



Mountain Training

Indoor Climbing Assistant

Candidate handbook





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Preface

This handbook has been designed to support candidates through Mountain Training's Indoor Climbing Assistant qualification. It contains useful information about the scheme as well as the syllabus and guidance notes.

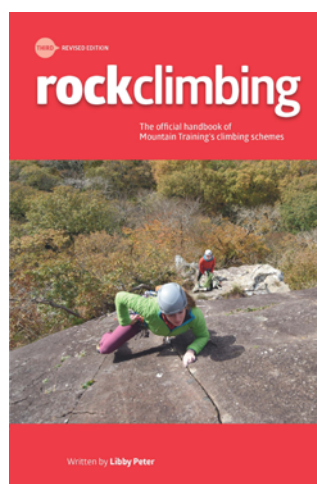
Participation statement

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 instructors manage these risks and to enable new participants to have positive experiences while learning about their responsibilities.

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the preparation of the contents of this handbook, by attending Mountain Training working party meetings and by making detailed and constructive comments on the draft. Grateful thanks are due to volunteers and staff from the Climbing Awards Review Working Group, national Mountain Training organisation council members, course providers, staff of the mountaineering councils, members of the Association of Mountaineering Instructors, Mountain Training Association, staff from the National Mountain Centres and members of The Association of British Climbing Walls for their help and support.

Thanks also to the following individuals whose photographs bring the handbook to life: Henry Iddon, Iain McKenzie, Jessie Leong and Karl Midlane.



Rock Climbing

Throughout this handbook there are references to Rock Climbing by Libby Peter which we publish to support developing rock climbers and instructors. It is packed with essential information and techniques and we have listed the relevant chapter(s) for each syllabus area.



1. Qualification pathway

1.1 Introduction

The Indoor Climbing Assistant qualification is for those with competence in the basic skills of climbing who wish to assist qualified climbing instructors and coaches in the management of their sessions. Indoor Climbing Assistants are assessed as being competent in their role supporting qualified instructors and coaches but are not qualified to manage groups independently.

Indoor Climbing Assistants can have an inspirational effect on individuals, groups and communities. They work with participants and a range of others such as instructors, other climbing assistants, colleagues, volunteers, parents, teachers, youth workers and health professionals to ensure the climbing experience is the very best it can be.

1.2 Scope of the qualification

While operating under the direct supervision of a qualified instructor, an Indoor Climbing Assistant can:

- Assist with the fitting of basic equipment such as harnesses, helmets and rock shoes.
- Assist a qualified instructor with the supervision of core climbing techniques.
- Assist a qualified instructor at indoor and outdoor bouldering venues and climbing walls.

1.2.1 Terrain

An Indoor Climbing Assistant can assist a qualified instructor at:

- Indoor and outdoor artificial bouldering venues
- Indoor and outdoor climbing walls

Assistants

- Need to be supervised by an instructor.
- Need to follow an instructor's directions.
- Need to refer to an instructor for extra guidance.
- Need to be clear about their role.



1.2.2 Exclusions

The qualification does not cover:

- The skills and decision making required for an Indoor Climbing Assistant to manage individuals or groups of climbers independently.

1.3 Stages in the qualification

1.3.1 Registration prerequisites

- You must be at least 16 years old.

Record your experience

Once you have registered for the scheme you will be given access to DLOG, Mountain Training's digital logbook which has been developed to help you keep track of your climbing sessions and other experience. The Indoor Climbing Assistant scheme relies on experience and it is crucial that you record it so that it can be reviewed.

1.3.2 Course prerequisites

- Competence¹ in the basic skills of belaying, harness fitting and tying on; and
- 5 indoor and/or 5 outdoor climbing sessions² logged in DLOG. There is no personal climbing requirement for these sessions; you can have just belayed, but it is useful to have experience of climbing e.g. bottom roping or top roping.

1 Competence is defined as meeting the ABC climbing wall membership standard or similar:

- can put on a harness and fit it safely
- can tie into a harness correctly using either a rethreaded figure of eight knot with a minimum 10cm tail or a bowline (single or double) with a stopper knot
- can belay, lower and secure a falling climbing safely using a belay device
- can check that their climbing partner has put on their harness and tied in properly

2 A session is a half-day or evening



1.3.3 Training and continuous assessment

- During the course you will be trained and continuously assessed on the knowledge and skills detailed in the syllabus and guidance notes. There is no first aid requirement.

2. Course structure

The course will involve a minimum of 6 hours contact time in a climbing wall.

Assessment of the knowledge and skills as detailed in the syllabus and guidance notes is carried out throughout the course.

