Bouldering Wall Instructor

Guidance notes for trainers and assessors

Contents

Introduction

These guidance notes should be used together with the Bouldering Wall Instructor candidate handbook and 'Bouldering: Guidance on session delivery and supervision'.

Candidate experience

- It is important candidates have the appropriate level of experience to allow engagement with course content. Candidates must satisfy the prerequisites for training and assessment courses. This must be evidenced in writing, we strongly prefer candidates record this information within DLOG.

- A thorough review of a candidate's logbook in advance of the course should provide the course director with information about their breadth, depth and currency of experience. It's important to scrutinise the quality, not just the quantity.

- Trainers should be mindful of experience levels of candidates when introducing content especially if techniques shown are on the fringe of the qualification scope.

Responsibility for safety

- Course directors and staff should remember that they are ultimately responsible for the safety of everyone, during any training or assessment course, and will do all they can to prevent accidents leading to physical or mental injury.

- Bouldering Wall Instructor courses are for experienced boulderers. While course staff should endeavour to maintain a safe working environment, participants should be reminded that they also have a duty to exercise judgment regarding their own personal safety and that of other members of the group.

- Trainers and assessors should be mindful of the psychological pressure candidates may feel to perform. This can be effectively managed by course staff through attentiveness to the group's needs, recognition of individual differences, and an understanding of how group dynamics and the environment interact. Course staff self-awareness is also essential; understanding one's own strengths, limitations, and training or assessment style supports informed decision-making and contributes to safer outcomes.

Venue choice

- Course directors should select venues carefully, bearing in mind the aims and objectives of the day. Venues should have sufficient variety of problems at the required grade and there should be a plan for managing the activity within busy walls that is shared with the candidates, reinforcing the practice of good decision-making.

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Safeguarding

- Safeguarding policies and practice should be discussed throughout the course to make candidates aware of its importance and how good practice should permeate all their planning and interactions with participants, to create a positive and safe learning environment for all. Different scenarios will help to illustrate this.

- Trainers should highlight the importance of, and signpost to, appropriate safeguarding courses for candidates.

General

- Training and assessment courses should facilitate open discussion.

- Assessors should set realistic tasks or scenarios rather than request specific techniques be demonstrated.

- If assessment candidates are unable to demonstrate competence initially, other opportunities should be given where possible or appropriate.

- Assessments should include observation of candidates managing a group of boulderers. The group should comprise a minimum of three individuals and ideally be novices (i.e. need supervising).

- Course staff should encourage candidates to engage in reflective practice.

In conclusion, Bouldering Wall Instructor courses are for participants with considerable personal 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.

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1. Personal bouldering skills

Trainers:

Candidates will be entering the training course as climbers with measurable experience in bouldering, including experience of climbing V2 (minimum). The training course will spend time evaluating and expanding their knowledge with the aim that candidates then complete numerous problems of varying styles and angles.

Refinement may include giving input on movement skills and common bouldering tactics such as route reading, brushing holds, downclimbing, jumping off and landing safely.

Assessors:

Candidates will need to have experience of climbing V2 (minimum) in their logbook and discussion with them individually should take place to verify this experience. The ability of the candidate to demonstrate climbing at V2 on assessments is also required.

Candidates should be able to move with confidence on V2 (min.) boulders following a warm-up and progression of easier problems. To be assured of competence assessors should request candidates climb multiple problems of varying style. Candidates should be able to choose their own problems and practice them before demonstrating smooth and accurate movement on them. These could include traverses and different styles of problem but not necessarily to have to include all slab, wall and steep angles as this could disadvantage individuals.

Top tips:

- Trainers may take the opportunity to demonstrate good technique themselves so that candidates have an understanding of the expectation at assessment.
- On training courses it may be possible for more experienced candidates to teach those lesser experienced as part of a personal skills task.
- Assessors may decide to climb with the candidates during the warm-up, and to demonstrate the expected climbing standard as a way of putting candidates at ease.
- Beware the pressure of training and/or assessment on candidates which may lead to them attempting problems that are too hard for them or too quickly, leading to injuries.

2. Background knowledge

Trainers:

The beginning of all training courses should outline the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its qualifications, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and NICAS. This may be in the form of a presentation or discussion which involves the whole group, and their knowledge and experiences should feed into this. It may be worth distinguishing between the role of an in-house qualified instructor and a nationally qualified one.

Awareness should be drawn to the grading system, history, traditions and ethics of climbing in the UK and Ireland through ongoing discussions or as opportunities present themselves. The use of guidebooks and publications can assist with this.

Candidates should also be made aware of how Mountain Training's work dovetails into the work of the mountaineering councils and other national training schemes e.g. NICAS.

