



Demystifying Risk Assessment

A guide to effective risk management on educational visits

Introduction

Despite Educational Visits being statistically one of the safest environments for children to be in, this guide was written in response to the large number of group leaders that have expressed concern and were seeking help with the demands being made of them for risk assessments of their visits.

It seeks to illustrate, in non-technical terms, common basic principles and how they can be effectively used to benefit their own group management plans and is suitable for all schools.

Many of the requests for help came from leaders preparing to take visits that did not include Outdoor and Adventurous Activities, but were typically curriculum-based tours, such as History and Modern Language Residentials or Concert Tours. Therefore this guide's main intention is to assist the organisation of those tours, but the information will have relevance to other types of educational visits.

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START THE ADVENTURE

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What Is Expected?

Essentially, leaders need to be duly diligent in preparing a management plan for their visit, but they do not have to demonstrate superhuman powers of pre-cognition. They simply have to deal with what is reasonably foreseeable and respond within a reasonable range of measures.

A risk assessment for an off-site activity need not be complex. It could be thought of as the recorded minutes of a staff meeting, where the challenges (significant risks) that are reasonably foreseeable in a particular activity are discussed, and the actions (control measures) identified to address those challenges are recorded.

There is no expectation for insignificant risks to be included in a written risk assessment; Professional judgement, particularly when backed by experience, is sufficient to deal with such situations within schools and it is no different when off-site.

It is important to follow any school or LEA guidelines and it is recommended that two or more leaders participate in the planning process. This sharing of the planning process shares knowledge and skills, allows others to be involved and take ownership of the solutions. Additionally, there is every reason to involve pupils, as a good code of conduct will inevitably feature in any group management plan.

What Is a Risk Assessment?

The concept is quite simple:

1. Somebody identifying a hazard
2. Recognizing somebody is at risk from the hazard
3. Putting some judgement on the potential likelihood and severity of the harm that might befall them
4. Then **critically** putting in place the necessary control measures to rectify the problem.

Example 1 – everyday risk management:

Teacher A walks into a room and sees Tracy balancing back on the back legs of her chair

- Hazard Identification
- Person at Risk
- Likelihood & Severity
- Control Measures
- Teacher A identifies the hazard - a fall from overbalancing
- Tracy is the person at risk
- Likelihood of fall is quite high and potential for harm also quite high
- Tracy told to sit straight on chair and observed to do so.

An important consideration is that the action – the control measure – is usually dependent on the person **not** the hazard.

For example, if Tracy was unlikely or unable to follow the simple instruction, "*sit straight*", the teacher may have felt another control measure was necessary.

Identifying Risks

As can be seen, the risks to consider are those associated with your own group management, which is different to thinking about the whole safety management of any location. Many leaders have made the mistake of asking for reams of risk assessment material from suppliers, which in fact hinders a good process.

Example 2 – identifying the risks on a visit to the Eiffel Tower:

Leaders have asked, “Do I have to risk assess the Eiffel Tower? However, it is much more useful to think about the task as ‘managing the group safely round the series of obstacles the Eiffel Tower presents’.

On consideration, the significant hazards to an average school group would be:

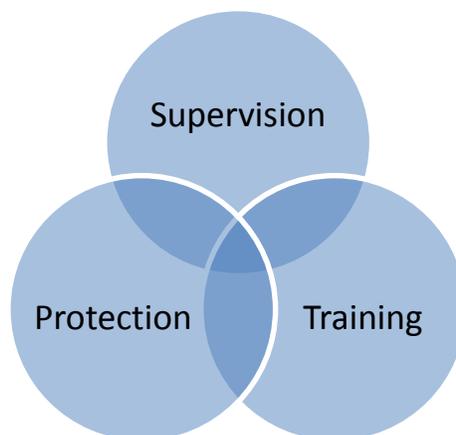
- Children getting lost / group being split
- Inappropriate behaviour
- Sickness
- Strangers
- Petty theft
- Trips on stairs
- Fear of heights

There is no need to ask for the Eiffel Tower’s own safety management systems as they are unlikely to be relevant to your group.

