



Lowland Leader

**Guidance notes for
trainers and assessors**



Introduction

These guidance notes are designed to assist trainers and assessors in the delivery of Lowland Leader training and assessment courses. They should be used in conjunction with the Lowland Leader Candidate Handbook and national Mountain Training board quality manual. This document will be updated when necessary; a version number and date can be found at the bottom of each page.

Trainers

Trainers should assist candidates to progress towards assessment. Different candidates benefit from different styles of delivery. Although trainers have a responsibility to work to the Lowland Leader syllabus, they must also structure their courses to accommodate the varying strengths and weaknesses of candidates. Courses should concentrate on the skills that candidates may have difficulty in learning without expert guidance, whilst not forgetting that in reality the skills of good leaders are integrated into a holistic performance. At the end of the course trainers should assist candidates to develop their action plans. It is valuable to review the course programme and the candidates' progress at the end of each day. Candidates should be given individual debriefings and should leave the training course with a good idea of what is required of them during the consolidation period prior to assessment.

Assessors

Assessors evaluate the performance of a candidate against the syllabus requirements. Assessments should enable everyone to perform to the best of their ability under suitably testing conditions. Assessors should ensure that candidates understand the tasks required of them and are given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their competence. Assessors should remember the importance of a holistic approach to the skills of good lowland leaders by limiting the time devoted to single techniques in isolation. Assessors must provide feedback to candidates and should explain how this will be given. An assessor should make a realistic and objective assessment against the nationally recognised standard and not decide results by comparing candidates' abilities.

1. Group management and the responsibilities of the group leader

Trainers

Training in leadership needs to be a balance between a theoretical and practical approach to group management and the leader's responsibilities. Teaching of leadership works best if it is integrated into practical skills training, whereas 'accident' and 'emergency' exercises may well be simulated. Trainers should include the more commonplace leadership tasks that occur, e.g. by managing a group over stiles, stepped decking or dealing with livestock encountered as part of a planned journey. Training staff should recognise that they are acting as role models for candidates through their own practice during a course.

Trainers should be well versed in all aspects of group management even in relatively benign terrain. Trainers should draw on the candidates' experiences to discuss and expand this topic in the classroom and during practical exercises outdoors.

Trainers should ensure that candidates are made aware of the importance of assessing the strengths, weaknesses and needs of the group and planning the journey accordingly. Trainers should discuss with candidates how best to carry out initial preparation and planning before leading walks in the countryside. As well as consolidating candidates' personal experience and skills, trainers should identify differing styles of leadership e.g. coercive, permissive, cooperative, and outline the characteristics of each. Candidates should be made aware of some of the formal requirements of the planning process such as gaining parental consents, organising insurance and obtaining organisational permissions.

Risk assessments should be discussed and undertaken. Trainers should provide opportunities, which involve an element of leadership, to analyse situations as they occur during practical sessions. At the end of such exercises trainers should review them.

Assessors

Assessors should examine the candidate's ability to undertake risk assessments for planned journeys and their strategies for dealing with incidents and potential emergency situations. During the practical assessment candidates should be presented with some common incidents or potential emergency situations.

It is difficult to provide genuine leadership situations on assessment. Groups of assessment candidates are not likely to react like a novice party. Assessors should be clear in their own minds as to which aspects of leadership they can assess within the structure of the course. They should carefully consider how they use simulated situations for assessment and should make clear to candidates what is being

assessed at any given time. Self-evaluation should be encouraged as the scheme depends upon leaders being aware of their strengths and limitations.

Planning skills can initially be assessed with a written home paper but they should not be looked at in isolation from candidates' abilities to lead a group effectively in the countryside.

Candidates' understanding of different styles of leadership should be assessed. Candidates should be able to identify the style with which they are most comfortable and be able to make judgements as to when changes of style might be appropriate when leading a group. Assessors should give candidates opportunities to show understanding of the issues surrounding effective management in a variety of situations.

Certain aspects of group management, such as pace setting, briefings and communication are relatively easy to evaluate, as are the choice and preparation of personal equipment and selection of routes. However the best course of action for an unanticipated situation has to be weighed carefully against possible alternatives. It is common for these situations to be used as further training for the benefit of all concerned.

It can be beneficial to assess candidates operating with novice groups. However, great care should be taken to see that no party is adversely affected by the experience. It is possible that an unsatisfactory day could be given to either the candidate or the group; assessors must therefore satisfy themselves as to what is to be gained from this exercise. When working with groups, candidates should be briefed thoroughly and given full charge of the group, thus allowing the development of a proper relationship. The assessor may then act as the assistant leader and only intervene for elements of further training or if the group's safety is in question. It is not generally satisfactory to have more than one candidate involved with a group during any one session. The candidate's role and commitment to the group and the group's reaction to the leader need careful observation; only very experienced assessors should take on this task and even then, the welfare of the group must come first.