Results: Pass or Defer

In the case of a 'Defer' result candidates will be given an action plan and guidance on further training and experience. The candidate may be required to attend a subsequent course or given the opportunity to undertake a one-to-one demonstration of competence. Candidates are strongly encouraged to return to the original provider for reassessment, but can be seen by any approved provider.

All reassessments must be completed within five years.

3. Course delivery

Course directors must be Climbing Wall Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Additional staff must be Rock Climbing Instructor/Climbing Wall Instructor or higher.

Min. course size: 4, max. course size: 12, max. ratio 1:6.



4. Awarding organisations

- Mountain Training Board Ireland
- Mountain Training Cymru
- Mountain Training England
- Mountain Training Scotland





Syllabus and guidance notes



Technical competence

Indoor Climbing Assistants will be able to identify, fit and demonstrate use of the basic climbing equipment required by individuals for a climbing session. When assisting a qualified instructor in fitting climbing equipment to participants and providing technical support during climbing sessions, they will be able to:

1. Equipment

- 1.1 Name and understand the use of basic climbing equipment.
- 1.2 Fit basic climbing equipment.
- 1.3 Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of basic climbing equipment.



Guidance

A good working knowledge of basic climbing equipment is important for an Indoor Climbing Assistant because its proper use is an integral element of climbing safely. Misuse of climbing equipment can have dangerous consequences. You will offer advice and assistance to novices on the fitting of equipment which cannot be done well if you do not have appropriate knowledge and understanding.

Climbing equipment such as footwear, helmets, harnesses (including full body harnesses), common belay devices (including assisted breaking devices) and karabiners come in a variety of different styles or sizes to suit different user groups. You need to be aware that the instructors you assist may choose different equipment for different situations and be able to work with these under their supervision.

You should be able to recognise if basic climbing equipment such as harnesses or in-situ ropes are damaged or worn and alert the instructor who can determine if they are fit to be used.



Chapter 6 Technical essentials

Key practice points

- Practise fitting a range of different helmets and harnesses to climbers of various shapes and sizes. Make sure that each harness is fitted correctly to each climber – this is a common error.
- Take time to familiarise yourself with your own equipment by reading the manufacturer's guidance label each time you buy a new piece of kit.
- Develop an effective method for demonstrating the fitting of equipment to a group of novices.



2. Belaying

- 2.1 Tie into the rope. Attach group members to the rope with and without a karabiner.
- 2.2 Demonstrate the use of direct and indirect belay systems set up by the supervising instructor.
- 2.3 Use different belay techniques/devices.
- 2.4 Bottom rope belay a climber competently, hold falls and control lowers.
- 2.5 While out of the rope system, assist a belayer to take in, hold a fall and control a lower.

Guidance

Belaying is a crucial element of roped climbing and belayer error is a potential cause of serious accidents. Your personal competence and ability to supervise others in this task is therefore of the utmost importance. You need to be familiar with ways of tailing a belayer and understand the importance of doing this properly.

The normal method of tying in will be a rethreaded figure of eight knot but you should consider the pros and cons of other knots such as the bowline and its variations. You



should consider when it may be acceptable to use a karabiner to connect the harness to the rope and the extra checks this requires.

Most of the time you will be belaying directly from the harness or rope tie in loop but you need an understanding of when it might be appropriate to use an indirect system involving sandbags or ground anchors.



Chapter 6 Technical essentials

Key practice points

- Make sure you are proficient at tying the figure of eight knot, rethreaded and on the bight, as you will be in a role-modelling situation.
- You need to become an 'instinctive belayer' so that you model good practice and can monitor others while belaying.
- Become familiar with using assisted braking devices such as the Petzl Gri Gri.





3. Personal skills

- 3.1 Demonstrate evidence of ongoing access to climbing walls for personal use.
- 3.2 Understand the importance of centre of gravity in climbing movement.

Guidance

The more time you spend in climbing walls watching experienced climbers and instructors the more you will learn about basic climbing movement and its coaching.

You are not expected to be able to teach climbing movement in a progressive way but you should be able to advise novice climbers on good posture. This involves keeping the centre of gravity over the feet, achieving balance with an upright stance and pushing with the legs to save the arms.



Chapter 4 Movement skills

Key practice point

- Watch short films on climbing technique on [BMCTV](#)





4. Background knowledge

- 4.1 Describe their duty of care in relation to assisting.
- 4.2 Describe and use common terminology* for climbing.
- 4.3 Describe the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its schemes, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and the NICAS/NIBAS schemes.
- 4.4 Describe the basic concept of grading.

Guidance

Indoor Climbing Assistants work under the direction and supervision of a qualified instructor. As long as you follow their directions and remain within your sphere of competence you will be exercising your duty of care. Assistants have a safeguarding duty with regard to children and vulnerable adults. You will need to be able to respond to individuals' needs within your care while being aware of the objectives of the session set by the instructor.

