will be obvious from the map but country lanes, exposed footpaths and potential water hazards should be noted by candidates as possible areas of concern. Candidates should have a strategy for dealing with minor incidents and a clear idea of what to do if they need assistance. Constructed paths or working environments such as farms or forestry can be the scene of common problems; setting the candidate realistic scenarios will allow the assessor to make judgements about their decision making and provide worthwhile discussion points for the whole group. There will often be a number of possible solutions but the key questions are: Is it safe? Is the answer acceptable? Is it overcomplicated?

Emergency procedures

Many leaders will come across an incident or accident and should be thoroughly prepared for these situations. It should be understood that emergencies may not be a result of an error on the part of the leader but can be the result of an unforeseen accident happening to a party member or other encountered on the walk.

Trainers

Accident and emergency procedures should be covered in detail. The candidates should be taught how to evaluate a situation and take appropriate action, whether it is a minor stumble in good weather or a life-threatening injury in poor weather. Candidates should be able to keep the rest of the party safe, stabilise the situation and send for help if necessary.

Assessors

Emergency procedures can be assessed by a combination of written and oral examination and practical work. Assessors should accept that there might be different solutions to examination situations. This area lends itself to discussion, particularly in groups, when differences of opinion may arise and can be used for the benefit of all candidates.

Assessors should be confident about the candidates' knowledge and ability regarding accident procedure and their responses to emergency situations. Candidates should exercise reasonable judgement and an awareness of the consequences of any course of action.

Top tips

- The management of hazards and emergency procedures often concerns candidates as they rarely get to practise these. Time demonstrating techniques, discussing decision making and practising scenarios is well spent in order to build their confidence.
- Candidates should be encouraged to think around problems for the best solutions rather than necessarily imitating a technique they have seen.

5. Equipment

Trainers

It is important to spend some time examining and discussing equipment needs with candidates. Candidates should be aware that their equipment has implications for the safety and comfort of themselves and their group. If a candidate does not have suitable equipment, trainers should be able to offer constructive advice and discuss available options. It may be appropriate for trainers to demonstrate their own personal and group equipment, discussing items that they or other trainers may elect to carry.

Candidates should be encouraged to travel light yet must also be able to deal with foreseeable emergency situations. Informal discussions offer excellent opportunities to show candidates the wide variety of equipment that is available. Trainers should ensure that all candidates understand and can use the equipment they will need as leaders and the depth of knowledge required to advise others.

Assessors

An assessment course provides many opportunities to examine the suitability of each candidate's personal equipment. Equipment should be examined with regard to safety, comfort and efficiency, allowing for personal opinion that will have been developed over previous months or years. Candidates need to be able to operate as party leaders in poor conditions and choice of personal equipment will have a bearing on their ability to do this. Candidates' knowledge of various types of equipment requires examination, especially with regard to their recommendations to others.

Top tips

- Setting short (5 minute) presentation tasks assesses both a candidate's knowledge and communication skills.

6. Walking Skills

Trainers

If candidates can fulfil their duty of care to others, the walking skills required should be achievable by a wide range of participants, including those with various disabilities. Trainers should encourage and coach confident balanced movement on uneven ground if required. All steep ground where a slip or trip could have serious consequences should be avoided, though methods of giving simple assistance for a tricky step or two should be covered.

Assessors

Assessors need to determine if a candidate can fulfil their duty of care to others over a quality lowland

day, including dealing with any incidents that could typically occur. Candidates do not need to demonstrate high levels of fitness and agility, but they need to be able to confidently look after themselves and others in lowland terrain whilst setting an appropriate pace to keep their group safe and comfortable.

Top tips

- A low level hazard such as muddy ground or a steep uneven coastal path can be used to determine a candidate's management of others as well as of themselves.

Fitness – course debriefs

See also Appendix 1

Trainers

Mountain Training expects course trainers to assist candidates in developing their action plans, utilising the relevant skills checklist and quality day definition as a reference. These action plans will often serve as the foundation for candidates' individual debriefs with the course director.

When providing feedback on someone's fitness level and creating an action plan, it is crucial to approach the matter with sensitivity and tact. It's important to determine whether the candidate genuinely has an issue with their overall walking fitness or if the trainer is making comparisons between candidates' abilities.

Trainers must recognise that discussions surrounding fitness can be emotionally charged, and the aim should be to inspire confidence and provide advice for the candidate with regards to completing Quality Days. Poorly delivered or generalised feedback can have a significant negative impact on a candidate's self-perception and well-being. Be specific about any aspects they may need to address and link this to the Quality Day definition and syllabus competencies.