Assessors should give daily debriefs, with special regard to leadership aspects. Such sessions will provide a vital platform for discussion and opportunities to compare the perceptions of all parties involved.

2. Navigation

Trainers

Whilst candidates are expected to be suitably equipped and comfortable in the outdoor environment, this may not always be the case. Experience has shown that trainers will often have the difficult task of dealing with people from a very broad spectrum of backgrounds; some will have done a fair amount of navigating, mainly on paths, while others will have done very little.

Teaching basic navigation skills will be beneficial. However, trainers must be mindful that within the scope of the award, the navigational demands of routes should be such that the use of the map alone would normally suffice, with the compass simply used to orientate the map or indicate path direction.

This will be revision for some but could be used as a model for those candidates who are in a position to teach basic navigation to their own groups. Trainers should teach navigation in relation to group leadership, including route selection and party supervision, remembering that candidates must cope with both navigation and leadership issues simultaneously. The key focus will be teaching candidates using appropriate navigation techniques whilst following paths and tracks that are clearly marked on a map and normally visible on the ground.

Maps of different types and scale should be available during the course, including locally produced trail maps for places of interest such as estates and country parks. Candidates should be taught how to integrate using an OS (or equivalent) map with a locally produced trail map. The use of navigation aids such as global positioning systems and altimeters should be discussed and practical demonstrations given wherever possible. Candidates should be encouraged to use the appropriate technique at any particular time and also to pay attention to the terrain around them.

Trainers should discuss strategies for dealing with poor visibility and it is worth remembering that many coastal and lowland walks can be subject to low cloud and heavy rain, both of which can have an adverse effect on visibility and candidates must be given the tools to be comfortable and confident whatever the weather within the scope of the award.

Trainers will find there will often be an overlap between navigation skills and access knowledge. Effective route finding (and hence navigation) will rely on candidates' in-depth knowledge of relevant access legislation and their rights and responsibilities within that access framework.

Navigation should be presented in a structured form so that the candidates can progress throughout the course. The candidates should finish the course being

aware of the level of navigation ability required and what they need to do to achieve this.

Trainers should note that Lowland Leaders are not required to be able to navigate across untracked areas.

Assessors

The assessor should structure the tasks to ensure that all relevant navigation techniques are seen. Navigation will be assessed throughout the two days so assessors can usually afford to settle candidates by initially setting simple navigation tasks. Assessors need to be certain that any errors are through lack of ability rather than as a result of 'exam nerves' or their own failure to communicate clearly. Very careful and precise briefing of the candidate concerning what is being asked of them is essential. The other candidates must also be briefed about their role while someone else is leading the group.

Candidates should be given time to demonstrate their level of navigation ability, allowed to complete the task to the best of their ability and not pressured into making quick decisions and mistakes. They should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to adopt the appropriate technique for the situation. The assessor should look at the task set from the viewpoint of someone navigating over unfamiliar ground in a stressful situation.

Practical sessions provide opportunities to assess navigation while reminding everyone of the nature of the activity. In all cases the elements of group management and leadership, access considerations and environmental issues should not be neglected.

Visibility will obviously influence the type of navigation tasks set, as assessors must satisfy themselves that candidates can navigate in poor visibility e.g. in dense woodland. Candidates who make a simple mistake should be given time to resolve the situation. The ability to identify and correct an error is both an essential skill for a leader and an informative process for an assessor. The choice of appropriate techniques and the efficiency of their application may be as important as the arrival at a designated point for the assessment process.

Navigation ability must be tested with map and compass alone without the use of GPS, altimeter or other similar equipment. If candidates carry navigation aids their ability to use them may be discussed as an additional training element.

3. Access and the environment

Trainers

Continued use of the countryside depends on sensitivity and an awareness of other land use. This aspect of the syllabus is therefore fundamental and should be integrated throughout the course as opportunities arise. It is recommended that a discussion session complements the evaluation of practical examples during the course. It is desirable that some venues which specifically highlight environmental issues are selected.

Recreational use of countryside represents only one of the many demands placed upon these environments. These demands may at times conflict and trainers have a responsibility to ensure that candidates have sufficient knowledge to operate without inadvertently creating tension with other land users.

Opportunities should be built into a course to illustrate the balance of habitats and measures to minimise or control the effects of recreational use should be illustrated.

Trainers must be aware of current legislation, in all parts of the UK, as it affects the countryside. It is common for candidates to have limited personal experience or involvement in these issues and trainers should ensure that candidates leave the course with an understanding of the current legal situation.

Many countryside areas are designated as being of particular environmental or historical value. The implication of these designations should be impressed upon candidates.

