

HOW DO WE JUDGE THE QUALITY OF A PROVIDER?

Arthur Sutherland, June 2008

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The question, “How do we judge the quality of a provider?” was frequently asked by teachers, board members, and principals during the Safety and Education Outside The Classroom professional development programme associated with the roll out of the Ministry of Education publication *Safety and EOTC-a good practice guide for NZ schools* (November 2002) www.tki.org.nz/e/community/eotc/ and continues to be asked by those looking to engage with providers.

The response today would include reference to

- OutdoorsMark,
- pages 77-79 of *Safety and EOTC-a good practice guide for NZ schools*, and
- *Outdoor Activities Guidelines for Leaders*, SPARC 2005.

OutdoorsMark

Those providers with **OutdoorsMark** have been audited by a member of the Register of Outdoor Safety Auditors (ROSA). The process involves a self assessment, followed by a desk audit of the institution’s documentation and then a field to see that the practice reflects the documentation.

Holders of the Mark are required to annually prove that they are still implementing the systems indicated at the time of the initial audit. This self-monitoring, plus any feedback to Outdoors NZ from users regarding the performance of the provider, means there is ongoing monitoring. Three years out a full audit is required.

Feedback to Outdoors NZ is crucial.

Schools

- can be assured that there is no need to request of providers copies of their safety systems
- are to be commended for insisting that the providers they use hold the OutdoorsMark

The Mark covers off People; Operational Procedures; Equipment, Sites, Facilities and Activities.

In the **people section** holders are expected, amongst other things, to have

- “A person allocated to the function of administrating the organisation’s safety management system. This includes hazard identification procedures, incident/accident reporting procedures, investigation and analysis, emergency preparedness, safety committee formation and planned and recorded safety meetings.”
- ‘Activity Leaders’ no matter what the contractual arrangement including volunteer and trainee who are competent. “Competence in this field is a mix of experience, certification (qualifications) and the ability to work with people. Mere technical ability, though vitally important from a safety point of view, is not likely to be sufficient in itself. You will also have to satisfy yourself that the people who run activity sessions have the other necessary attributes as well as technical competence (as evidenced by their activity qualifications). The competence and integrity of activity leaders is probably the single most important factor for assuring safety and good practice.”
- Approved technical advisors. Such a person “is someone with a recognised level of specific expertise generally higher than is required for leading or supervising the activity at the level offered. They may either be the provider (or another person within the organisation), or they may be brought in to advise if this expertise does not exist "in-house". You will need at least

one technical adviser for each activity you offer, although in some cases, one person may have the expertise across a range of activities. The role of technical advisors, when required, is to advise the provider about nationally accepted standards and codes of good practice; advise or help the provider to meet these standards; and help the provider to decide if staff are sufficiently skilled and trained to operate at these standards. Levels of qualification for technical advisers exist within a number of organizations offering outdoor awards. 'Approved' technical advisers will normally hold these qualifications as a minimum. In exceptional circumstances, very experienced holders of lesser qualifications may be acceptable, but 'approval' in these cases can only be given on an individual basis."

- Staff training, review, appraisal, monitoring and induction processes in place.

In the **Operational Procedures section** holders are expected, amongst other things, to have

- Means of relaying to activity leaders and their assistants what is expected of them. They should generally outline:
 - Who can run sessions? Reference should be made to what qualifications or ratification of competence is required of the person leading the session.
 - What they are expected to do under normal conditions and circumstances.
 - What they are expected to do in the event of an incident, accident or unusual group or event.
 - What site-specific hazards may be encountered over and above the norm that may be expected for that activity?
- Means to realistically assess the overall risks, taking into account the likely competence of the groups, the competence of the activity leader (and assistant where necessary) the likelihood of something going wrong and the likely consequences if it does go wrong.
- Sufficiently brief procedures so that they can be easily read and the information retained by the activity leaders and assistants who use them. These documents are not a substitute for training. In some cases they may be best thought of as 'hand-outs' that accompany activity leader training. In others they may form an *aide memoir*, or induction checklist.
- Emergency procedures and preparedness. The former are the "ambulance-at-the-cliff-bottom" of an outdoor activity which, if your safety management is effective, may never be needed. However, along with hazard identification and management, written emergency procedures are an extremely important element of any safety planning.
- "A culture of reporting incidents as "**no blame**" is an extremely empowering process for improving activity and site safety. An incident can be interpreted as any event that either causes harm (accident) to a person or under different circumstances would have caused harm (near-accident)."
- Regular meetings to discuss operational matters including health and safety and communication issues

In the **Section C** holders are expected, amongst other things, to have

- Equipment that is suitable, meets the industry best practice or legislated standard and is serviced regularly
- A relationship with the standard setting bodies such as NZOIA, NZMSC, and SFRITO
- Processes to handle the use of new and unfamiliar sites
- Processes to follow to establish the level of supervision required. "When a group or individual participates in an outdoor activity, the outcome of their experience is influenced by a number of factors. Included in these is the level of supervision, the style of leadership and the amount of information provided by the activity leader."
- Processes for the management of unaccompanied activities; inspection and maintenance of equipment; and the use of client provided equipment.

Clearly, the expectation is high and a school can be assured that the provider has quality staff and systems. There is no need for the provider to send the activity RAMS or SAP to the school. Almost all the 'checklist questions' (page 81 of Safety and EOTC, 2002 edition) have all been answered.

For full details see www.outdoorsmark.org.nz