
Review of education visits policies in the further education sector

September 2015

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Introduction

The Minister for Education and Skills asked Estyn in February 2015 to conduct a review of the policies used by further education colleges for educational visits. Estyn conducted a desk-based review of college policies and interviewed college staff in order to understand how well their procedures are working. As a result, Estyn identified areas of good practice as well as areas of concern. The Minister also asked Estyn to consider whether colleges are following the National Guidance on educational visits drawn up by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel and whether separate or supplementary guidance should be produced for colleges. In addition, the Minister asked Estyn to identify any gaps or weaknesses in the policies and to make recommendations on improvements.

This review is confined to the health and safety aspects of educational visits and does not consider their educational value, or the financial or administrative aspects of educational visits.

Background

The request from the Minister for Education and Skills for Estyn to undertake this review followed the death of a learner studying at Ystrad Mynach College, during an educational visit to Barcelona in 2011. Following their son's death, his parents raised a range of concerns about the college's procedures for educational visits and the associated risk assessments. The Minister made a commitment to the learner's parents that every college in Wales would be made aware of the impact of their son's death and that he would take steps to minimise the risk of such an event happening again. This review forms part of that commitment.

Main findings

- 1 All colleges in Wales have generally appropriate and relevant policies, procedures and guidance for educational visits. Overall, they meet legislative requirements. All colleges have suitable general arrangements for assessing levels of risk. While all policies meet requirements, a few do not set out clearly enough what is included in each policy or to whom the policy applies. The policies are very varied and highly individual to each college. Nearly all policies set out the rationale and purposes of educational visits, with a strong emphasis on the value of learning outside of the classroom.
- 2 Usually, a college policy sets out the principles of the policy and gives an oversight of the context. Nearly all policies identify the respective roles of a group leader and other staff on educational visits. Most policies refer usefully to the skills and competencies that group leaders and other accompanying staff need to have.
- 3 Nearly all colleges use their health and safety staff well in every aspect of the planning of educational visits. The health and safety professionals provide staff with guidance and support as well as training in assessing risk.
- 4 Most of the college policies make good reference to assessing levels of risk and the need to plan carefully to take this into account when planning visits. A few policies refer specifically to the National Guidance on educational visits drawn up by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel, although nearly all follow only the broad principles of the guidance.
- 5 All colleges have sound procedures on risk assessments accompanied by useful guidance. Nearly all colleges require that these together with operational plans are scrutinised by a manager or staff member responsible for managing health and safety.
- 6 All colleges have detailed requirements for the assessment of risk in proportion to need. Many colleges require that health and safety officers guide and support group leaders when planning risk assessments. This is good practice. In order to minimise bureaucracy, most colleges identify the level of risk inherent in different types of activity and use systems of 'blanket consent' and generic management within the context of the college policy for activities that are straightforward.
- 7 All policies set out the expectations of the college in ensuring that educational visits are staffed appropriately. Nearly all assume that the visit organiser is the group leader, but this is not always explicit enough. Most policies make reference to the need for all accompanying staff and volunteers to have appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service clearance.
- 8 Most policies make useful references to the distinction between direct and indirect supervision when third party organisations are responsible for delivering and supervising activities.
- 9 Many colleges provide useful flow charts and checklists of the actions that group

leaders should take in planning and managing educational visits. These set out the actions that staff need to take at every stage of the planning. Nearly all colleges refer to the need for group leaders to be acquainted with the current guidance on educational visits. However, very few colleges require the group leader to sign a declaration that they have done this. Many colleges have useful guidance on the training that staff need prior to taking on the role of group leader.

