

## Planning Learning Outside the Classroom experiences

### **BEFORE the activity – planning and preparation**

#### **1. Have a clear vision of what you want to achieve**

Be clear about your learning objectives and outcomes. Ensure that learning outside the classroom builds on or enhances the learning in the classroom. The objectives for the visit should be defined carefully and must relate closely to classroom work.

#### **2. Plan any experience carefully as part of an ongoing learning process**

An obvious point, but also an essential element of any successful enterprise: the quality of the outcomes will be highly influenced by the nature and quality of the preparation. Ensure the visit is part of the young people's ongoing learning experience and development. It should complement and enhance their understanding. Talk to any providers involved as part of the preparation and ensure the plan is tailored to these needs. Negotiation beforehand and a careful plan will ensure young people's learning is enriched by their visit.

As well as having a clear idea of what the group has previously done with you, it is important to have a grasp of the broader range of experiences they may have had previously and those that are planned for them by others. This will help you to identify the way in which you prepare for the activity you are planning. Ideally young people should progress through a series of activities and experiences that support them on the journey to becoming successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens, and learning outside the classroom can play an invaluable role in this.

The progression of activities might be seen as an ascending spiral with increasing levels of responsibility, complexity and independence: groups will be at various levels of the spiral, sometimes with individuals within one group at very different stages of the spiral. Consolidation will sometimes be necessary, but where appropriate, individuals and groups should be moving on to the next level.

#### **3. Making the most of external providers**

Leaders of learning outside the classroom experiences will need to decide whether to lead the activity or visit themselves, or use an external provider (e.g. an individual practitioner or a provider organisation such as a museum, theatre workshop, historic site, field study or outdoor education centre). When using a provider it is vital that proper detailed planning takes place and that this planning is a shared process.

This collaborative planning is crucial when planning for residential experiences. Leaders should liaise closely with the provider organisation beforehand to plan how the chosen activities can draw on, and

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develop further, the learning that has taken place at school. If the leader's professional skills and their knowledge of the particular needs of the young people are not used well enough, there is the danger that the residential visit may be an isolated special event, rather than an extended and powerful learning experience.

This is an initial, and fundamental, decision you have to make. Your decision will depend on a number of inter-related questions, for example:

- How can you most easily and successfully achieve the objectives of the visit?
- How experienced are you? Will it be more supportive for you to work with an external provider rather than be on your own?
- Do you have a clear vision of what you want to achieve and do you need assistance to achieve it?
- Do you have the time to do all the administration, organisation and planning yourself or would it be better to share this with an external provider?
- Do you have colleagues who will work with you collaboratively on the project? Do they have the necessary experience, competence and/or qualifications?
- Can you find an external provider that has the necessary expertise or experience in the type of educational visit you are planning and/or the destination?
- Are they prepared to plan the experience in partnership with you? Can they tailor their service to meet your needs?
- Do you feel you could forge a successful partnership with them?

“One of the main reasons for using these providers was to capitalise on their expertise. Very often, staff from the providers rather than the schools contributed much of the teaching. However, because there tended to be little liaison or planning with the schools before the visit, it was difficult for the providers to know what the pupils already knew or were meant to learn. Many providers produced work sheets and other educational materials: these were high quality and available freely to the schools. However, schools often used these uncritically, without ensuring that they were relevant enough or adapting them sufficiently to their own classes' particular learning activities.” (Ofsted Report, 2008)

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### 4. Involving children and young people in this planning

Any successful learning outside the classroom experience or series of experiences will need to have engaged the interest of the young people who take part. These experiences are more likely to be successful if you involve young people in their planning and delivery. This can provide numerous opportunities to enrich the learning opportunities, and gives young people greater involvement and 'ownership'. School policies can reflect this.

Young people can therefore be involved in:

- suggesting, researching and evaluating a range of venues or providers
- planning activities, including risk assessments
- assisting with the delivery of some activities, including as leaders.

The quality of the outcomes will also be highly influenced by the involvement of the young people. Whether this involves a series of sessions in the school grounds or twelve months' training for a Gold D of E Expedition, the nature of the involvement of young people is critical. Young people who have been involved in the organisation and planning of learning outside the classroom will:

- be better prepared
- make more informed decisions
- be more risk aware.

The elements involved in the planning and preparation will vary according to the nature of the activity. They may exclusively involve the leader(s), or can be approached in a way that involves the group at an appropriate level to their age and development. The young people may have specific skills, expertise or experience, which could be used to enhance their learning, and leaders and managers should exploit that experience wherever possible. Learning outside the classroom offers an ideal opportunity for young people to lead in a properly supervised setting.

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### The spectrum of approaches to preparation, planning (and delivery)



There are no 'right' or 'wrong' approaches to this — although some approaches are more appropriate, according to the group and the purpose of the activity. The outcomes identified for your activity or visit should 'drive' the approach to organising the planning and preparation.