Climbing has its own jargon that, once understood, helps to describe the activity more accurately. However, this language can be a barrier to understanding for novices and part of the assistant's role is to interpret and educate them in its use. You should therefore become familiar with common climbing terminology (e.g. 'jugs' and 'rockovers'). Climbing walls also tend to use French climbing grades to describe the difficulty of routes and a variety of grading systems to describe bouldering difficulty. You will need to become familiar with these systems to help your participants.

The more you get to know about the world of climbing, its pathways and the organisations that support climbers, the more you will be able to inspire and enthuse your participants. The mountaineering councils are a good source of information as is Mountain Training itself. You should have a good awareness of the National Indoor Climbing Award Schemes.



Chapter 6 Technical essentials

Chapter 13 Inspiring others



Key practice points

- Watch [Mountain Training - Our Ethos](#)
- Learn about [NICAS](#)
- Look up [Climb Scotland](#)
- Seek out valuable resources such as *The Beginners Guide for Climbers* by Sophie Mitchell – useful for introducing basic climbing technique, equipment and language to young climbers.



Management and decision making

Indoor Climbing Assistants should be able to support qualified climbing instructors and coaches with the organisation, planning, management and delivery of their sessions. They should be able to:

5. Planning and structure of sessions

- 5.1 Assist an instructor in liaising with climbing walls, parents, group members and organisations.



5.2 Demonstrate an awareness of environmental hazards and other site users.

5.3 Be aware of the existence of Mountain Training's National Guidelines.

Guidance

Indoor Climbing Assistants can play a key role in liaising with parents, teachers, carers, supporters and the climbers themselves. They may have an existing relationship with a participant or group and as such can have a powerful effect on both individuals and groups.

Climbing walls are often busy places and other users can present a significant safety hazard. You should remain vigilant as to how other users may affect, or be affected by, your group. Outdoor structures are exposed to the full effects of weather conditions and you should be mindful of this when supervising sessions. Temperature changes can loosen holds, even indoors and you should report any such issues to the instructor.



Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Key practice points

- Observe how instructors plan and structure climbing sessions based around their clients' aims and objectives and how this might change with different circumstances.
- Get to know your local climbing wall's procedures and expectations with regard to supervising groups – these differ from wall to wall.





6. Management of participants

- 6.1 Demonstrate good ethics for arrival, activity and departure.
- 6.2 Under direction, manage a basic safe warm up session.
- 6.3 Under direction, supervise one bottom roping party, providing back up where appropriate.
- 6.4 Under direction, assist in the safe supervision of bouldering activities with groups (including spotting where appropriate).
- 6.5 Avoid common problems when assisting supervising a roped party.
- 6.6 Demonstrate an awareness of fall zones, lower off zones and trip hazards.

Guidance

As an Indoor Climbing Assistant, you can provide valuable support to an instructor and the group when they arrive at a venue. This is a busy time when administration, participants' individual needs, liaison with staff, issuing of equipment and briefings all have to be addressed.

Properly structured and engaging floor based warm ups offer an opportunity to learn more about the individuals in the group. The warm up may have been planned with (or by) the instructor and you should be able to adapt it according to the needs of the participants.

A critical role of an Indoor Climbing Assistant is to be able to safely supervise a single roped climbing party. This will involve you making essential checks and backing up the belayer if required, under the direction of the instructor. You can use a variety of different methods to achieve this, depending upon the age, ability and experience of the participants. The instructor will direct you on these and you must be confident that you can understand and are competent to carry out these directions – the participants' safety will depend on it.

Being aware of common mistakes that can be made by novice climbing groups will enable you to support the instructor in managing the associated risks. Constant vigilance over your participants and checking that equipment is being used properly should prevent most problems from occurring in the first place. If problems do occur, you should alert your instructor who is trained to deal with them.

Supervising effective group bouldering sessions requires good planning, high levels of



vigilance and quick reactions. As an assistant you can provide invaluable support both with the safe supervision and the coaching of individuals, through games, exercises, coaching movement or physical training. The instructor will be responsible for planning and directing sessions but you need to be able to assist them with a wide variety of groups.



Chapter 3 Warming up

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Key practice points

- Experiment with different ways of getting to know a group.
- Practise backing up a roped party in a variety of different ways, using different belay devices, so that you are ready for different directions from the instructor.
- Many minor accidents happen in bouldering walls – don't relax here. Focus on how experienced instructors keep control and build up participants' skills and safety.





7. Decision making

- 7.1 Assist a qualified instructor in making decisions for the group.
- 7.2 Assess and respond to the needs of participants.

8. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

- 8.1 Assist a qualified instructor in teaching basic techniques.

