

11.0 Use of Contractors (Providers) & Tour Operators

Schools and other services need to make informed choices about the suitability of contractors and outdoor centres in order to ensure, as far as is practicable, the safety of the pupils and others involved.

Contractors (Contracted Providers) for Educational Visits include; Tour Operators, Expedition Providers, Outdoor Education Centres, local farms, Civic Museums as well as national bodies such as the RSPCA or YHA etc.

Accidents can happen even in the most carefully run activities. When considering a visit to an Activity Centre or when planning to use an Activity Provider, schools and other services must satisfy themselves on basic matters such as the company's safety policy, levels of instructor competence, qualifications and standard of equipment. For example, check that they hold an up-to-date Adventure Activity Licence, as this is evidence that they comply with nationally accepted standards (see Section 12). To assist in this assessment the following issues should be considered: -

- **Safety Policy Statement**

Ask for evidence of: -

- An up-to-date and suitable Health and Safety Policy.
- The way in which the policy is brought to the attention of staff.
- The way in which the contractor monitors his health and safety arrangements.

- **Health and safety arrangements**

Ask for evidence: -

- That every possible measure has been taken to reduce the risk of the occurrence of an accident or ill health.
- Of how the contractor actively promotes the awareness of health and safety amongst his own staff. For example, via training; team safety meetings; accident feedback reports etc.
- Of independent verification of safety arrangements e.g. if an external professional body audits the contractor's safety systems.

- **Insurance**

Check the centre or provider has adequate public liability insurance and how their insurance policy affects the School or Facility insurance cover.

- **Provision of accommodation**

All accommodation that is to be used for the first time must be checked to ensure it conforms to United Kingdom standards of safety as a minimum requirement. Ask for evidence from the accommodation provider directly, or from the brochure advertising it or the Agent supplying it. Request a pre-visit safety guide; this should draw your attention to accommodation's key safety points, in particular fire safety.

- **Provision of Services or Equipment**

Check for evidence that equipment supplied for your use on the visit or for an activity is: -

- Recognised regulation equipment.
- Adequately maintained to a planned maintenance programme, and maintenance documentation is up-to-date.
- Regularly inspected and examined at the correct intervals.
- Suitably repaired as required and there are effective systems in place for preventing damaged equipment from being used.
- Taking safety into account when purchased by the contractor.

- **Transport**

When coaches or minibuses are to be used, ask the provider for evidence of coach safety audits, a copy of the coach company's operating licence as well as motor vehicle and employer's Liability Insurance. Other issues to be checked include: -

- Seatbelts: where necessary ensure road transport is fitted with sufficient seatbelts for the relevant group size; in line with current legislation.
- Driver's Hours: ensure all itineraries for tours using road transport take into account current legislation on driver's hours and statutory breaks.
- Driver recruitment: check contracted coach/minibus companies provide evidence that they have taken reasonable steps to establish their drivers do not have a criminal record or a detrimental employment record.
- Foreign transport: Check all companies used for transfers and excursions conform to all relevant local, national and international standards. Ask for evidence. The minimum standard is that they hold an Operators Licence, Fleet Insurance and Public Liability Insurance.
- Public Transport: the appropriate authorities of individual Countries determine the regulations concerning public transport so there is little to be done in this area. If public transport is to be used ensure regard is given to the safety of Educational Visit Group Members using it; especially when boarding and alighting transport in countries that drive on the right.

- **Staff training**

The Contractor should provide evidence that their staff are suitably trained, qualified and competent: -

- For their role in the visit including any activity they are required to supervise or manage.
- For the use of any equipment they are required to use.
- To respond quickly and efficiently in the event of an emergency.
- In first aid if required.

- **Emergency procedures**

Ask for details and evidence that the contractor has: -

- Adequate 24-hour emergency plans and procedures in place and that they are compatible with yours.
- Suitable contingency plans.
- Adequate first aid provision and arrangements.
- Suitable accident/incident reporting procedures.
- Suitable means of communication; mobile phones etc. and can provide you with relevant contact numbers.

- **Risk assessments**

Ask for evidence from the contractor that: -

- There is a system for carrying out risk assessments.
- Suitable risk assessments have been carried out for all parts of the visit under his control and that they are reviewed if being used as a generic assessment for future visits and communicated to relevant staff.
- The contractor has adequate method statements and safe working procedures based on the risk assessments, for activities under his control.

- **Other issues**

- Check all products and services comply where applicable with current local, national and/or international standards.
- Check that any required competencies can be independently verified. Is the contractor a member of a professional body etc?
- Check that the provider abides by stipulated staffing ratios and all staff are checked for relevant criminal history.
- Check that the Activity Centre clearly specifies when its own staff will be responsible for pupil supervision and when responsibility lies with the Group Leader.
- Check if preliminary visits are welcomed or required.
- Check if the Centre can accommodate pupils or staff with special educational needs, disabilities or individual dietary requirements.
- Check the activities and if they are appropriate for the age and abilities of the group members.
- Check with other schools that have previously visited the same venue or have used the provider for their experiences. The LEA will provide a list of activities and approved providers.

- **Sub-Contractors**

- Check if the contractor employs a sub-contractor; for example in the case of a Tour Operator using an independent coach company. Ask for evidence from the contractor of any systems put in place to vet and monitor the sub-contractor's safety performance.