Leaders may operate in unfamiliar areas. It is therefore essential that they know how to obtain current information about access. Trainers should ensure that candidates are fully aware of the significance of Rights of Way and access arrangements as shown on maps. They should also appreciate the different legal rights in different areas of the UK. Knowledge of access rights and relevant legislation (for all parts of the UK) is essential for route-planning and navigating, more so than in any other walking award. Lowland journeys will often take groups through a landscape that is used and managed by a diverse group of users. In-depth knowledge of prevailing access legislation and an individual's rights and responsibilities within that access framework are essential to avoid conflict with other users.

The principles in the accepted codes of practice should be embedded throughout the course and the concept of an environmental audit i.e. a consideration of the environmental impact of one's activities could form a useful part of the course.

It is important that on a training course, staff try to impart knowledge about differing aspects of the countryside. Candidates should be encouraged to discuss areas of personal expertise with the rest of the group and to impart what knowledge they

may have. Candidates can be helped to develop the confidence to talk about their knowledge through a positive demonstration by training staff. Guidance may be given on resources available for further development.

Assessors

An assessor can gain an understanding of candidates' experience and attitudes towards this crucial aspect of the syllabus by reviewing their DLOG and asking follow-up questions. Although a written paper may be of value and provide a stimulus for worthwhile discussion, this aspect lends itself to be evaluated throughout a course either as opportunities arise or engineered through the choice of venue. It is common for a candidate to be asked to prepare a discussion topic and then lead a group session on relevant local or national access and environmental issues.

The criteria applied to the assessment of this area of the syllabus, with its wide range of topics and possible levels of expertise, will need to be flexible. It should, nonetheless, be a clear part of the assessment process and should play a part in any broader assessment decision. Issues of access and the environment are of fundamental importance in effective countryside outdoor leadership. Assessors should not hesitate to defer a candidate if they feel that the range of experience demonstrated contributes to a serious lack of awareness of the importance of access and the environment, or that the practice of the candidate has, or may have, a negative impact. Assessors may look for knowledge and enthusiasm over a wide range of related subjects but should not expect equal levels of expertise across them all.

The assessment of candidates in this area of the syllabus needs to be flexible and allow for variations in personal interests and depths of knowledge. A positive attitude to learning and imparting knowledge on the part of the candidate may well be the over-riding concern. Candidates should be familiar with current legislation that may differ between the home nations.

Assessors should be confident that candidates are aware of the other interests, both commercial and recreational. They should be particularly aware of and sensitive to the potential conflict between their own imported values and those of local communities. Assessors must be confident that a candidate in no way jeopardises existing arrangements through insensitive actions.

Recreational pressures may contribute to the loss of access to certain areas as well as a degradation of the physical environment. Assessors should therefore feel free to offer additional training at assessment in this aspect of the syllabus.

Knowledge of sources of current information is vital to planning any route. It is possible to incorporate this in a planning exercise during an assessment course. This would provide opportunities to discuss real situations as they arise and to offer further training.

The implications of the various protection designations should be understood, as should the value of the relevant code.

Many leaders will come across an incident or accident and should be thoroughly prepared for these situations. It should be understood that emergencies may not be a result of an error on the part of the leader but can be the result of an unforeseen accident happening to a party member or some other person or persons encountered during the course of the day.

4. Hazards and emergency procedures

Trainers

Although Lowland Leaders operate predominantly in relatively benign areas trainers must make candidates aware of, and help develop strategies for dealing with, a wide range of potential hazards. These could be anything from livestock of an unknown temperament to a steep, muddy path by an exposed cliff top on a coastal path or some slippery decking on a badly eroded footpath. Walking a few metres down a country lane can be potentially life threatening if not handled appropriately, so trainers need to discuss a wide range of potential scenarios and how to manage the resulting incident if it occurs.

Self-help, providing you are doing no further harm, is often the best course of action; for example a trekking pole when someone has twisted an ankle can be an effective solution. Trainers should ensure that candidates are aware that they should, at all times, use bridges or other recognised water crossing points such as stepping stones or fords if the stream or river constitutes a hazard to the party.

Assessors

Assessors need to satisfy themselves that candidates have used the map to gain all relevant information regarding any potential hazards. Not all will be obvious from the map but country lanes, exposed footpaths and potential water hazards should be noted by candidates as possible areas of concern. Candidates should have a strategy for dealing with minor incidents and a clear idea of what to do if they need assistance. Manmade paths or working environments such as farms or forestry can be the scene of common problems; setting the candidate realistic scenarios will allow the assessor to make judgements about their decision making and provide worthwhile discussion points for the whole group. There will often be a number of possible solutions but the key questions are: Is it safe? Is the answer acceptable? Is it overcomplicated?

5. Equipment

Trainers

It is important to spend some time examining and discussing equipment needs with candidates. Candidates should be aware that their choice of equipment has implications for the safety and comfort of themselves and their group. If a candidate does not have suitable equipment, trainers should be able to offer constructive advice and discuss available options. It may be appropriate for trainers to demonstrate their own personal and group equipment, discussing items that they or other trainers may elect to carry.

