

Chapter 1 - Types of visit and planning/approval procedures

1.1 Categories of visit and approval requirements

Visits may be identified as one of the following:

- **Category 1 - DAY VISITS (ROUTINE)**

Visits and activities that take place on a regular basis, usually in familiar environments.

e.g. visits to local library

Category 1 visits must be **checked and approved internally by the Headteacher (with EVC support)**, preferably at least 2 weeks in advance of departure.

- **Category 2 – DAY VISITS (NON ROUTINE)**

One-off or occasional visits and activities that would not be regarded as a part of the normal everyday or school life, often in less familiar environments.

e.g. day visit to York Minster

Category 2 visits must be **checked and approved internally by the Headteacher (with EVC support)**, preferably at least 2 weeks in advance of departure.

In addition, the Governing Body should be informed of visits that have taken place, and may wish to be informed of visits planned (depending upon the school's own Visits Policy).

- **Category 3 – UK RESIDENTIAL VISITS**

Visits that involve one or more nights away from home.

e.g. residential trip to London

Category 3 visits must be checked and approved internally by the EVC, the Headteacher, AND an appropriate representative of the Governing Body, AND externally by the County Educational Visits Consultant (or another delegated officer with appropriate experience and training), preferably at least 6 weeks in advance of departure.

- **Category 4 - OVERSEAS**

Residential or day visits to any place outside England/Scotland/Wales.

e.g. rugby tour to Dublin

Category 4 visits must be **checked and approved internally by the EVC, the Headteacher, AND an appropriate representative of the Governing Body, AND externally by the County Educational Visits Consultant** (or another delegated officer with appropriate experience and training), at least 6 weeks in advance of departure. For visits with significant financial commitment, "Outline Approval" should be obtained before firm bookings are made.

- However, if any of the above 4 types of visit involve what may be regarded as "High risk activities or environments" they **MUST** be given an additional subcategory "A" classification:

- **Sub Category "A" – HIGH RISK ACTIVITIES and ENVIRONMENTS**

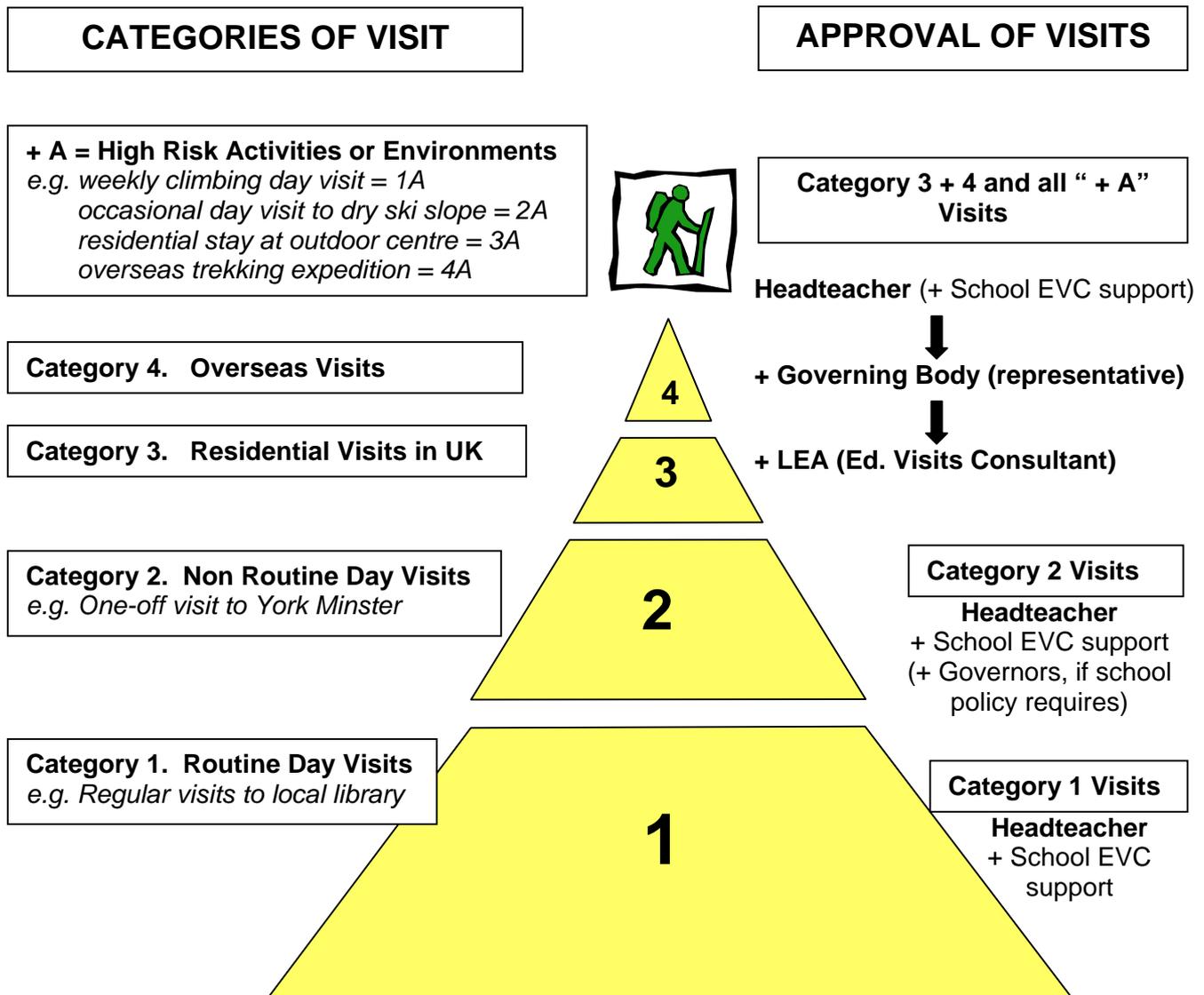
All day visits, or residential or overseas visits that involve hazards that are significantly different or more serious (in terms of severity and/or likelihood) than might normally be encountered in everyday or school life. For example:

- a weekly climbing day visit = 1A
- an occasional day visit to dry ski slope = 2A
- a residential stay at outdoor centre = 3A
- an overseas trekking expedition = 4A

All visits with an "A" classification must be **checked and approved by the Headteacher (with EVC support), AND by a representative of the Governing Body, AND by the LEA**, at least 6 weeks in advance of departure.

The categories and approval requirements above are clearly illustrated in the following diagram:

Categories of visit and approval requirements



1.2 What is a “high risk activity or environment”? (see also SG 8 for further details)

- Clearly, all activities and environments have hazards and involve some degree of risk.
- An element of personal judgement is needed to decide if an activity or environment is defined as “high risk”.

Examples of low risk activities and environments

- Many activities and environments present few significant hazards, and pose minimal risks. Such activities might include:
 - walking in parks or on non-remote country paths under close supervision;
 - field studies in environments presenting no technical hazards.

Characteristics of high risk activities and environments

- High risk activities or environments are those that are likely either to:
 - threaten serious harm, if particular care and special precautions are not taken;
 - be new and unfamiliar to at least some of the participants (perhaps even some of the leaders);

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- offer a larger than normal degree of unpredictability (e.g. weather conditions might substantially, and perhaps suddenly, change an activity from being low risk to high risk);
- require additional and specific leader competence (e.g. qualifications, training or experience);
- require additional specialist equipment or clothing (e.g. climbing harness or wetsuit);
- involve locations that are remote or difficult to access, and where it might take emergency services considerable time to provide additional assistance or medical care;
- involve remote or indirect supervision;
- involve pupils whose behaviour is challenging and difficult;
- involve pupils with special needs.