Assessors:

Throughout the assessment candidates can be questioned about many of these topics. In some cases it may be difficult to find the time to thoroughly cover all aspects of this syllabus area, therefore the use of a home research or question paper should be considered. It is important that the questioning references a wide variety of climbing wall types and that discussion is not just focused on commercial mixed climbing centres. (for example: bouldering only centres, private facilities in schools, 'taster' session walls in multi activity centres, walls in gyms, mobile climbing walls, fixed walls outdoors).

Top tips:

- Make use of a home research or question paper – candidates should be allowed to answer in non-written form if necessary.
- The mountaineering councils produce excellent online resources available in digital and hardcopy form. These resources can be used to address key syllabus elements. The value of supporting the mountaineering councils can be outlined when doing so.
- Bouldering walls regularly advertise climbing events and competitions run by councils and clubs. These advertisements can prompt further discussion.

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3. Instructor responsibilities

Trainers:

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. Risk assessments for bouldering should be undertaken and trainers should signpost to relevant safeguarding training. Trainers should discuss with candidates how best to carry out initial preparation and how to complete detailed planning before delivering sessions.

Trainers should ensure that candidates are made aware of the importance of assessing the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the group and plan the climbing activity accordingly. Safeguarding and inclusion practices should be introduced and discussed throughout the training e.g. managing cultural clothing, spotting, managing exclusionary 'banter', changing and toilet breaks, working 1:1, using positive language, setting agreed goals, attending to cultural needs etc.

Procedures for when and how the instructor or the group might call for assistance should be discussed. Trainers should provide opportunities to analyse situations as they occur during practical sessions and review exercises, which involve an element of leadership.

Candidates should be encouraged to develop a range of management strategies applicable to different circumstances and groups. It is ideal if those management strategies allow full group participation. Either way, candidates should be reminded that their responsibility is for the whole group, irrespective of whether they are directly involved in the climbing activity or not. Participants may require additional support to join in the activity and trainers may need to make adjustments for these individuals. Although instructors should commonly be able to facilitate this, trainers should make candidates aware that they may require additional training to do so.

Assessors:

Assessors should examine the candidate's ability to undertake risk assessments for bouldering activities 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 practical ability to lead a group effectively during bouldering activities. 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 special 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' activity planning should show considerable adaptability to anticipate changes in conditions, the group or the environment. This can be tested at climbing venues either for real or by setting different scenarios.

4. Leadership and decision-making

Trainers:

Trainers should emphasise to candidates that underpinning their role as an instructor 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, groups 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 instructors 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 instructor, and the group.

All instructors tend to have preferred behaviours that are heavily influenced by their personality, experience, ethos and beliefs, as do their groups. Trainers should stress that instructors 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

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managing a group's arrival at a busy venue. 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 & how to make them
- Instructor observations: what they should be & how to make them
- Instructor 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 instructor – 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 Vision Support Challenge 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/climbing activity choice
- Having the group deliver short demonstrations and teaching inputs.

Trainers should be well versed in the literature on leadership and the responsibilities of an instructor, 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 during the course.

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Assessors:

Observing candidates leading and managing a group should provide an insight into their leadership behaviours and adaptability. Much assessment can also be achieved by careful questioning throughout the course as situations arise. Assessors should consider introducing the Vision Support Challenge 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 as to which aspects of leadership they can assess within the structure of the course. Self-evaluation (using Vision Support Challenge 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. During practical assessment candidates should also be presented with some common emergency situations.

Top tips:

- Encourage candidates to think of observable behaviours that demonstrate the leadership competencies. The Vision Support Challenge 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 starting bouldering activities to create an inclusive and positive team spirit for the day?'
- Set tasks that require technical focus (e.g. introducing movement techniques) 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.

5. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

Trainers:

A key skill of a Bouldering Wall Instructor is their ability to plan and run a structured and engaging bouldering session for a range of participants. Successful sessions typically include a variety of bouldering activities, appropriate games and activities, and selecting or setting appropriate boulder problems. During training, candidates should spend time planning and running a range of activities.

Candidates will need to develop good demonstrations on fundamental climbing movement skills including balance, accurate footwork, the concept of their centre of gravity and efficient use of the skeleton to support the body's weight. Time should be allowed for each candidate to practise demonstrations, active discussion among the group, and for feedback to take place.

Exercises and games that develop good movement should be introduced. This is not a coaching movement course however and trainers should be able to signpost the relevant candidates towards the Mountain Training Coaching schemes for further training in this area.

Additionally, candidates should be able to teach and demonstrate downclimbing as well as safe falling and landing techniques. Falling and landing training requires some considerable, and careful, consolidated practice to develop good instinctive habits. This should be delivered in a 'ground up' progression beginning with safe landing positions on the mat, then rolling or collapsing into these, before any small drops are practised from the wall.