- 10 A minority of colleges make explicit reference to the management and supervision of learners during evenings on residential visits. Most colleges require that group leaders assess the risks associated with 'periods when the learners are not engaged in formal learning' in their detailed plans for the visit. However, this information does not always provide group leaders and accompanying staff with enough guidance to ensure that the levels of supervision are sufficient. Most colleges provide useful guidelines for checking the suitability of accommodation. However, the guidance does not always make it explicit enough that staff and learners should normally be accommodated in the same residence. Not all colleges have enough guidance on the roles and responsibilities of all accompanying adults with supervisory responsibilities.
- 11 Only a minority of colleges make explicit references to the risks associated with alcohol consumption by learners or staff during educational visits. This is often covered in the codes of conduct for staff and learners. Nearly all colleges require that supervisory staff should always be alcohol free, as should any learners under the age of 18. Colleges have varying rules for the consumption of alcohol for learners over the age of 18, although they all refer to the college's code of conduct and the consequences of failure to abide by the code. Not all colleges make it clear what action the college will take if any learners or staff fail to adhere to the code of conduct.
- 12 Nearly all colleges have good arrangements for collecting emergency contact information on all learners and staff involved in planned educational visits. Most colleges have clear information on college contact points should an emergency occur. Where emergency arrangements are described they provide useful information about how group leaders and staff should act, including on contacting the agreed college contact. In a few cases, the college's emergency procedures do not provide enough clear guidance about contact information at all times of the day and night.
- 13 All colleges provide useful references to their insurance policies and the potential use of these for covering educational visits. In a few cases, they do not provide enough information on exactly what the college insurance policy covers and when learners need to take out additional insurance cover.
- 14 All colleges provide detailed information on the additional requirements for overseas visits. Nearly all colleges require that the college principal authorises any overseas visit.
- 15 Most colleges provide useful guidance on the use of third party providers and the actions that group leaders should take in relation to these at the planning stage. However, a few colleges do not make this explicit enough.

Recommendations

Further education colleges in Wales should review their educational visits policies and guidance to ensure that they conform to best practice. They should:

- R1 review their policies and supporting guidance for educational visits to ensure that they set out clear and straightforward procedures for planning visits and that plans and risk assessments are proportionate to need and the level of risk
- R2 require that group leaders have the knowledge, competence and experience to organise and lead the visit and that they have signed a declaration that they have used the current guidance when planning the visit
- R3 make sure that on residential visits all accommodation is checked for suitability and that supervisory staff stay in the same accommodation as learners
- R4 require that on residential visits there are appropriate arrangements for the supervision of downtime¹ and that all staff in a supervisory role are alcohol free
- R5 always require that all learners and parents are aware of the need to comply with the college's codes of conduct on behaviour and of the consequences of not doing so
- R6 make sure that any assistant leader and/or voluntary leaders have clearly understood roles and responsibilities and that they have up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance when leading groups, which include any learners who are either aged under 18 years or vulnerable adults
- R7 provide clear information to learners and parents of the scope and limitations of their insurance policies in relation to educational visits and clarify the responsibilities and expectations of third party providers
- R8 take account of the advice in the National Guidance on educational visits provided by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel when reviewing their policies and guidance on educational visits

The Department of Education and Skills should:

- R9 require that all colleges take account of these recommendations when reviewing and updating their policies and guidance on educational visits

¹ Downtime is any time when learners are not involved in formal learning activity