Assessors

An assessor should conduct a realistic and objective assessment of a candidate's fitness, without making comparisons to other candidates' abilities. It is important to recognise that some candidates may have above-average fitness levels, while others may possess average or below average levels of fitness within the context of the qualification terrain.

To gain perspective, assess whether the candidate is fit enough to lead a group of unfit novices on a Quality Day in appropriate terrain. This consideration helps ensure that the candidate possesses the necessary fitness level to fulfil their responsibilities as a leader.

By focusing on the individual's fitness within the specific context of the scheme and their ability to guide a group, assessors can make an accurate and fair evaluation. It is essential to avoid drawing comparisons among candidates and instead assess each individual on their own merit and suitability for the leadership role.

7. Navigation

Definition: Poor visibility / darkness

The terms 'poor visibility' and/ or 'darkness' are used to describe situations where an individual's line of sight i.e. how far they can see, may be limited by weather (e.g. mist/low cloud, heavy driving rain), environment (e.g. plantation woodland, complex rolling terrain) and/or time of day (e.g. night time).

Any combination of any or all of these can severely restrict a person's line of sight requiring specialist navigation skills to navigate their journey safely and efficiently. Night time alone does not in and of itself equate to darkness. During the summer months in Scotland, assuming clear skies, it never really gets dark. Likewise in clear weather with a full moon it is unlikely to be dark enough to warrant reliance on specialist navigational techniques and skills.

Trainers

Trainers will often have the difficult task of dealing with people from a very broad spectrum of backgrounds; some will have done a fair amount of navigating, mainly on paths, while others will have done very little.

Teaching basic navigation skills will be beneficial. However, trainers must be mindful that within the scope of the qualification, the navigational demands of routes should be such that the use of the map alone would normally suffice, with the compass simply used to orientate the map or indicate path direction.

This will be revision for some but could be used as a model for those candidates who are in a position to teach basic navigation to their own groups. Trainers should teach navigation in relation to group leadership, including route selection and party supervision, remembering that candidates must cope with both navigation and leadership issues simultaneously. The key focus will be teaching candidates using appropriate navigation techniques whilst following paths and tracks that are clearly marked on a map and normally visible on the ground.

Maps of different types and scale should be available during the course, including locally produced trail maps for places of interest such as estates and country parks. Candidates should be taught how to integrate using an OS (or equivalent) map with a locally produced trail map. The use of navigation aids such as phone apps should be discussed and practical demonstrations given wherever possible. Candidates should be encouraged to use the appropriate technique at any particular time and also to pay attention to the terrain around them.

Trainers should discuss strategies for dealing with poor visibility and it is worth remembering that many coastal and lowland walks can be subject to low cloud and heavy rain, both of which can have an adverse effect on visibility and candidates must be given the tools to be comfortable and confident whatever the weather, within the scope of the qualification.

Trainers will find there will often be an overlap between navigation skills and access knowledge. Effective route finding (and hence navigation) will rely on candidates' in-depth knowledge of relevant access legislation and their rights and responsibilities within that access framework.

Navigation should be presented in a structured form so that the candidates can progress throughout the course. Candidates should finish the course being aware of the level of navigation ability required and what they need to do to achieve this.

Trainers should note that Lowland Leaders are not required to be able to navigate across untracked areas.

Assessors

The assessor should structure the tasks to ensure that all relevant navigation techniques are seen. Navigation will be assessed throughout the two days so assessors can usually afford to settle candidates by initially setting simple navigation tasks. Assessors need to be certain that any errors are through lack of ability rather than as a result of 'exam nerves' or their own failure to communicate clearly. Very careful and precise briefing of the candidate concerning what is being asked of them is essential. The other candidates must also be briefed about their role while someone else is leading the group.

Candidates should be given time to demonstrate their level of navigation ability, allowed to complete the task to the best of their ability and not pressured into making quick decisions and mistakes. They should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to adopt the appropriate technique for the situation. The assessor should look at the task set from the viewpoint of someone navigating over unfamiliar ground in a stressful situation.

Practical sessions provide opportunities to assess navigation while reminding everyone of the nature of the activity. In all cases the elements of group management and leadership, access considerations and environmental issues should not be neglected.

Visibility will obviously influence the type of navigation tasks set, as assessors must satisfy themselves that candidates can navigate in poor visibility e.g. in dense woodland. Candidates who make a simple mistake should be given time to resolve the situation. The ability to identify and correct an error is both an essential skill for a leader and an informative process for an assessor. The choice of appropriate techniques and the efficiency of their application may be as important as the arrival at a designated point for the assessment process.