Furthermore if we think of the Eiffel Tower as a *“public monument on an open site, featuring close proximity with other members of the public, potential crowd situations, access restrictions, height and lots of stairs/trip hazards”*, then we can see that the risks will be common at similar locations.

Appropriate Control Measures

When deciding on how to control a group in any situation, it is useful to consider a range of measures that work together:



Example 3: control measures for a field trip to a local wood:

- Supervision
 - Pupil / teacher ratios
 - Appropriate dispersal of teachers throughout the group
- Protection
 - Suitable clothing
 - Sun protection
 - Safe walk routes.
- Training
 - Agreed code of conduct
 - Pre-visit briefing

Note not all categories of controls will be required on all occasions.

Generic Risk Assessments – the Building Blocks

As we can see from the Eiffel Tower example, there is a commonality of hazards affecting groups in similar situations. Many situations on visits can be assessed in this way and this approach is useful to keep in mind, as it starts an effective and relevant assessment procedure. These can be usefully recorded as Generic Risk Assessments.

Once established Generic Risk Assessments can be used again and again or shared. Likewise, they may come from elsewhere within the school or the LA. Many employers already provide these and it is recommended that employees use them.

However, it is important to recognise that Generic Risk Assessment is not sufficient, even if you return to the same place on a regular basis, the plan needs to be considered further, because the make up of the group (leaders and pupils) will be different every time.

Event Specific Risk Assessment – Adding Essential Detail

This step builds on the Generic RA by recognising the individual nature of each group is unique and needs will vary from one group to the next.

Example 4 – One venue, same hazards, two correct solutions.

Consider two groups visiting a large amusement park in Europe. Group A is a primary school visit with the children aged 9 –10; Group B is from a secondary school with pupils aged 13 - 15.

From a Generic viewpoint, the hazards will be somewhat consistent with any other large amusement park. The significant hazards might include:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Getting lost• Other members of the public• Sickness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trips & minor injuries• Petty theft |
|---|--|

However, the control measures used to protect the children should vary, because of the age and experience of the children.

Group A may decide the appropriate control measure is to divide the group up according to their leader/pupil ratio (which in itself will also be influenced by the age of the children). Thereafter every group has a leader who stays in close control.

Group B may feel that such close control was inappropriate, particularly since one of the objectives of the visit may be to educate the pupils in the management of their own safety. They may decide to allow more remote supervision, by providing more pupil instruction, establishing a base to which pupils could always return, patrolling or stationing leaders as appropriate.

In addition, it is likely that the individual makeup of a group will vary year on year, which should also be taken into account; inclusion issues are a good example of this.

Who does what?

The example clearly indicates that the unique dynamics of the group, and the individuals within it, dictate reasonable and appropriate control measures. **Therefore, it is inappropriate to consider generic RA to be sufficient or for anybody without intimate knowledge of the group to attempt to complete this phase of the group management plan.**

Where there is no existing experience of a location, a site visit is useful. There is no substitute for first-hand knowledge. Think of a pre-visit as 'walking the course', such pre-visits add the fine detail to the group management plan. Site visits are also useful when developing the educational outcomes for the visit.

Where site visits are not possible, or to obtain updated information, Tour Companies will normally be very happy to pass on their local knowledge, which can be used to inform (not substitute for) the leaders own plan.

Having an Alternative - Plan B's

It is important to think of the obvious 'What ifs?' Again, leaders are not required to consider all the many, minor details that could possibly change, but for example:

- What if a venue is weather dependent and can't be used?
- What if there is a sick child, how will the sick child be looked after and what's the effect on the rest of the group?
- What if one of the members of staff falls sick?

One of the hardest decisions for a leader to make is to stop an activity at short notice with a group of excited, expectant pupils without a pre-prepared alternative.

