

## Generic Risk Assessments – user guidance notes

### 1. What are Generic Risk Assessments?

- Generic Risk Assessments highlight commonly identified hazards (i.e. things with the potential to cause harm) and control measures/precautions (i.e. ways of reducing the likelihood of the hazard causing harm) associated with general locations, events or activities (e.g. visits to coasts, visits to theme parks, or pond dipping).
- The main aim of these Generic Risk Assessments is to help raise overall safety standards on Educational/Offsite Visits.
- They aim to fulfil the LA's legal responsibility to provide employees with relevant written risk assessments.
- They are not mandatory, but are made available as helpful tools for all those who have responsibility for the organisation and leadership of educational visits. If Headteachers/Managers choose not to use the LA-provided Generic Risk Assessments, they must ensure that adequate alternative risk assessments are undertaken, and that these are recorded and stored appropriately.

### 2. How can Generic Risk Assessments for Educational Visits help?

Generic Risk Assessments should help all those responsible for the organisation and leadership of educational visits by:

- raising awareness of possible hazards and control measures that might have previously not been considered;
- promoting good practice;
- providing information that can easily be shared with, and adapted by, all leaders (and group members) to ensure a common understanding of expected standards and responsibilities during a visit.

Generic Risk Assessments should therefore help to:

- **protect young people**, by highlighting ways of improving safety standards on educational visits and encouraging leaders to actively discuss issues and agree good standards of practice that can be applied consistently;
- **safeguard leaders** from the threat of litigation, by providing clear written evidence of the risk assessment and management measures that have been taken (as required by law);
- **save considerable time and effort**, by providing an initial framework of ideas for discussion (rather than starting with a blank sheet of paper! – it is generally easier to cross out the suggestions that may not apply, rather than to think from the start of all the issues that do).

### 3. How should Generic Risk Assessments be used?

Generic Risk Assessments provide a useful starting point for discussion and consideration, **BUT** they must never be regarded as:

- **Foolproof** – accidents can still happen! (but the risk assessments do give written evidence to help show that leaders have given reasonable prior thought to the risks and control measures involved!);
- **Comprehensive** – whilst generic risk assessments seek to identify and highlight key hazards and control measures, it should never be assumed that all significant issues have been recognised and included. It is still up to the leaders to identify and add any other hazards or control measures that may appropriate;
- **Rigid** – generic risk assessment forms are flexible, and must be adapted to each group's own circumstances and needs by adding further hazards/control measures that may be relevant, or deleting/amending those hazards/control measures that are not appropriate or acceptable, or cannot practically be implemented for some reason. Indeed, whilst the control measures suggested on the form might all be worthy of consideration, it is understood that they are not all universally applicable or acceptable for all groups and situations (for example, the agreed control measures for a group of sixth formers might be very different to a group of nursery school children). The control measures on the form are only suggestions to consider, and NOT rigid rules and requirements laid down in law or by the employer. The purpose of the forms is therefore not to dictate to visit leaders what is required, but to raise awareness and prompt thoughtful

consideration and discussion as part of the visit planning process. It is understood that visit leaders will often face unexpected or unusual situations (including sometimes being presented with new learning opportunities that are too valuable to pass by) during a visit, and they should have the necessary experience and competence to dynamically risk assess each situation and to respond flexibly and appropriately to each circumstance. Visit leaders should always bear in mind the general practice agreed in the generic risk assessments, but it might be reasonable and acceptable in certain circumstances for visit leaders to choose not to adhere to control measures that had previously been agreed in the generic forms. For example, leaders might have agreed prior to a visit that in the event of the coach breaking down on a motorway that they would normally evacuate everyone from the coach onto safe ground at the side of the motorway. However, there might be particular circumstances (e.g. in adverse weather conditions), when this might not be the safest or most suitable response, so visit leaders should remain flexible and not feel unduly constrained by control measures that might have been earlier agreed, especially if safety might be compromised.