Candidates should be encouraged to travel light, yet must also be able to deal with emergency situations. Informal discussions offer excellent opportunities to show candidates the wide variety of equipment that is available. Trainers should ensure that all candidates have an understanding of and ability to use the equipment they will need as leaders and the depth of knowledge required to advise others.

Assessors

An assessment course provides many opportunities to examine the suitability of each candidate's personal equipment. Equipment should be examined with regard to safety, comfort and efficiency, allowing for personal opinion that will have been developed over previous months or years. Candidates need to be able to operate as party leaders in poor conditions and choice of personal equipment will have a bearing on their ability to do this.

Candidates' knowledge of various types of equipment requires examination, especially with regard to their recommendations to others. Opportunities to do this may be provided in a written paper.

6. Weather

Trainers

Trainers must be aware that weather is an important subject that has to be pitched at the correct level for the candidates. The trainer should identify the basic level of knowledge required to enable the candidates to make appropriate judgements based on commonly available information. This can be achieved through lectures, tutorials and seminars and by directing candidates to suitable material.

Additionally, it is recommended that this topic be integrated within the course on a daily basis using practical observation. Forecasts and synoptic charts should be used and compared with the local weather conditions.

Assessors

Weather knowledge might be assessed through written and oral examination including the use of home papers. Asking candidates to make daily interpretations of the weather at the start of the day and then reinforcing this on the trail emphasises and places in context the relevance of weather prediction. The assessor should be confident that candidates are able to understand how to access all the commonly available types of weather forecast and be able to evaluate their relative accuracy and reliability. Finally they should be able to integrate their understanding of the likely weather conditions into their planning as leaders.

7. Background knowledge

Trainers

Trainers should introduce candidates to a variety of resources to enable them to expand their understanding of the development of hill walking. They should also introduce candidates to the role of Mountain Training and the national Mountain Training boards, the Mountaineering Councils and the Mountain Training Association. They should also outline how they work with other agencies that have interests in the outdoors. This can be achieved through lectures and an integrated approach throughout the course.

Assessors

Assessors must be confident that candidates operate in a suitably sensitive way in order to avoid conflict between their activities and those of other outdoor users.

Candidates' overall knowledge of the development of the activity and roles of national bodies should be investigated. This can be achieved through a variety and combination of ways, e.g. home papers, discussion or set course papers.

Appendix 1

Definitions

1.1 Lowland terrain

The Lowland Leader Award is designed to train and assess the skills and knowledge required to operate as a leader of walking parties in rural countryside and forest following paths and tracks. Walks must follow paths or tracks that are clearly marked on a map and normally visible on the ground.

There will always be situations where crop growth, ploughing or simply heavy leaf fall might obscure a path temporarily, however entry and exit points to such areas will normally be easy to locate. Routes should not require navigation across untracked areas.

The navigational demands of routes should be such that the use of the map alone would normally suffice with the compass simply being needed to orientate the map or indicate path direction.

There should be no requirement to cross any hazardous terrain such as very steep slopes or cliffs although it must be recognised that some paths in appropriate lowland terrain may be steep and broken. The terrain should be fairly close to access points so that the leader can easily cut short a walk or gain help.

As a general rule no point on planned walks should be more than around 3km from an access point such as a car park, lay-by or populated area where assistance or evacuation could be sought. Any 'escape routes' from the planned walk should also be through terrain that lies within the scope of the Lowland Leader award. A long route that ran 3 km away from, and parallel to, a road but which had a high moorland ridge between it and that road could therefore fall outside the scope.

Walks should at all times use bridges or other recognised water crossing points such as stepping stones or fords to cross any stream or river that could constitute a hazard to the party.

Walks must only take place in summer conditions (i.e. when there is no unavoidable snow or ice on any part of the route). It should be noted that such conditions may well be found at any time of the year; the Lowland Leader should operate according to the conditions underfoot rather than the season.

1.2 Quality Days

Experience gained outside the UK and Ireland can be recorded if it took place in similar conditions to those found in the UK were encountered. However the majority of your experience, at least 50% of the days recorded, should be in the UK. A Quality Day will involve most, if not all, of the criteria below:

- the individual takes part in the planning and leadership.
- navigation skills are required.
- knowledge is increased and skills practised.
- attention is paid to safety.
- adverse weather and poor underfoot conditions may be encountered.
- four hours or more journey time.

These criteria mean that days as a course member under instruction, a member of a group practising skills, or days spent repeating familiar routes are very unlikely to meet the requirements of a Quality Day. However these can be recorded in the appropriate place in your logbook even though they are not suitable for use in meeting the minimum requirements for attending assessment.