Review of colleges' policies and procedures

Principles of educational visits policies and procedures

- 16 All further-education colleges in Wales have generally appropriate and relevant policies, procedures and guidance for educational visits. Most of them set out the legal context of the policy under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at work Regulations 1999 to ensure the safety of students, employees and members of the public during any visit or activity organised by the college. In a few cases, the college policies for educational visits are part of a wider suite of policies for other aspects of the management of health and safety. However, a very few policies do not always set out the scope of the policy or whom it applies to. These policies, while covering the legislative context and requirements, do not set out the roles and responsibilities of the governors, the principal / chief executive and other responsible posts clearly enough.
- 17 Normally, the college policy sets out the principles for carrying out an educational visit and provides an overview of the context for health and safety matters. In these cases, the policy is often accompanied by useful operational guidance, setting out the tasks that group leaders need to do in order to conform with the college's systems and procedures for managing visits, and ensuring that they meet the college's health and safety requirements.
- 18 College policies are very varied in content, presentation and detail and are highly individual to each institution in ways that reflect each individual college's structures and procedures. Nearly all policies set out the principles and purposes of educational visits and stress the wider value of learning outside the classroom. Nearly all colleges require that visit organisers provide a rationale for the value of the visit, as well as an indication of the likely cost prior to granting initial approval by a college manager. It is outside the brief of this report to comment on the educational rationale of visits.
- 19 Nearly all colleges use their health and safety staff well in every aspect of the planning of visits. Health and safety professionals provide staff with guidance and support as well as training in the assessment of risk.
- 20 Most of the college policies and associated guidance make appropriate reference to assessing the level of risk and the need to plan carefully when developing and writing risk assessments for the proposed educational visit. They draw useful distinctions to the different procedures that need to be followed for visits that are likely to have a higher level of risk. A few colleges specifically refer to the National Guidance on educational visits drawn up by the Outdoor Education Advisers Panel and nearly all follow most of the broad principles inherent in the guidance. Coleg y Cymoedd makes explicit reference to the need for group leaders to use the National Guidance for more detailed information about planning visits.
- 21 All colleges have sound procedures accompanied by useful guidance for risk assessments. Nearly all colleges require that these, along with other operational plans for visits, are scrutinised at an appropriate level by a manager or staff member

responsible for ensuring health and safety. Many procedures refer usefully to the need for dynamic risk assessments that respond to changing circumstances, such as the need to take action following an emergency.

- 22 Most risk assessments take appropriate account of the staffing arrangements, the nature of activities to be undertaken, the nature of the group, and the environment in which the activity is taking place, as well as the location and distance of the visit. They all require more detailed planning for activities involving a higher level of risk, so that risks are minimised.

Staffing of visits

- 23 All policies set out the expectations of the college and staff in ensuring that educational visits are staffed appropriately. While many policies refer to the role, responsibilities and characteristics of a group leader, a minority do not do so clearly enough. The policies that make useful references to the characteristics of effective group leaders refer to their competencies and responsibilities in managing all aspects of the visit. Most, but not all, policies refer to the need for up-to-date Disclosure and Barring Service clearance for all accompanying staff and volunteers in relation to the supervision of learners under the age of 18 and those adults classified as vulnerable by ability or with known behavioural characteristics.
- 24 Most policies also refer to the roles and responsibilities of assistant leaders on visits. In a few cases, the policies note that acting as an assistant leader is an appropriate way of training to subsequently take on the role of group leader. Nearly all policies refer to the need for appropriate staffing levels and the need to vary this when taking account of the known behavioural characteristics of the group or the potentially hazardous nature of the planned activity.
- 25 Many colleges make explicit reference to the need for group leaders to consult with health and safety officers when planning the visit and particularly when writing risk assessments. This is good practice and helps to ensure that group leaders receive specific training and guidance from health and safety professionals when planning the educational visit.
- 26 Most policies make useful distinctions between direct and indirect supervision when a third-party organisation is responsible for delivering and supervising activities. In the policies that refer to the use of third-party organisations, most refer to the need to check that there are suitable staffing arrangements in place to ensure an appropriate level of staffing.
- 27 In cases where learners with additional support needs are accompanied on a visit by a carer who is not a member of staff, colleges normally ensure that the risk associated by this is mitigated by an appropriate process involving an assessment of the risk.

Guidance and training for staff

- 28 The majority of policies refer clearly to a specific need for the training of group leaders and their assistants. However, nearly all policies assume that group leaders

have the skills and competence to carry out the role. Occasionally, there is not an explicit reference to the form of training that group leaders should be required to undertake before taking on the role of group leader, other than familiarising themselves with the college's regulations and requirements in, for example, planning and writing risk assessments.