Guidance

Indoor Climbing Assistants will often have special knowledge of a group and your role allows you to support particular individuals more closely. This means that you can often contribute very significantly to decisions that the instructor may make for the group or individuals. There could be opportunities for differentiated tasks, changing the timings on the session plan and providing technical or pastoral support for individuals' needs.



Chapter 4 Movement skills

Key practice points

- Practise giving short simple demonstrations of basic techniques to small groups and get feedback about how clear you were.
- Try standing beside your students when demonstrating a knot or belay so they don't get a 'mirror view'.



9. Working with other staff

- 9.1 Describe their role and responsibilities in supporting a qualified instructor
- 9.2 Communicate effectively with a qualified leader.

Guidance

Assistants and instructors should be working as part of a team. Effective communication is therefore vital and you should remain within sight and sound of them when assisting with off ground activities. It is essential that you both understand each other's role in any given situation. You must be clear about your responsibilities and the fact that the instructor maintains overall responsibility for the group at all times.

At the end of a climbing session you should be able to review its outcomes with the instructor. You may have different knowledge of the group and individuals and should be able to contribute to an assessment of the session on whether it has achieved its aims.



Chapter 13 Inspiring others



Key practice points

- Make sure that you are familiar with the scope of the qualification and that you do not exceed this or accept a responsibility that you are not comfortable with.
- It will be useful to read the guidance issued to instructors about how they should manage an assistant.

Teaching and learning skills



10. Teaching and learning

- 10.1 Assist a qualified instructor in maintaining a positive learning environment for all participants.
- 10.2 Communicate effectively and appropriately both with a group and individuals.

Guidance

To be most effective, Indoor Climbing Assistants need the ability to create rapport, communicate at an appropriate level, use positive language and give meaningful



encouragement to their participants. In some cases their own skills and knowledge of the group could give them a primary role in communicating with a group (e.g. signing to the hearing impaired).

As an assistant you can have a strong influence over the learning climate. Regardless of this you need to be able to communicate simple instructions to a group clearly and in a positive way. You should also be able to adapt your method of communication for different groups and individuals.



Chapter 13 Inspiring others

Key practice points

- When talking to a group, get everyone's attention – eye to eye. Arrange the group or yourself to achieve this.
- Check for understanding – get participants to describe, demonstrate or explain to you or the group what you have taught them.





The climbing environment



Indoor Climbing Assistants should be familiar with the indoor climbing wall environment, both small and large scale (commercial) venues. They should be able to:

11. Access

11.1 Demonstrate an awareness of the main rules and regulations governing the use of a climbing facility.

12. Etiquette and ethics

12.1 Demonstrate an awareness of the impact the group they are with may have upon other site users.

Guidance

Climbing walls vary greatly in how they are designed, used and managed. Don't assume that what works or is allowed in one centre will work or be allowed in another. You need to take the time to understand a new venue; its risks, opportunities, rules, culture and users.



When you work with a group in a public venue you should be mindful of others observing you and you need to be aware of, and respond to, local etiquette. The local management will always help you in this regard and you should, along with the instructor, seek their help for guidance and local procedures.

Key practice points

- There are often preferred 'beginner' or teaching areas in a climbing centre – get into the habit of finding out where they are when you visit a new wall.
- Be sensitive to noise coming from your group if there are independent climbers present.
- Novices and experienced climbers often do not mix well in a bouldering wall. It is best to negotiate access or arrange a separate area for your group in advance of the session taking place.





Appendix

Course delivery

Mountain Training courses are delivered by approved providers throughout the UK and Ireland. Providers of Indoor Climbing Assistant courses will appoint a course director for each course.

Courses can be found by searching on the Candidate Management System (CMS) <https://mt.tahdah.me> or on the Mountain Training website <http://www.mountain-training.org/find/find-a-course>.

Your course result will be recorded on CMS.

Further experience

There are various avenues for further experience and support which Indoor Climbing Assistants can pursue, including:

- Mountain Training Association membership .
- Mountaineering council membership (BMC, Mountaineering Ireland, Mountaineering Scotland) – this gives Indoor Climbing Assistants access to relevant insurance cover when operating as a volunteer.
- Mountain Training’s Rock Skills courses – personal skills courses for climbing outdoors on rock.
- Mountain Training’s Foundation Coach or Mountaineering Ireland’s Level 1 Climbing Coach – these develop coaching and instructing skills.
- Mountain Training’s Climbing Wall Instructor or Rock Climbing Instructor qualifications (sessions working as an Indoor Climbing Assistant would support DLOG requirements for these qualifications). Reflective practice with a qualified instructor would support you on your journey towards these qualifications. DLOG can be used to record these comments.