Examples of high risk activities

- Some activities and environments are generally regarded as “**high risk**”, for example:
 - **all activities licensable by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA)** such as caving, climbing, canoeing, mountain biking, mountain walking, sailing, windsurfing, horse riding, rock or gorge scrambling should be regarded in this category – see full list below;
 - **other non licensable outdoor activities**, such as dry slope skiing, road cycling, rope courses, rollerblading, water skiing etc. that may involve an extra degree of vulnerability by, for example, travelling at high speeds or at a height above the ground;
 - **remote, challenging or unpredictable environments**, such as rocky mountains, steep or slippery slopes, cliffs, scree/boulder fields, snow/ice, fast moving rivers, sinking sand, or deep water;
 - **activities that are less predictable and controllable**, and use equipment which potentially could cause serious harm such as rifle shooting, paintballing, go-karting, quad biking, archery (N.B. some of these activities may not be permissible due to concerns over their educational purpose, or the lack of insurance cover available)
 - **most water-based activities** - it should be noted that a high proportion of recent fatalities on visits have involved activities based on or near water. Not all activities associated with water are necessarily “high risk”, but leaders should be aware that water is a particularly unpredictable environment, and extra caution should be exercised when groups are near coasts, and when close to water which is deep, fast moving, tidal, or has waves or currents - such environments should be regarded as “high risk”. The DfES has produced guidelines called “Group Safety at Water Margins”, available at www.teachernet.gov.uk/visits, which provides good practice advice for waterside environments. There is also detailed guidance available within the LEA’s Generic Risk Assessments;
 - **adverse climate/weather conditions** - it should be noted that the degree of risk may also be increased by other factors, such as the climate or weather conditions. These, in turn, are often a reflection of the time of year that the activity is planned (e.g. a lowland walk might be considered low risk in the summer, but potentially more hazardous in winter conditions).
 - **remote staff supervision** (e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Expeditions) - adventurous activities or hazardous environments where there is no immediate staff supervision.

1.3 How to decide if a visit involves high risk activities or environments

- It is impractical and unhelpful to compile a precise and comprehensive list of all high risk activities and environments because there are too many variables. For example, playing a game beside a shallow lake
- might be perceived as a “high risk activity” for a group of 5-year-olds, but perhaps as only a minimal risk for a group of 17-year-olds.
- Moreover, different people, according to their individual circumstances and experience, and according to society’s prevailing attitudes, may perceive hazards and associated risks quite differently. For example, travelling in a coach may actually present a much higher risk than canoeing on a lake, but it is not normally recognised as a “high risk activity”, because it is familiar and “normal” to most people, and the level of risk is generally recognised as acceptably low.

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- General principles for deciding if a visit involves high risk activities/environments should be:
 - if there is any uncertainty, ask other people to obtain an objective consensus of opinion;
 - if Group Leaders, EVC's or Headteachers are still unsure, seek guidance from the County Educational Visits Consultant.
- it is ultimately the responsibility of the Headteacher to decide. However, if in any doubt, err on the side of caution. Additional support and guidance will then be available if required, and LEA approval should give further reassurance that the visit plans are considered reasonable, satisfactory and sufficient.

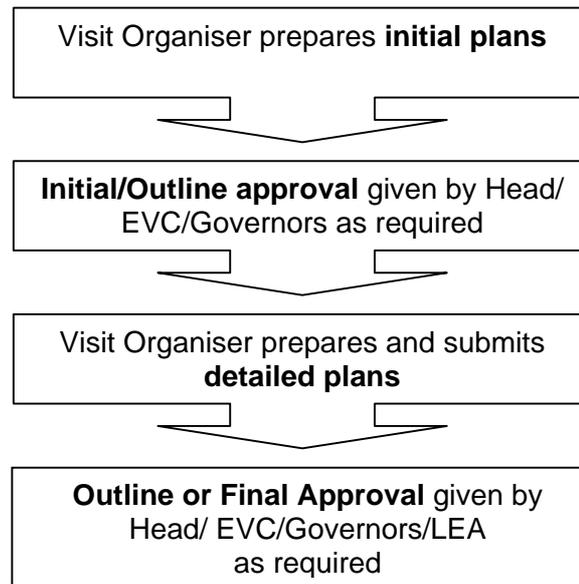
1.4 Why is it important to highlight those visits with high risk activities and environments?

- The main purpose of identifying those visits that involve “high risk activities or environments” is to enable someone else, who has relevant knowledge and experience, to:
 - check the plans;
 - give informed feedback;
 - make an additional objective assessment as to whether the activity is safe and suitable.
- The adding of classification “A” should therefore be seen positively as a means of gaining additional support and guidance, rather than negatively, as an extra “hoop” to jump through.