- 29 Policies and procedures contain widely different guidance on the arrangements for training staff to lead and manage educational visits. A very few do not refer to the need for training at all, while most others provide very clear guidelines and requirements including the need for specific training, for example in first aid procedures. Other colleges refer usefully to the value of acting as an assistant group leader under the guidance of an experienced group leader as good and effective training. A few refer to the need for at least one member of the staff team to have an approved Health and Safety Executive (HSE) 'first aid at work' certificate and to be authorised to administer first aid.
- 30 Many colleges provide useful flow charts of the steps that staff should take in planning and managing educational visits. These normally identify clearly the documents that staff need to complete at every stage of the planning. Most of the guidance also provides good information about who is responsible for the administration of visits in the college, the level of authority needed for the approval of visits, and the time scales for authorisation. In the cases involving higher levels of risk, such as residential and overseas visits, most colleges require a longer period of notice and the approval of the college principal.
- 31 Nearly all colleges require all group leaders to acquaint themselves with the current guidance for educational visits and to take it into account when planning the visit. However, very few require the group leader to sign a declaration that they have done this.
- 32 In many cases, colleges provide clear guidance on the roles and responsibilities of all staff involved in approving, leading, and acting as accompanying staff before and during educational visits. These arrangements reflect the differing arrangements that colleges have for giving initial outline approval and subsequently approving the risk assessment for the visit before final authorisation.
- 33 Cardiff and Vale College have well considered guidance in relation to the need for first aid cover. They advise that at least one supervisor accompanying a high risk visit should have a current First Aid at Work certificate and that an appropriately stocked first aid kit (suitable for the identified hazards) must be taken on all high risk activities.
- 34 Gower College Swansea clearly sets out the minimum requirements of competence for group leaders. This includes having acted as a supervisory role on at least three previous visits and having a proven track record of learner behaviour control. They advise that members of staff should keep a record of their experience in leading visits, particularly in relation to adventure activities.
- 35 Many policies make useful references to the role of volunteers as assistant leaders or group supervisors. In the cases where they do, they make helpful references to the

need for training volunteers in relation to their responsibilities. The policies refer to the role of former staff, staff family members, student teachers or friends as assistant leaders. In these cases, the policies do not always make it clear enough that any accompanying adults should be present only as additional leaders and be subject to the same safeguarding guidance and levels of responsibility as staff members.

Management of downtime and residential accommodation

- 36 Only a minority of policies make explicit reference to the management and supervision of learners during evenings on residential activities. In spite of this, most colleges require that group leaders assess the risks associated with downtime in their detailed plans for the visit. Most college policies, however, make general references to learners being required to adhere to the college code of conduct at all times and the consequences of not doing so. For learners under the age of 18, most colleges require parents to sign an agreement that ensures that they understand the full consequence of the learner failing to adhere to the college code of conduct. On residential visits the consequence will often include paying the cost of the learner being returned home and, in the case of learners under the age of 18, the cost of staff to accompany the learner.
- 37 Many risk assessments for residential visits require detailed information for the management and supervision of learners throughout the day and night. These identify 'on duty' staff arrangements and the arrangements for supervision in residential accommodation. These include checking (beforehand where practicable) the suitability and security of accommodation on lower floors and all group members familiarity with emergency procedures. Only a few policies and procedures state explicitly that staff and other adults in a supervisory role should be accommodated in the same residence as the learners.
- 38 A minority of policies make explicit reference to the risks of alcohol or drug misuse, especially during downtime. While, in a few cases, the misuse of drugs and alcohol is referred to in college codes of conduct for staff and learners, it is often not referred to explicitly in either the college policy nor in the risk assessment of residential activities. A minority of colleges make it explicit that learners and staff should not drink any alcohol at any time (be 'alcohol free') during an educational visit in their policies. Many colleges make it clear in their risk assessments that all supervisory staff and learners under 18 should be alcohol free. Others state that supervisory adults should be alcohol and drug free, but make no reference to learners. However, nearly all colleges require learners to abide by the college code of conduct on the consumption of alcohol and drugs and provide clear guidance on the consequences of failure to do so.