Navigation ability must be tested with map and compass alone without the use of GPS, smartphone or other similar equipment. If candidates carry navigation aids their ability to use them may be discussed as an additional training element.

Top tips

- Candidates should be able to spot if a path or right of way has been moved or diverted from the map record, as this is common in managed lowland areas (e.g. farms, forests, developments).
- The concept of traffic light modes of navigation and their application may be useful to introduce. Green = map away, macro navigation; Amber = map reading, ticking off features, timing etc; Red = full concentration with pacing/timing etc.

8. Teaching and learning skills

Trainers

Candidates need to pass on their knowledge and enthusiasm effectively to their students. However, inspiring is not the same as impressing and a fruitful discussion can be had on the role of the leader and the values that Mountain Training espouses. It is often worth spending some time looking at group communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal.

Time should be spent looking at how instructors can alter their activities and delivery style to teach the same topic to different groups. Being able to alter their language, calibrating the level of challenge, giving clear demonstrations, and setting appropriate goals are all essential teaching tools.

Reflective practice is the key to improving teaching skills and candidates should be encouraged to approach more experienced leaders for feedback and to experiment by practising different teaching methods with groups.

Assessors

Candidates need to be able to command the attention of their groups and deliver knowledge and instructions to their participants with clarity. There should be a good structure to what they say and they should have developed a habit of checking for understanding from their group using a range of methods.

They should be able to plan and adapt activities that are appropriate for the group and that achieve defined outcomes. They should keep the group engaged and enthused by facilitating the appropriate level of challenge. Candidates should also be able to evaluate students' progress and signpost them to appropriate avenues for further development.

Written and verbal self-evaluation will give the assessor good insight into the candidate's ability to reflect on and adjust their approach. All these skills can be modelled with peers or by presenting them with alternative scenarios.

Top tips

- Setting scenario-based lesson plans is a good way to assess a candidate's choice of route and goals.
- Look for behaviours that can be described, recorded and fed back to the candidate e.g. voice characteristics, eye contact, use of names, body position and language, ratio of talk to activity, pace, attention to individuals, giving feedback and encouragement etc.
- Setting different teaching scenarios for the same skill development will test candidates' abilities to adapt their plan and style of delivery.

9. Access, conservation and the environment

Trainers

Recreational use of the countryside represents only one of the many demands placed upon lowland environments. These demands may at times conflict and trainers have a responsibility to ensure that candidates have sufficient knowledge to operate without inadvertently creating tension with other

land users.

Opportunities should be built into a course to illustrate the balance of habitats and measures to minimise or control the effects of recreational use. In addition, many countryside areas are designated as being of particular environmental or historical value. The implication of these designations should be impressed upon candidates.

Knowledge of access rights and relevant legislation (for all parts of the UK and Ireland) is essential for route planning and navigating, more so than in any other walking qualification. Lowland journeys will often take groups through a landscape that is used and managed by diverse individuals and organisations. Trainers must be aware of current legislation, in all parts of the UK and Ireland, as it affects the countryside. It is common for candidates to have limited personal experience or involvement in these issues and trainers should ensure that candidates leave the course with an understanding of the current legal situation.

Leaders may operate in unfamiliar areas. It is therefore essential that they know how to obtain current information about access. Trainers should ensure that candidates are fully aware of the significance of Rights of Way and access arrangements as shown on maps. They should also appreciate the different legal rights in different areas of the UK and Ireland:

<https://www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot/>

<https://www.mountaineering.ie/accessandenvironment/AccessPolicy/default.aspx>

<https://www.gov.uk/right-of-way-open-access-land>

<https://gov.wales/get-access-countryside>

The principles in the accepted codes of practice should be embedded throughout the course. The concept of Leave no Trace and its implications should be discussed.

It is important that on a training course, staff try to impart knowledge about differing aspects of the countryside. Candidates should be encouraged to discuss areas of personal expertise with the rest of the group and to impart what knowledge they may have. Candidates can be helped to develop the confidence to talk about their knowledge through a positive demonstration by training staff. Guidance may be given on resources available for further development.

Assessors

An assessor can gain an understanding of candidates' experience and attitudes towards this crucial aspect of the syllabus by reviewing their DLOG and asking follow-up questions. Although a written paper may be of value and provide a stimulus for worthwhile discussion, this aspect lends itself to evaluation throughout a course either as opportunities arise or engineered through the choice of venue. It is common for a candidate to be asked to prepare a discussion topic and then lead a group session on relevant local or national access and environmental issues.