Emergency Procedures

The ultimate Plan B is an Emergency Procedure for worst-case scenarios. These are usually already established by the school or LEA and must be considered. Remember to ask about a tour operator's emergency procedure and check how it fits into yours.

On-Going and Dynamic Risk Assessment – Making the Plan Work

Armed with the group management plan (including Plan B's), leaders will have a well-considered approach to the visit. However, the world is a dynamic place and management of safety 'on the ground' is key and appropriate skills and experience in leaders are called for.

For many situations, the group management skills exercised within schools are suitable, particularly if the process is backed by a good planning process. If the activity or circumstance is very 'technical' or outside a leader's experience, consideration should be given to recruiting expert help; this might be in the form of a local guide or instructor.

It's recommended that you discuss the coming day's plans and possible variations before setting out. Again, after you return, review the day and look forward to the next. These meetings can be short and informal and jotting down any changes on the management plan forms a useful and easy record of the decisions made.

Reviewing the Process

As the majority of educational visits follow similar patterns, it is very good practice when the tour is finished to get together with colleagues, reflect and review the planning process/risk assessments used. These can be used to inform next year's or other visits.

Reducing Your Overall Work and Liabilities

Use of a properly selected tour operator can substantially reduce liabilities and work load. By contracting out visit organising, leaders can better allocate their time to developing their own management plan and the delivery of the educational content of the visit.

Liability Management and Financial Protection

Any school undertaking the self-organisation of a school trip is required to exercise the same duty of care including the same level of supplier verification as a reputable travel company would do. This will include accommodation, transport, visits and activities.

In addition any redress for shortcomings will have to be pursued locally, significantly adding to the difficulties of doing so. However the UK's Package Travel Regulations (PTR) cut through consumers' difficulties; if you purchase travel as a package the tour operator is completely responsible for the actions of any third party supplier. No chasing overseas settlements, your first and last call for redress is your travel company.

In addition the PTR ensures tour operators have to offer financial protection, but travel booked as separate elements doesn't enjoy that protection. With a school trip costing in the thousands

of pounds and the potential for minor or major disruption of plans, protection of the funds entrusted by the parents to the school and meeting the expectations of all are essential considerations.

That doesn't mean you have to get something that doesn't suit your needs; packages can be completely tailor-made from scratch, the main stipulation is for the elements to be purchased together.

Choosing a good provider - CLOtC Quality Badge and School Travel Forum

The CLOtC Quality Badge encourages providers to have their safety and quality standards verified by independent, inspection regimes. The Quality Badge provides a quick and easy means for party leaders to ascertain that a provider has been inspected and accredited to a level that meets all the usual assurance requirements of a well-informed and competent party leader. Where the provider holds a LOtC Quality Badge, the OEAP considers no further assurances are necessary.

The School Travel Forum (STF) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting good practice in school travel. In late 2008 the STF were appointed by the Learning Outside the Council (LOtC) Interim Council (an independent charity set up by the UK government in 2008) to act as the Awarding Body for the Study & Sports Tours Sector of the LOtC Quality Badge and our standards adopted as the benchmark for all companies operating in that sector.

Membership includes the greater majority of specialist study, sports and ski tour operators in the UK selling into the UK schools market and they carry over 16,255 school groups annually.

Further Advice and Training

- **Your employer** will have its own policy and guidance for supporting visits which you should request this if you do not have a copy. Many Authorities have an advice and approval process that their schools are required to follow. Key to this is the supporting role of the Educational Visit Coordinator (EVC) in schools.
- **The OEAP** also provide comprehensive **National Guidance** for all types of educational trips: www.oeapng.info
- **Dept. for Education:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-and-safety-advice-for-schools>
- **Health & Safety Executive:** <http://www.hse.gov.uk/services/education/school-trips.htm>
- **Scottish Executive:** <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2004/12/20444/48943>
- **Welsh Assembly:**
<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/allsectorpolicies/healthandsafety/education/visits/?lang=en>

The School Travel Forum

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