Remote supervision

- 39 About half the college policies include useful information about 'remote supervision', when learners are under the direct supervision of a third-party provider or are undertaking an activity in which they are not directly supervised, such as working in groups on tasks set by the college staff on expeditions. The colleges that make reference to remote supervision generally provide good guidance on how group leaders should plan such activities to ensure that learners know what is expected of them at all times, and they have the means to contact one of the group leaders if necessary.

Emergency procedures

- 40 Nearly all colleges have good arrangements for collecting emergency contact information on all learners and staff involved in the planned educational visit. In nearly every case learners are not allowed to take part in visits unless they have provided this information prior to the visit taking place.
- 41 Coleg Sir Gâr provides useful information on how to register with emergency services through SMS. Having registered, staff are then able to send text messages to the emergency services when there is no mobile phone signal coverage in the location.
- 42 Most colleges have clear information on college contact points should an emergency take place. In most cases this is set out as a 24-hour emergency action plan. However, this information does not always provide for a contact point throughout 24 hours in the event of an emergency as many are daytime contacts within the college during the working week or a senior manager on a weekend.
- 43 Most colleges have clear arrangements for the provision of first aid or contact with emergency services should an incident occur. Where emergency arrangements are described, they all provide useful information about how group leaders and staff should act, including clear instructions for contacting the college's named contact and legal advice. A few colleges have useful flow diagrams for what to do when things go wrong.

Insurance arrangements

- 44 All colleges make helpful reference to their insurance policies and the potential use of these for covering educational visits. However, not all insurance policies held by colleges provide insurance cover for all situations, particularly in relation to cover for the loss of or damage to personal possessions. In a few cases, the guidance in the policies states exactly what is covered by the college's policy and the steps that need to be taken by the group leader to ensure compliance with the terms of the insurance policy, for example in relation to disclosing pre-existing medical conditions. A few colleges require participating learners to obtain 'fit to participate / travel' authorisation from their general practitioner. Gower College Swansea requires that their student health advisers review the medical conditions or disabilities of all learners and informs the group leader of the appropriate control measures that need to be taken. The health advisers confirm electronically that the medical conditions of all learners have been reviewed for each planned visit and assist group leaders in carrying out individual risk assessments for the planned activity.
- 45 A few colleges make it clear that certain hazardous pursuits are not covered by the college insurance. For example, when the Ministry of Defence is the third party delivering a supervised training course, the Ministry states explicitly that it does not have an insurance policy of any kind and advises users of its training courses of the actions that they need to take regarding insurance against personal risk. This does not have any impact on the insurance cover provided by the college.

Additional requirements for overseas visits

- 46 Many of the policies or their associated guidance provide detailed information about the additional information and levels of risk inherent in visits outside the United Kingdom. When this information is provided, it is generally of good quality and provides groups leaders with clear information of the additional actions that they should take prior to the visit to minimise the risk. Nearly all colleges require that the principal takes responsibility for the final approval of any overseas visits.
- 47 The Neath Port Talbot College Group provides comprehensive information on the steps to be taken when planning overseas visits. It provides useful information on the benefits and limitations of the European Health Insurance Cover (EHIC) card as well as how to find out the up-to-date health advice and the contact numbers of British embassies and consulates. The college also emphasises the need for the group leader to have access to copies of all participants' passport information for use in an emergency situation. The college requires that all group leaders have a mobile phone provided by the college that allows international calls.

