



# Indoor Climbing Assistant

Candidate handbook





# Contents

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1. Qualification pathway .....	4
2. Course structure .....	6
3. Course delivery.....	6
4. Awarding organisations .....	7
 Syllabus and guidance notes .....	 8
1. Equipment .....	8
2. Belaying .....	10
3. Personal skills .....	12
4. Background knowledge .....	13
5. Assistant responsibilities .....	14
6. Leadership and decision-making.....	16
7. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques .....	17
8. Hazards and emergency procedures .....	19
9. Working with other staff .....	20
10. Teaching and learning .....	22
11. Etiquette and ethics .....	24
 Appendix .....	 26



# Preface

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

## Participation statement

Mountain Training recognises that walking, climbing, and mountaineering are activities that have associated risks. Mountain Training provides training and assessment courses and guidance to help instructors develop the skills to manage the risks associated with the environment in which they operate and to enable new participants to have positive experiences.

All instructors owe a heightened duty of care to the people they instruct, their colleagues, and the wider public who may be impacted by the instructor's actions.

Mountain Training qualified instructors will act in the best interests of their group, individual group members and others, and they will always act within their competence to prevent harm to them.

## Acknowledgements

Mountain Training would like to thank all the staff members and volunteers involved in the Climbing Awards Review 2014-2016.

Thanks also to the following individuals whose photographs bring the handbook to life: Henry Iddon, Iain McKenzie, Jessie Leong, Karl Midlane, NICAS, Bryn Williams, Guy Jarvis, The Boardroom, and The Climbing Hangar.



## 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

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## 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 in the UK and Ireland. 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

- Competence<sup>1</sup> in the basic skills of belaying, harness fitting and tying on; and
- 5 indoor and/or 5 outdoor climbing sessions<sup>2</sup> 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.

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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 minimum of an hour.



### 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

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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

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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: 2, max. course size: 12, max. ratio 1:6.





## 4. Awarding organisations

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



**Mountain  
Training**  
Association

Our association can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications. We are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.





# Syllabus and guidance notes

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## Technical competence

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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 different 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

### Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

#### 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 and use common terminology\* for climbing.
- 4.2 Describe the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its schemes, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and the NICAS schemes.
- 4.3 Describe the basic concept of grading.

### Guidance

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.



Chapter 1 A brief history of UK and Irish climbing

Chapter 6 Technical essentials

### 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. Assistant responsibilities

- 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 Describe their duty of care in relation to assisting, including safeguarding issues specific to supervising young people and vulnerable adults.

## 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.



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.

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.



## Chapter 6 Technical essentials

## Chapter 20 The law and risk management

### Key practice points

- Get to know your local climbing wall's procedures and expectations with regard to supervising groups – these differ from wall to wall.
- Make yourself familiar with the legal aspects of taking people climbing, in particular with those under 18.





## 6. Leadership and decision-making

- 6.1 Demonstrate good conscientious behaviours for arrival, activity and departure.
- 6.2 With support from the supervising instructor, demonstrate adaptable leadership behaviours and decision-making.
  - 6.2.1 Monitor the group, environmental conditions and activity, and can adapt their behaviours and decisions to meet ongoing safety, group and task requirements.
  - 6.2.2 Be consistent and confident in their decision making to achieve positive outcomes and communicate these clearly to the group.

### 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.

The Indoor Climbing Assistant, under support and direction from their supervising instructor needs to be able to demonstrate the basic skills and decision making of adaptive leadership. They should have a well-researched plan for their group's climbing experience which incorporates factors such as the groups' abilities and needs, the weather and ground conditions as well as the location and intended activities (such as cooking). Most important of all is to match their choices with the desired outcomes for the group.

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.
- Read the guidance issued to instructors about [how they should manage an assistant](#).
- Experiment with different ways of getting to know a group.



## 7. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

- 7.1 Under direction, deliver technical instruction to individuals and the group including:
  - 7.1.1 Fitting of suitable harnesses.
  - 7.1.2 Attaching the rope to the harness.
  - 7.1.3 Effective belaying.
- 7.2 Under direction, manage a basic safe warm up session.
- 7.3 Under direction, supervise one bottom roping party, providing back up where appropriate.





- 7.4 Under direction, assist in the safe supervision of bouldering activities with groups (including spotting where appropriate).

## Guidance

An assistant can provide valuable input when a technique is being demonstrated or explained to a group. Demonstrations may require two presenters, for example movement skills demonstrated on a rope will require a belayer and activities can be introducing both verbally and visually. When it is well coordinated, team teaching in this way can be highly effective.

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.

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 and avoiding injuries

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

## 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 belaying so they don't get a 'mirror view'.
- 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.



## 8. Hazards and emergency procedures

- 8.1 Avoid common problems when assisting supervising a roped party.
- 8.2 Demonstrate an awareness of fall zones, lower off zones and trip hazards.

### Guidance

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.

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 point

- 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.



## 9. Working with other staff

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

### 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

- Consider what methods of communication you might use with an instructor prior to and during a session.





# Teaching and learning skills



Indoor Climbing Assistants will often need to give tuition and support to a range of climbers. They should be able to:

## 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. Etiquette and ethics

11.1 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.



## Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

### 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

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## 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 \(tahdah\)](#) or on the [Mountain Training website](#).

Your course result will be recorded on your account.

## Further experience

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

- Mountain Training Association membership (info on the next page).
- 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.



# Mountain Training

Association

Our association is a membership organisation that can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications.

As a membership association we are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.

## We can help you with:

- Big savings on clothing and equipment
- A wide range of accredited development workshops, events and opportunities for continuing personal/professional development
- Specialist mentoring for your qualification
- Regional networks and opportunities to build connections with others in the sector
- The Professional Mountaineer magazine offering advice, tips and guidance from experts and peers within the profession
- Specially negotiated rates for liability insurance for qualified members

Anyone can join from the moment they register for a Mountain Training qualification, and can join anytime when working towards a qualification or when qualified.

Join via your account on the Mountain Training Candidate Management System (Tahdah – CMS).

“The workshops I’ve done have been brilliant and have definitely made me a better leader” Alex, Association member.

“The Association offers an excellent range of CPD, which has given me a broader understanding of the role, skills and expertise required to be a great leader. Definitely recommend.” Charlie, Association member.