You will need to take account of the **age, ability and experience** of the young people involved. With the right approach even very young children can be involved in preparation, for example:

- by drawing themselves appropriately dressed for the visit or activity, with labels as appropriate e.g. hat, gloves, sun cream
- age-appropriate discussions about 'risk management' e.g. the importance of staying together in groups and looking after each other, appropriate behaviour, etc.

Older young people can be involved in more complex preparations such as:

- carrying out research about a venue on the internet
- planning the journey using public transport
- negotiating and agreeing a code of conduct for a residential visit
- planning practical work to be carried out during the activity.

Where appropriate different tasks (or parts of tasks) could be allocated to groups to allow for differentiation for ability.

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### Some examples:

- Children in a Reception class discuss and agree the 'rules' for using their outdoor area wildlife garden.
- Children in a Key Stage 1 class are involved in writing the risk assessment for using the local park (e.g. crossing a main road, appropriate behaviour, adult supervision, etc).
- A primary school group visiting a museum is supported in researching the bus or train timetables before going (links to 24-hour clock, maths skills, time management, environmental issues, etc).
- A mixed group of Year 11 GCSE science and geography pupils negotiate and agree an appropriate code of conduct for their residential field trip.
- A group of young people in a youth club express an interest in taking part in some outdoor activities, and supported by a youth worker, they agree on an activity and location, book accommodation at a youth hostel, and find suitable providers using the internet, etc.
- A group of young people working towards their D of E Gold expedition decide how to reach the area where their expedition will take place, research the public transport links on the internet and purchase tickets. They also make decisions about appropriate clothing and equipment.

Young people should be involved in **review and evaluation**. A review immediately or soon after the activity is an ideal way to consolidate the learning that has taken place.

Leaders and managers should seek feedback both on the success of the activities offered and on the overall experience. After-event review by adults is unlikely to provide the same quality of feedback, and issues around bullying in particular are more likely to emerge from a peer-led process.

## DURING the activity

### 1. Learning Styles

Research confirms that people learn in various ways, and most people have a preferred style. Learning styles are simply different approaches to or ways of learning.

#### What are the types of learning styles?

- **Visual learners** — learn through seeing
- **Auditory learners** — learn through listening
- **Kinaesthetic learners** — learn through, moving, doing and touching

Kinaesthetic learners learn best through a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration.

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Classroom teachers try to accommodate this by presenting information in a variety of different ways, and will often vary the style of delivery during the course of a lesson and use written information, photographs, graphs, websites, discussion, groupwork, etc. Learning outside the classroom provides opportunities for young people to experience and learn in very different ways to those typically offered in a classroom. For this reason it can provide powerful learning opportunities to young people whose preferred learning style is not best served by the constraints of the classroom. Typically it gives opportunities for:

- direct experience
- 'hands-on' practical work
- exploration and discovery
- opportunities for experiencing 'awe and wonder' first hand
- learning good models of risk management
- practical teamwork
- directly encountering other cultures or religions
- experiencing challenge and managing risk
- experiencing success and achievement
- enjoyment and fun!

You should consider the opportunities an activity or visit will offer and take into account your knowledge of the group. When planning, avoid styles of presentation which simply transfer classroom techniques to an outdoor setting: 'chalk and talk' can become 'walk and talk' or 'look and see'. Whilst this suits some people's learning styles, others will learn far more if they are offered other kinds of learning opportunities outside the classroom.

The range of possible 'delivery styles' when working outside the classroom also means that there are many opportunities for a range of adults to contribute effectively.

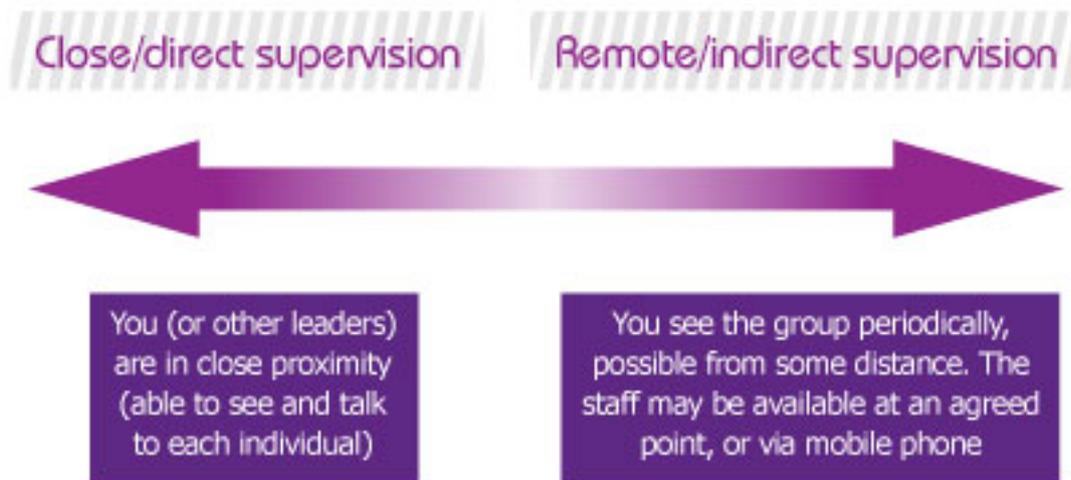
### 2. Supervision Styles

One of the most important decisions you must make is how to supervise the group during the visit or activity. The decision about which style to use requires judgement based on experience, taking into account a range of variables including:

- the previous experience of the group
- the age, maturity, and previous behaviour of individuals
- the hazards identified during the risk assessment process and the nature of the environment
- your previous experience
- the experience of the other adults assisting you.