Assessment of risk

- 48 All colleges require group leaders, as part of their planning, to assess the risks and hazards that may occur, to identify the level of risk, and to state the planned actions to manage the risk. The procedures for assessing risks are usually thorough, detailed and supported by useful guidance. Most colleges require that a health and safety officer reviews and approves the risk assessment prior to the visit being authorised by a college senior manager. Many policies state that no off-site visits can take place without official authorisation and that failure to follow procedures will result in disciplinary action. In many cases, the health and safety officer also provides support and guidance to the group leader in drawing up the detailed risk assessment.
- 49 Coleg Cambria provides detailed guidance on the approval of visits and the associated risk assessments in its group leaders' handbook. All risk assessments must be authorised by a relevant manager with assistance from a health and safety professional at an appropriate level. The health and safety professional provides support to the group leader in planning the visit and completing the risk assessment. The risk assessment covers four main aspects: the group, the journey, the activity and the accommodation. The guidance provides detailed information about all the aspects that the group leader needs to take into account when determining the level of risk. Where risks are unacceptable, then the group leader has to detail the control measures to be used to eliminate or reduce the level of risk.
- 50 In order to minimise bureaucratic demands, most colleges identify the level of risk inherent in different types of activity and use systems of 'blanket consent' and generic management within the context of the college policy for activities that are straightforward. Such generic risk assessments need to include clear guidance on what is covered by them and what actions need to be taken should an emergency arise.
- 51 Colleges that take this approach recognise that, when the level of risk is higher than normal, a more detailed risk assessment needs to be undertaken. The various

factors that determine the level of risk include the experience, competence and skills of staff, the nature of the planned activity, the prior experience and nature of the learners, environmental factors, and the location/distance of the planned activity. These colleges make it clear the circumstances in which 'blanket coverage' applies and the circumstance in which an individual and detailed risk assessment needs to be undertaken.

Guidance on the use of third-party providers

- 52 A few colleges provide useful guidance on the value of using third-party providers to carry out and supervise learners' activities. The third parties can include outdoor activity centres and some of these hold licences for the activities that they offer. Other providers, not required to hold licenses, are covered by Health and Safety legislation alone. The few colleges that do provide guidance on the use of third parties provide useful information on the actions that group leaders should take, prior to the visit, in ensuring that the third party has suitable arrangements for the management of risk.
- 53 The Neath Port Talbot College Group have detailed guidance on the use of third-party providers. The guidance distinguishes between licensed and unlicensed providers. Group leaders are advised to check that the third-party provider has suitable and trained staff, appropriate security and public liability insurance. The guidance also provides useful information on the role of licensing authorities and other systems of accreditation of centres.

Transport

- 54 Nearly all educational visits involve the use of some form of mechanised transport. Most colleges have good guidance on the use of college-provided transport, the requirements for authorisation of staff to drive college transport and the use of external transport providers. Colleges normally require the use of external companies with whom the college has a contract and the administrative arrangements for the booking of transport. In a few cases, the guidance extends to the requirements for the use of tachographs to ensure that all drivers conform to safe practice.

Planning and communication

- 55 Nearly all colleges have detailed procedures for ensuring that all parties are kept fully informed about the planned visit, including the college, participating staff, learners and parents/guardians. This information provided usually includes the visit itinerary, the college and accommodation contact telephone numbers, a list of staff and other supervisory adults, as well as additional information for overseas visits. All learners are normally issued with a consent form that must be signed and agreed by parents for learners who are under 18 years of age and by the learner if they are older.
- 56 Pembrokeshire College have a very useful range of planning checklists for tasks that group leaders need to refer to at each stage of planning the visit. These include helpful flow diagrams as well as post-visit review arrangements, including reports to governors and any recommended changes to the planning system.

Evidence base

Estyn reviewed the current educational visits policies of all the further education colleges in Wales who provide full-time education. Estyn also reviewed a sample of risk assessments for recently undertaken overseas and residential visits by all colleges.

In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with a range of principals and other staff responsible for health and safety in a representative sample of colleges.

Explanation of words and phrases used to describe our evaluations

The words and phrases used in the left hand column below are those that we use to describe our evaluations. The phrases in the right hand column are the more precise explanations.

nearly all	with very few exceptions
most	90% or more
many	70% or more
a majority	over 60%
half or around half	close to 50%
a minority	below 40%
few	below 20%
very few	less than 10%

The remit author

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