

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education, Culture and Sport
DATE	21 November 2013
DIRECTOR	Gayle Gorman
TITLE OF REPORT	Outdoor Learning and Educational Excursions Policy Review
REPORT NUMBER:	ECS/13/068

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to present to the Education Culture and Sport Committee a revised policy and guidance for Educational Excursions. The policy has taken into account new Scottish Government Guidance on Education visits published 31 March 2013.

The Council's existing policy is in three sections. Section A is the management arrangement for Educational Visits and has been the focus of this review. This is the only section that has undergone policy change.

Section B is policy and guidance on the delivery of adventurous activities. Section C is policy and guidance on buying adventurous activity services from External Providers. Whereas sections B and C will be updated to take into account ongoing changes, the policies of the Council will not change.

The current policy and guidance can be found at <http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.asp?IID=44542&slD=18154>

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Education Culture and Sport Committee approve the proposed changes to the Council's Outdoor Learning and Educational Excursions Policy and instruct Officers to circulate the New Policy to establishments on 5th January 2014, to become live on 1st February 2014.

At this date the Existing Policy shall be replaced in its entirety with the New Policy, subject to the phasing in guidelines stated in section 7 below.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Any adjustments to personnel to provide the necessary support to the implementation and day to day management of the policy will be drawn from existing budgets.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The Council implemented an updated version of its Outdoor Learning and Educational Excursions policy in August 2012. This was soon after an incident involving a visit to a swimming pool. One of the findings of HSE after the incident recommended that the Excursions Policy was reviewed after one year and any required changes made to its operational systems.

To facilitate this recommendation and initiate the review Education, Culture and Sport SMT on 9th April recommended the review begin in June 2013 with a view to its implementation after the October break 2013.

Providing and safely managing educational visits and off site learning involves a broad spectrum of stakeholders. The policy review group drew in a wide cross representation of the stakeholders and have contributed and been consulted with over the life time of the group that met four times:

Service Manager Early Years / Primary
Policy and Advice Team (Legal Services)
Early Years Partnership
Primary Head Teachers Executive
Secondary Head Teachers Association
Additional Support Needs
Communities Team
Social, Health and Well-being
Parent Council
Directorate Support (Administration)
Health and Safety
Outdoor Learning and Educational Excursions
Co-ordinator (Clerk)
Adventure Aberdeen Team Leader (Chair)

This policy review has made a number of changes to the current policy, Outdoor Learning and Educational Excursions Policy and Guidance, in line with the new Scottish Framework for safe practice in off-site visits; Going Out There (GOT). The framework has been developed in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education (SAPOE), Education Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES).

The framework refreshes and updates the Health and Safety on Educational excursions (HASEE) 2004.

The main changes the updated policy proposes are:

- To change the name from Educational Excursions to Educational Visits as per new guidance
- To adopt the new Scottish Framework for offsite visits layout and content whilst retaining many of Aberdeen City's own policies and standards of operational management
- To provide a more enabling administrative system whilst still retaining safety oversight support and monitoring
- To reduce administration by reducing the number of forms and steps involved whilst increasing the number of examples and specimens
- To increase parental knowledge and understanding of the need to be able to take learners off site more regularly and on occasion without specific parental consent
- To enable establishments to make their own distinction as to what is a Routine and Expected visit and what is a one-off day visit depending up on the normal curricular practices of the establishment
- To provide generic risk assessments for different categories of visit that still require the visit leader to actively assess the risks involved
- To reinforce the requirement for Heads of Establishment and Visit Leaders to establish supervision ratios with the help of suggested ratios
- To re-emphasise that the Head of Establishment must authorise every visit however they must consult with the Adventure Aberdeen Team Leader on all visits abroad or ones that involve adventurous activities before giving final approval
- To direct visit leaders of groups with disability and equalities related matters to the Equalities Act (2010) and to sources of useful guidance related to this.

If the policy is adopted, this will require a title change of the Outdoor Learning and Educational Excursions Co-ordinator post to Educational Visits Co-ordinator (EVC) to reflect the new terminology in the policy. In accordance with the recent Council decision, the Service will pursue the appropriate channels to effect this amendment.

The new framework adopts a less bureaucratic approach, enabling and encouraging outdoor experiences through outdoor learning and off site-visits. This reflects the step change in approach to educational visits detailed in the HSE high level statement "School Trips and Outdoor Learning Activities" - Tackling the Health and Safety Myths and the Going Out There Framework.

5. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

Providing safe off site learning is a complex business when all the safety and legal responsibilities of the Council are taken into consideration.