- **One person's sole responsibility** - all risk assessments should be shared and discussed in advance with all the other leaders (including volunteer helpers) involved as part of the visit planning process. Wherever possible, the group members should also be involved in discussions - this will help them to recognise hazards, to identify suitable control measures, and to take more responsibility for their own safety and welfare;
- **An Opt Out** – whilst Generic Risk Assessments should significantly ease the workload of leaders, considerable thought, discussion, and interaction are still required to complete the forms. A generic risk assessment is not complete unless it has been suitably adapted and agreed as acceptable by all those responsible for the visit (evidenced by written and dated signatures);
- **Complete** – the generic risk assessments identify likely hazards and suggest control measures to consider, but they do not provide a comprehensive list of all options. Users should delete or amend inappropriate and unacceptable options, and add extra measures in each section of the form, as necessary. In addition to using relevant generic risk assessments, a “Specific Visit Risk Assessment” form should normally be completed before the visit to identify foreseeable hazards and control measures that are unique to the precise locations visited, activities undertaken, and individuals within the group (see the blank “Specific Visit Risk Assessment form below) on a particular visit. Furthermore, it must be clearly understood by all leaders that risk assessment and management is an ongoing process that involves far more than written documents. Therefore, during a visit, all leaders must maintain a “Dynamic or Ongoing Risk Assessment” (this is NOT a form, and no written record is normally required!!!) by remaining alert to, and responding to, changing circumstances or additional unforeseen hazards;
- **Static** - At the bottom of each form is the name of the person who initially wrote the generic risk assessment, together with the date it was last updated. Inevitably, during the course of time, various changes, corrections and improvements will be made. Users of the forms are encouraged to notify the LA Educational Visits Officer of any mistakes or suggested amendments, so that the forms can be steadily improved, and thus become increasingly useful and effective tools for developing safe practice on educational visits. The forms may also need to be amended in the light of accidents, incidents or near-misses during visits. It is important therefore that leaders review visits after they return and, as part of the risk assessment and monitoring process, record and pass on to others lessons that can be learned for future visits. In particular, it may be helpful to raise awareness of newly identified hazards or of management strategies that were not effective, or indeed to share with others successful strategies and good practice. Leaders should therefore note changes that do occur (by checking on the date of the last update), and regularly update any hard copies of these forms.

#### **4. What is the recommended process for using Generic Risk Assessments?**

- **Select and print off** - all relevant and helpful forms (according to the type of visits and activities normally organised during the year) – others (e.g. that apply to one-off visits) can be added later if required.
- **How many?** - one set of forms for small staff teams - or one set per department for large staff teams.
- **Complete draft forms** - initially by one or two staff with appropriate experience;
- **Staff meeting 1** - introduce and leave draft forms in a file for all relevant staff (i.e. those who organise or help lead such visits) to inspect and consider over a short period (e.g. a week).

- **Staff meeting 2** - discuss, amend, and agree main hazards and standard practice with all relevant staff (add names and initials in table below to indicate acceptance).
- **Staff members who cannot agree** with the general consensus should complete their own risk assessment, but this must be considered acceptable and approved by the Headteacher/Senior Manager.
- **Check and approve** – e.g. by line manager/head of dept and/or visits coordinator if appropriate
- **Store** - in a marked file in a clearly known and accessible place (e.g. staff room or dept office).
- **How often?** - forms that apply to all visits (e.g. “All Educational Visits”) or to regular/frequent visits (e.g. “Visits to Museums” ) should be completed once, then reviewed, amended, signed and dated annually.
- **Additional forms** - that apply to occasional/one-off visits (e.g. “Overseas Visits”) can be completed when required – these should be reviewed, amended, signed and dated whenever such visits are planned.
- **Keep familiar**- with the agreed practice, and refer to forms as a reminder before visits if necessary (especially for activities that are less frequent or familiar to staff).
- **New leaders and volunteers** - should normally be asked to read all relevant forms and add their signed agreement before assisting with the organisation or leadership of a visit.
- **Review and amend** - by all relevant staff annually (or more often if necessary), and immediately if new hazards are identified or new precautions deemed necessary.
- **Stop** - this type of visit/activity if the level of risk is considered unmanageable and unacceptable.
- **Flexibility** - is still necessary. Staff should dynamically risk assess situations throughout a visit and respond appropriately, mindful of, but not necessarily totally constrained by, the general practice agreed in the generic risk assessments. However, staff should always have reasonable justifications for their actions.
- **Specific Visit Risk Assessment** - is also normally required for each visit to address any extra foreseeable issues relevant to the specific site/group/activities involved.