- Climb down if possible

- The basic principles of landing to break the fall and absorb energy should be covered

- Basic vertical landing technique: bend knees, collapse backwards, keep arms in, possible back roll (taking care: enough room? Protect the neck?).

- Other landings (e.g. sideways rolls from dynos) are beyond scope and need a lot more training/experience.

Bouldering Wall Instructors commonly work with novices. For this reason, it is important that they are comfortable running sessions with a range of groups with limited experience. Instructors should be able to teach activities in a fun, engaging and progressive way. Trainers should develop these skills drawing on their own and the candidates' prior experience.

Assessors:

Assessors should ensure candidates are able to supervise novice groups. Activity should be safe, progressive and fun for all. Candidates should be aware of the needs of the participants and be able to switch between different activities to ensure full engagement.

Candidates should be comfortable developing movement skills whilst bouldering. They should be aware of a range of strategies to do so, applicable to different groups. They should understand where to direct participants to extend their development.

Assessors should focus on the candidates' ability to spot or support climbers, and their judgement as to when and where it is appropriate to do so. They should also assess how candidates would train participants in downclimbing, falling and landing in a safe and progressive manner. Candidates must be aware of the safeguarding issues and sensitivities surrounding physical contact and have strategies to address these.

Top tips:

- Input on movement skills naturally compliments bouldering sessions and should be incorporated into warm up exercises and games too.
- Candidates can be asked to demonstrate a range of movement skills to real students or their peers. In all cases they should check for understanding.
- Introduce an example of facility rules that will dictate that various strategies may or may not be used (e.g. rearranging holds). Ask them why this might be so?

6. Hazards and emergency procedures

Trainers:

Discussion should be had during the training course about the venue's suitability and use with groups, with attention to the risk assessment of the physical layout, floor surfaces, type and quality of matting, hold types and wall angles.

Warming up is key in injury avoidance and preparing for activity and should be an engaging activity in its own right. A creative approach commonly inspires good participation. Candidates should be encouraged to experiment with multiple, effective methods of warming up applicable to different groups and situations.

Injuries sustained during bouldering activities are common. Identifying bouldering hazards, and minimising risk of injury is a key focus of the Bouldering Wall Instructor scheme,

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therefore a good amount of dedicated time is required during the course to help candidates build knowledge as well as practice safety briefings and group management techniques. This will assist them in identifying potential and common issues along with simple strategies to avoid them.

Examples of common bouldering issues include:

- Stuck climber at top of wall/unable or refusing to climb down.
- Out of control falls/bad landings.
- Landing on an object.
- Collisions with other climbers.
- Collisions with the wall.
- Soft tissue injury sustained by attempting, or repeating, inappropriately fingery, steep, or snatchy moves.
- Antagonising existing injuries – shoulders, knees, wrists etc.

Potential issues should be foreseen and avoided by clear briefings, focus on good technique, thorough warm-up and a progressive approach to trying harder problems.

Advice on spotting is well covered in our bouldering guidance document. Candidates should generally not plan to spot other than clearing the fall zone. They should manage the situation where possible to reduce the likelihood of bad landing e.g. height limits for children. However, there may be occasional situations where spotting by the instructor is warranted (e.g. shoulders when climber is horizontal) to reduce the risk of injury, but this should be rare. Sometimes some physical support is helpful for novices - with full permission and safeguarding taken into account. Group members should never be asked to spot.

In the case of an incident, it is likely that external help is close to hand. Candidates should know how to call for help and must be aware of the simple steps necessary to stabilize the situation and provide immediate care until external help arrives. In doing so candidates should be able to ensure the safety of the rest of the group and the casualty.

Assessors:

Candidates can be tasked to review the suitability of a given venue for a particular group as a way for the assessor to gauge their knowledge.

Assessors should use scenario-based approaches to set tasks which require the candidate to make judgements in a realistic way. Candidates should be given a range of scenarios to enable them to demonstrate their knowledge and communication skills as they seek to avoid 'common problems' occurring.

Assessors should then build upon the scenarios and consider what common occurrences may happen given the setup, location and group. These additional scenarios should be realistic for the given environment and used to prompt further discussion within the group.

Top tips:

- Get candidates to individually assess a venue for risks and opportunities. This can be reported back verbally or in writing.
- Use a scenario-based approach to group management to help draw in wider issues.
- The focus needs to be on the avoidance of issues, rather than the solving of problems.

7. Managing/supervising other staff

Trainers:

Candidates need to understand that a qualified instructor remains responsible for the actions of any assistants and volunteers supporting their sessions. The instructor must assess the competence of each individual, and the demands of the situation, before deploying them.

Scenario-based discussions on the role and management of assistants could be used to illustrate the range of judgements and decisions that an instructor will need to make. Trainers may also want to model management styles using course members in scenario-based roles.