1.5 Why are there several different levels of approval?

- Everyone makes mistakes...and of course, some mistakes have serious consequences.
- If plans and decisions are made only by a single leader, without appropriate checks made by others, the likelihood of making a mistake with serious consequences is much greater.
- Indeed, several of the recent fatalities on school visits have involved leaders operating independently, with apparent disregard to the advice and guidance of others.
- A checking system can therefore be a sensible and reasonable means of maintaining and improving safety standards, and of reducing the likelihood of mistakes.
- If the checks are made by people with appropriate knowledge and experience of the activity and/or environment, it reduces further the risk of making a serious mistake being made.
- Competence generally exists within schools to make sensible judgements and give Final Approval for Category 1 and 2 (Day) visits, providing no significantly hazardous activities or environments are involved.
- **The Governing Body and Headteacher should clearly state within their own policy on Educational Visits who is responsible for approving and checking visits.** This may vary depending upon the circumstances of each school, but those involved should have sufficient knowledge and experience of educational visits to be able to give sensible feedback, guidance and support, as well as to assess and approve visits.
- The Governing Body can provide a valuable additional level of support and guidance, and should be actively involved in this checking and approval process, providing there is a suitable representative who has the appropriate interest and competence, but individual school policy should decide if this is realistic, relevant, and helpful.
- Where the Overall Group Leader/Visit Organiser is the Headteacher, it is usually good practice for the visit details to be checked and approved by an additional level of authority. Category 3,4, and “A” visits will always still require additional LEA approval, but it is good practice, in such instances, for day visit proposals to be checked and approved by a suitable representative of the Governing Body.
- Category 3 (UK residential), 4 (overseas) and all Subcategory “A” (hazardous activities and environments) visits are usually more complex, and require more careful planning. The LEA must therefore also check and approve these types of visit, and visits must not go ahead without their Final Approval.

1.6 What is the process for the Notification and Approval of Visits?



1.7 What is ROVER (Record of Visits East Riding) Online?

- From March 2005, the East Riding of Yorkshire introduced ROVER, an online system for the notification and approval of visits, which must be used by all schools for Category 3, 4 and “A” Visits, and is optional for Category 1 and 2 (Day) Visits.
- The ROVER system enables the Visit Organiser to record, and then to submit by email to each of the approving authorities, full details of the visit plans for checking and approval.
- The ROVER database enables all those who are responsible for visits to have immediate online access to all the school’s visit records. This is particularly important if an emergency occurs during a visit. As a consequence, all those responsible should be familiar with using the ROVER system.
- The ROVER website <https://www.eastriding.gov.uk/eforms> can be accessed by all those who have been given their own username and password by the LEA. New requests for a username and password should normally be made via the school EVC, who will then contact the LEA Educational Visits Consultant. An individual’s own personal username and password must be kept confidential and must be used only by that individual

1.8 What is Initial or Outline Approval?

- Depending upon the circumstances and Educational Visits policy of each school, the Overall Group Leader/Visit Organiser should submit basic plans and receive initial approval from the relevant authority (e.g. EVC or Headteacher) for each proposed visit before making detailed arrangements. This process enables the approving authority to check that the basic outline plans and proposals, such as the visit dates, costs, group members, staffing and cover, are acceptable.
- Initial plans must be provided with enough detail for those giving initial approval to make informed judgements as to the overall suitability and safety of the intended venture.
- Initial approval only gives the go-ahead for further detailed arrangements to be made, and in no way gives full approval/permission for the visit.
- In some cases, especially in small schools, it might be sufficient to obtain initial approval verbally from the Headteacher.
- However, most schools usually require a more structured procedure using either:
 - a simple form with outlined details of the visit, to which the appropriate authority can add their signature of initial approval, or
 - the ROVER (Record Of Visits East Riding) system which will allow Visits Organisers to submit basic details of the visit online and request Outline Approval from the relevant authority.

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- Whichever procedure is most appropriate, the individual school policy should clarify what is required for Initial/Outline approval internally.
- For most types of visit it is only necessary to obtain Initial/Outline Approval from the relevant internal authorities (i.e. the EVC/Head/Governors) without notifying the LEA.
- **However, where a school is planning a visit that will later require LEA Approval, and it involves considerable financial outlay and/or binding commercial contracts (for example, Overseas Expeditions), the Visit Organiser must first obtain Outline Approval (via the ROVER online database) from the Headteacher/Governors and the LEA prior to the signing of the contract or paying any deposit.**