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### The spectrum of supervision



Confident, experienced leaders will draw on experience of a range of options including:

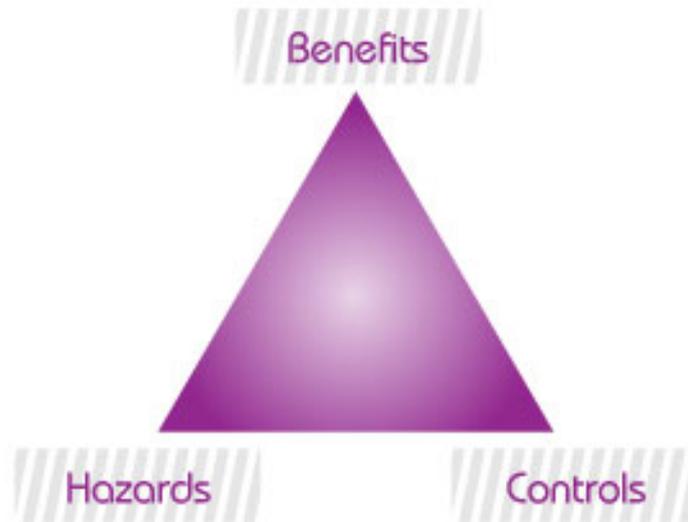
- direct supervision of the whole group
- direct supervision of smaller 'buddy groups' each with an adult attached
- various styles of remote or indirect supervision, usually with young people in small groups.

The learning outcomes identified for the activity will help you determine the appropriate supervision style (taking into account the environment and the age and maturity of the young people). It may be tempting to default to what is perceived to be the most cautious and 'safest' style of supervision, and certainly in some more hazardous environments, this may be entirely appropriate. However, you should consider the benefits that may result from other styles of supervision, such as giving opportunities for young people:

- to explore
- to put into practice risk management approaches discussed and agreed during the preparation
- to focus their own learning
- to work at their own pace
- to feel a sense of trust and responsibility.

Assess these possible benefits, and balance them against the other considerations, the hazards identified as part of the event-specific risk assessment, and the available controls:

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The style of supervision may need to vary for individuals within a group to allow for inclusion, and during a visit according to the circumstances.

For example, a group visiting a museum will typically be closely supervised, with a very directive style during the journey, and on the walk from the coach to the museum. Once inside the museum some young people may be indirectly supervised; moving around in small groups (possibly with worksheets) whilst others might need to be directly supervised at all times. Leaders will need to monitor the situation, and if necessary adjust the style of supervision accordingly during the activity (this is an aspect of 'dynamic' or 'ongoing' risk management). So using the example above, the leader might decide to maintain direct supervision in sub-groups (each with an adult) if on arrival at the museum it is very crowded.

Make sure that that the style of supervision you choose is consistent with the nature of the preparation and planning, especially if indirect or remote supervision is to be used. For remote supervision to be effective, young people need to have been involved in appropriate planning and preparation and normally have been through a progression of experiences.

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### AFTER the activity — follow-up and evaluation

A good learning experience should make a difference to the children and young people — and to the adults involved too. To ensure this is at least a possibility, it is important to link the experience or visit to ongoing action and learning. It is therefore vital to have asked the following three questions when planning (and following up) the learning outside the classroom experience.

#### **1. What follow-up and continuation activities can be pursued when back in the classroom?**

The best experience will not end when you get back to the classroom, but will be a stimulus for ongoing activity and learning. Ensure that planning for this is part of your earlier planning process and is supported by the work carried out during the experience or visit.

#### **2. How do you know whether the experience was successful and met your learning objectives?**

A review immediately or soon after the activity is an ideal way to consolidate the learning that has taken place. Devise a way of reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the experience and its contribution to the quality of teaching and learning. Involve the young people in the planning of this evaluation. Plan for this before the visit and share it with the group. Interview the young people to identify what they had learned from their work outside the classroom and what improvements they had made as a result. Try not to use only anecdotal information to describe improvements in attainment, behaviour, motivation or attitudes — find ways to record or analyse this information systematically.

Ask accompanying adults for their responses too and share the findings.

#### **3. How can the learning and questions raised by the experience or visit be shared with others?**

Who do you want to share this with — other children and young people, parents, governors and other staff? An assembly, display or more formal meeting may help to do this. Again plan for this at the beginning.

And don't forget to celebrate your achievements!