The criteria applied to the assessment of this area of the syllabus, with its wide range of topics and possible levels of expertise, will need to be flexible. It should, nonetheless, be a clear part of the assessment process and should play a part in any broader assessment decision. Issues of access and the environment are of fundamental importance in effective countryside outdoor leadership. Assessors should not hesitate to defer a candidate if they feel that the range of experience demonstrated contributes to a serious lack of awareness of the importance of access and the environment, or that the practice of the candidate has, or may have, a negative impact. Assessors may

look for knowledge and enthusiasm over a wide range of related subjects but should not expect equal levels of expertise across them all.

The assessment of candidates in this area of the syllabus needs to be flexible and allow for variations in personal interests and depths of knowledge. A positive attitude to learning and imparting knowledge on the part of the candidate may well be the overriding concern. Candidates should be familiar with current legislation that may differ between different parts of the UK and Ireland.

Assessors should be confident that candidates are aware of the interests of others, both commercial and recreational. They should be particularly aware of and sensitive to the potential conflict between their own imported values and those of local communities. Assessors must be confident that a candidate in no way jeopardises existing arrangements through insensitive actions.

Knowledge of sources of current information is vital to planning any route. It is possible to incorporate this in a planning exercise during an assessment course. This would provide opportunities to discuss real situations as they arise and to offer further training.

Top tips

- Setting research and presentation tasks on access rights in different settings of the UK and Ireland can be used to assess the candidates' abilities to find the relevant detailed information.
- Presentation tasks on the lowland environment should encourage the explanation of systems, processes and concepts (e.g. geomorphology, ecology, archaeology, history, environmental impact etc) rather than just describing and naming observations.

10. Background knowledge

Trainers

Trainers should introduce candidates to a variety of resources to enable them to expand their knowledge and understanding of countryside walking. They should also introduce candidates to the role of Mountain Training and the national Mountain Training organisations, the mountaineering councils and the Mountain Training Association. They should also outline how they work with other agencies that have interests in the outdoors. This can be achieved through presentations and an integrated approach throughout the course.

Assessors

Candidates' overall knowledge of the development of the activity and roles of national bodies should be investigated. This can be achieved through a variety and combination of ways, e.g. home papers, discussion or set presentation.

Appendix 1

Fitness

It is important that candidates have the appropriate level of experience to allow engagement with course content. Candidates must satisfy the prerequisites for training and assessment courses, and this must be evidenced in writing, ideally in DLOG, before attending their course.

However, within any group of candidates there will inevitably be a range of fitness and experience levels. Mountain Training expects course staff to manage various levels of fitness and experience in a group 'on the hill' in a thoughtful and inclusive approach.

Here are some strategies based around the Mountain Training leadership and decision-making behaviours that can help course staff manage different abilities:

Individualised support: Understand that each group member may have different fitness levels and abilities. Take the time to know their strengths, weaknesses and goals. Offer personalised support and guidance, like suggesting suitable routes or adjusting for different fitness levels.

Inspire and motivate: One of your main roles is to inspire and motivate your candidates. Encourage them to challenge themselves while creating a supportive and positive atmosphere. Share stories of personal achievements, provide encouragement, and celebrate progress to keep everyone motivated throughout the course.

Set realistic goals: Work with each group member to set realistic and achievable goals based on their experience and fitness levels. The aim is to create a sense of accomplishment and keep participants engaged. Adjust goals as necessary to accommodate dissimilar experience, fitness, and ability levels within the group.

Foster collaboration: Encourage collaboration and teamwork within the group. Pair individuals with dissimilar experience and fitness levels so that they can support and encourage each other. Create an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and can contribute to the group's overall success.

Adaptability and flexibility: Be ready to adapt and be flexible. Modify plans based on the group's capabilities, weather conditions, or unexpected situations. Have alternative routes or options available to accommodate different fitness and experience levels, ensuring that everyone can take part and enjoy the experience.

Communication and feedback: Effective communication is crucial when managing a group with diverse experience and fitness levels. Keep communication open with group members, listen to their concerns, and provide constructive feedback. Encourage participants to share their experiences and challenges, promoting a culture of continuous improvement and learning.

Lead by example: Demonstrate positive leadership behaviours. Your enthusiasm and passion will inspire and motivate others to strive for their personal best. By following these leadership behaviours, you can create an inclusive and supportive environment where candidates with varying experience and fitness levels can succeed and enjoy their Mountain Training course.