Current thinking believes that over bureaucratic management discourages off-site learning, and that this is potentially more damaging to young people than exposure to real risks of the real world. Many examples of concerns of over protection can be found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 17 in terms of the need for access to play, recreation and access to nature.

Finding the right balance between appropriate bureaucracy and necessary health and safety monitoring remains a difficult management task.

The Government report “Common Safety Common Sense” by Lord Young in 2010 spelt out that an over bureaucratisation was having a detrimental effect on schools and other learning centres and that staff moral and confidence in the face of this was at an all time low. The report proposed a number of changes including the abolition of the Outdoor Activities Licensing Authority. The report also urged the HSE to look seriously at its key messages and put measures in place to create an enabling culture and de-cluttering of the process to be involved in off-site learning and activities.

The new Scottish Framework for Safe Practice in Off-site Visits; Going Out There (GOT), reflects these changes in outlook, principally through the involvement of the HSE in its drafting. The proposed policy change which accompanies this paper also reflects these changes whilst retaining appropriate health and safety measures and support to staff.

6. IMPACT

The implementation of this updated policy is intended to make it easier for our schools, community centres and other services working with young people and adults to leave the establishments behind and enjoy the stunning variety of local environments and be involved in visits to all the corners of the world. Between August 2012 and July 2013 there were 35 foreign visits from Aberdeen City.

The process of ‘Getting it right for every child’ involves outdoor play and recreational and activity - this being a part of our overall commitment to developing the health of our citizens and supporting them to reach their potential.

The curriculum for excellence has as a key component a commitment to embed outdoor learning in everyday learning. Experiences and outcomes are fundamental to the curriculum’s ethos and it is recognised that taking learning out of doors meets and delivers these.

This report is of interest to the public as it sets out how the Council are addressing step changes in health and safety directives and applying them to our learning establishments across the city.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

There are three types of risk associated with the implementation of policy related to educational visits. There are the risks to young people associated with the visits in taking our learners into the wider world, there are the risks associated with not taking young people our learners in to the wider world and there are the risks to the council of being found negligent of its policies and procedures whilst introducing and implementing the policy or in the event of a misfortune whilst leading a visit.

To mitigate the risks that can easily arise from introducing and implementing the new policy alongside an existing one the following arrangement will be in place.

From 6th January to 1st February 2014, information briefings will be arranged in all Associated School Groups.

All new visits planned after 1st February 2014, or for which documentation has not yet been submitted by 1st February 2014, will be required to use the New Policy, together with corresponding new documentation and procedures.

Visits which have been planned or initiated prior to 1st February 2014 which have submitted documentation under the Existing Policy, shall continue to use the Existing Policy, together with corresponding documentation and procedures, through to completion of that visit.

Where a visit has been planned or initiated prior to 1st February 2014 and documentation has been submitted, yet visit leaders wish to bring the visit under the requirements of the New Policy, the visit documentation shall require to be re-submitted using the New Policy regime and accordingly the visit will be governed by the rules of the New Policy.

The updated policy seeks to address the difficulty in finding the right balance when weighing up risk benefit analysis against opportunities and experiences we present to our learners. This revised policy, as with its predecessor, is centred around the need to provide real learning opportunities in the real world whilst providing relevant and proportionate Continuous professional Development, support monitoring, and compliance presence from supportive and experienced staff.

Risks of claims against the council are always possible and incidents and accidents on visits remain possible, though unlikely. Fortunately these are extremely rare as a result of the professionalism and training of our

staff. Public understanding of the need to “not wrap our children in cotton wool” is still developing.

This proposed policy aligns itself very closely to the new National Framework, Going Out There. It provides a lot of supportive information and guidance for staff and sets out very clearly how further information can be sought if required. Monitoring, training and qualification are key factors in the structure of the policy together with the roles and responsibilities of everybody involved. The presence of the health and safety team on the review group has had considerable input into how we train staff to recognise and manage risk in the field.

Twelve training briefings in the secondary school ASG areas will be delivered between 15th – 30th January to which Nursery, Primary, Secondary, ASN and SCW staff will be invited.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Going Out There; Scottish Framework for Safe Practice in off-site visits
31 March 2013

Convention on the Rights of the Child General Comment No'17 (2013)
on the rights of the child to rest, leisure, play recreational activities and
cultural life and the arts (art. 31) Feb 2013

Common Safety Common Sense; Lord Young HM government 2010

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Jonathan Kitching, Adventure Aberdeen Team Leader
jkitching@aberdeencity.gov.uk