#### 5. Which Generic Risk Assessments should be completed?

- Generic risk assessments that apply to all visits (e.g. “All Educational Visits” or “All Travel” or “All Overseas Visits”) should normally be completed as a foundation for all other Generic Risk Assessments, and identify issues that are common to all visits.
- In addition staff teams should decide which other generic risk assessments will be relevant and helpful – this will depend upon the type of visits and activities that they normally organise during the year.
- Other generic risk assessments that were not originally considered at the start of the year, but apply to unscheduled visits later in the year, can be completed in addition, as and when required.

#### 6. Who needs to see and check completed Risk Assessments?

- Completed risk assessments should be available for inspection, if requested, by all those who are responsible for overseeing, monitoring and approving visits (e.g. for schools - the Educational Visits Coordinator, the Headteacher, the Governing Body, and the LA Educational Visits Officer).
- Normally for schools, copies of the forms should be presented for inspection and checking internally if requested by the Head of Dept and/or Headteacher (according to the school’s own Visits Policy), but there is no need for additional copies to be sent to the LA. However, the LA Educational Visits Officer may request copies of documentation for specific visits that are causing concern, or for a spot check, as part of the LA’s standard monitoring policy.
- For Youth and Children’s Service groups, copies of risk assessments should normally be presented for inspection and checking internally by a suitably experienced and competent Line Manager or Unit Manager (according to their agreed policy).

#### 7. When, and how often, should Generic Risk Assessments be completed?

- For generic risk assessments that apply to all visits (e.g. “All Educational Visits” or “All Travel” or “All Overseas Visits”) or for visits that are organised frequently and/or regularly (e.g. “Sports Matches” or “Visits to Cities” or “Visits to Theatres/Cinemas/Museums”), it is appropriate and acceptable for the form to be completed once initially, then reviewed, amended, and signed annually by all those staff who might be involved in organising and leading those type of visits during the year. It is suggested that staff are directed to read the standard generic forms online, and then to sign a hard copy that is kept for reference in a clearly marked file in the staff room.

- For other occasional, non-routine visits, the relevant generic risk assessments can be completed and signed as required as the foundation for a risk assessment of the visit.
- New staff arrivals and prospective new leaders should normally be made aware of any generic risk assessments that are used regularly, and should be asked to read and add their signatures, in acceptance of the recognised and adopted safety measures.

**8. When should the generic risk assessments for outdoor or adventurous activities (e.g. Rock Climbing) be used?**

- The generic risk assessments for outdoor or adventurous activities should be used only on those occasions when members of your own staff are directly responsible for the leadership or instruction of the activities (e.g. your own staff are leading/instructing a canoeing group).
- If external service providers (e.g. instructors from a residential outdoor centre) are directly responsible for the leadership/instruction of activities, the Overall Group Leader is not responsible for completing risk assessments for each activity, and therefore the generic risk assessments are not applicable.
- However, the Overall Group Leader has a duty to check that the external activity provider has full safety management systems in place, and it would be appropriate to obtain a written assurance from the providers that they have their own risk assessments for each activity, and that these are available for inspection if required.

**9. Where should risk assessments be stored, and for how long?**

- It is suggested that hard copies of all generic risk assessments are kept for reference in a clearly marked file in the staff room or department room. It is important that staff can easily access and remind themselves of recommended safe practice. Staff can always download or scan additional individual copies for themselves, if required.
- Hard copies of completed and signed risk assessments should be retained by those responsible (i.e. for schools - the Overall Group Leader and/or the Educational Visits Coordinator and/or Headteacher), at least until such time that they are confident that all issues/incidents arising from the visit have been dealt with fully. Whilst a young person might theoretically bring legal action until they are aged 21, it is recommended that, for practical reasons, documentation is stored only for a period of 6 years, unless there is good reason to suspect that further legal action might be taken.

**10. Are these Generic Risk Assessments compulsory?**

- By law, those who are responsible for organising and leading visits should be able to show evidence of the risk assessments they have undertaken, and of the preventative control measures they have established to safeguard those in their care. There is no single acceptable method for this, and it would ultimately be up to the law courts to decide what level of risk assessment and management is deemed “reasonable”.
- These generic risk assessments reflect the LA’s ultimate responsibility in law (see “The Health and Safety at Work Regulations” 1999) to assess the risks of activities, and to pass on to its employees recommended measures that it should consider adopting.
- It is not mandatory for staff to use these exact forms, and it is perfectly acceptable for leaders to complete their own risk assessments in a different format, if preferred, providing they are suitable and sufficient. However, in the event of an investigated incident, leaders clearly might need to justify why they had chosen not to adopt the forms provided by the LA.