See: Guidance for managing assistants during climbing activities

Assessors:

Assessors should explore the candidates' judgement of an assistant's capabilities and the role they give to them. Assessors should also examine how the candidate supervises other staff given specific scenarios. These could be demonstrated using 'live' groups and attending assistants or could be modelled within the assessment course. Appropriate supervision requires the ability to intervene if necessary and candidates should be able to justify that their decisions and actions were appropriate.

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8. Teaching and learning skills

Trainers:

Instructors 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 instructor and the values that Mountain Training espouses. It is often worth spending some time looking at group communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal. Reference to specific techniques that a trainer may have expert knowledge in can sometimes be useful here.

Time should be spent looking at how instructors can alter their activities and delivery style to teach the same topic to different groups both during short single sessions and as a progression over several sessions. Being able to alter their language, calibrating the level of challenge, gamifying activities, introducing competition where appropriate, letting students experiment, 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 instructors for feedback and to experiment by modelling different behaviours with groups. The Mountain Training Bouldering Wall Instructor Skills Checklist and Action Plan are useful tools for facilitating this process.

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 type of activity, level of challenge and pace of delivery. 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 but a truer assessment of a candidate's ability to teach and facilitate learning will be better observed with a student group.

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Top tips:

- Setting scenario-based lesson plans is a good way to assess a candidate's choice of activity and delivery.
- 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, quantity of talk and 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. Etiquette and ethics

Trainers:

Trainers should discuss the behaviour and attitudes of instructors using climbing walls and emphasise the responsibilities of the instructor to avoid any potential conflict with other users or local climbing wall guidance and rules.

Candidates must understand the importance of adhering to facility rules. Trainers should ensure candidates understand why common rules exist (e.g. no harnesses on, no loose chalk) and why rules differ between different facilities. If candidates understand why particular rules are set it will support their learning.

Candidates may find themselves in a position where there are no set rules at the facility. In this case they should be encouraged to abide by 'normal practice' and, if necessary, encouraged to seek further information from reliable sources.

Candidates should be able to cope in busy, hectic environments and deal with common complications (e.g. sections of the wall being closed).

Assessors:

This section of the syllabus is commonly assessed through an open discussion among candidates. This will highlight how wide ranging the subject is once candidates draw and share from their experiences. In addition to the discussions, assessors should use questioning with candidates individually to gauge a more accurate understanding of the candidate's knowledge.

Top tips:

- Choose a busy climbing wall where group management is challenging.
- Restrict the sections of the wall candidates are able to use on assessments.
- Ask candidates to outline what the traits of a high and low impact instructor would be.

Appendix 1 – Sample **training** course programme

1. Introduction – classroom
   a. Introductions and course domestics
   b. The Mountain Training pathways. BWI remit, scope and scheme structure.
   c. The responsibilities of the BWI – discussion. Duty of care.   45 mins

2. Personal bouldering skills – wall session
   a. Warming up
   b. Injury prevention
   c. Safe bouldering
   d. Structure of a personal session
   e. Reading a problem
   f. Grading   1 hr 15

3. Risk assessment and safety management – wall session
   a. Hazards and their mitigation
   b. How to fall/land/downclimb - building safe practice progressions *.
   c. Spotting and supporting – when, how, safeguarding   1 ½ hrs

       LUNCH BREAK

4. Background knowledge - classroom
   a. Ethics, history, outdoor bouldering differences
   b. Competitions – types, how they work, setting your own
   c. NICAS, ABC, Mountaineering Councils, GB Climbing   ½ hr

5. Instructing – classroom/wall
   a. Management techniques and responsibilities
   b. Leadership and its difference to management – Vision, Support, Challenge
   c. Inclusive practice and behaviour
   d. Positive behaviours for safeguarding – creating a safe learning space
   e. Problem solving and incident management
   f. Managing an assistant   1 hr

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6. Session planning and teaching skills – wall session
    a. Planning different session aims and structures for different groups
    b. Being creative in delivery – challenges, games, floor exercises
    c. Teaching basic movement skills – COG, weight transfer, footwork
    d. Teaching landing skills – when, how, risk assessment.   1 ½ hrs

7. Evaluation – classroom
    a. Course feedback and questions
    b. Pathway to assessment
    c. Individual feedback   ½ hr

                                                                7 hours total

Appendix 2 – Sample **assessment** course programme

1. Introductions, setting the scene	30 mins
2. Home papers/research discussion	30 mins
3. Personal bouldering skills	30 mins
4. Group management skills (30 mins each leading and other assisting)	1 hour
5. Further Q&A - scenarios	15 mins
6. Tea break	15 mins
7. Feedback and results	30 mins
Total	**3 hours**