1.9 What is Final Approval? - general principles (see also Chapter SG 18 for further details)

- No educational visit or offsite activity must go ahead unless clear Final Approval has been given by all of the required authorised personnel.
- Final Approval must not be assumed, but clear, documented and unequivocal.
- **The School's own Visits Policy must detail who is responsible within the school to check and approve visits.** There must be a clear and unequivocal statement in the Policy identifying who has the authority to give Final Approval for each specific category of visit.
- When visits are submitted for final approval, each of the authorised personnel must check the details of the visit plans carefully to assess the safety and suitability of the visit.
- Particular attention should be given to the competence of the leaders (it might be helpful to refer to the record of each leader's qualifications, experience and training – this could be found in the school's Educational Visits file, or accessed via the ROVER database – see "Personal Details").
- If there are significant concerns about the visit, whether for safety or other reasons, the visit should not be given Final Approval.
- It is important that any relevant feedback, or additional guidance and support is given to the Visit Organiser if required, and that questions regarding areas of concern are answered satisfactorily.
- Each of the relevant authorities can respond to a request for visit approval by giving the visit one of following 3 levels of status:

"Not Approved" the visit is not permitted to proceed – this might be for safety or other reasons, but a full explanation will be given. It might still be possible to arrange a similar visit, but significant changes may need to be made, and it is likely that a new visit form will need to be completed and submitted.

"Outline Approval" the visit is approved in principle, but further information or action is required before Final Approval can be given - either the plans are incomplete, or there are aspects of the visit which may need further attention, or there are concerns which first need to be answered satisfactorily. Once these issues have been addressed and dealt with satisfactorily, the visit can be resubmitted for Final Approval.

"Final Approval" the visit is given full approval to proceed – there may, however, still be recommendations or guidance to consider.

1.10 Seeking Final Approval - for Category 3 (UK Residential), 4 (Overseas), and "A" (High Risk activities/environments) Visits (see also Chapter SG 18 for further details)

- Once the Visit Organiser has completed the main plans and preparations, full details of the visit must be submitted to all the relevant authorities (Head/EVC, Governors, and LEA) for approval, by means of the ROVER online database (<https://www.eastriding.gov.uk/eforms>) – see Appendix SGA 1.2 for guidance on the use of ROVER .
- Visit details should be submitted at least 6 weeks in advance of departure (in order to allow sufficient time for processing, and for changes to be made if required).

1.11 Seeking Final Approval - for Category 1 and 2 (Day) visits

- Once the Visit Organiser has completed the main plans and preparations, full details of the visit must be submitted to the relevant authorities for approval.
- At least two week's notice is recommended, but individual schools should clarify their requirements in their own Educational Visits policy.
- The ROVER online database is an ideal means for the notification and approval of all visits, including Category 1 and 2 (Day) Visits. The system can store all visit details centrally, and will allow staff to easily access information from anywhere. However, the requirements of schools vary enormously, and therefore it is not mandatory to use the ROVER online system for category 1 and 2 (Day) visits. Some schools may find it simpler and may wish to continue using the existing paper-based system.
- If a school prefers to use a system other than ROVER for recording and approving category 1 and 2 (Day) visits, the Governors and Headteacher must make this clear in the school's own Educational Visits policy, and it is their responsibility to ensure that there is a clearly established and rigorous system for recording, checking, and approving such visits internally.

1.12 Amendments to Approved Visits

- Any significant changes (e.g. in staffing levels) that occur to visit plans after the visit has received "Final Approval" (or after details have been submitted for processing) must be notified in writing to all relevant levels of authority.
- Any proposed changes should be acknowledged and approved accordingly by all relevant levels of authority. The approval status of the visit will need to be reconsidered – in exceptional circumstances, the visit may need to be cancelled or postponed, or further changes may need to be made before "Final Approval" can be given.
- For Category 1 and 2 (Day) Visits, it is normally just the EVC and Headteacher who must be notified of, and give approval to changes.
- For Categories 3 (UK residential), 4 (overseas) and all "A" (hazardous activities/environments) Visits, the visit plans must be submitted using the ROVER online database. Once a visit has been submitted for Final Approval using ROVER, the system automatically stores and "locks" the visit details so that no further alterations can be made. However, the ROVER system has the necessary facility to allow for the notification and approval of additional changes (see Appendix SGA 1.2 for detailed guidance on the use of ROVER). It might be necessary to fully resubmit the plans once the changes have been made, but minor amendments can be noted without the need for re-approval.

1.13 Planning visits

- The Planning Flowchart in Appendix SGA 1.1 can be used by Visit Organisers as a checklist to ensure that visit plans and preparations have been satisfactorily completed.

1.14 Work related learning during educational visits

- see appendix SGA 1.3 for guidance