

CIPD Circular – August 2006 Outdoor Development

This factsheet gives introductory guidance. It:

- discusses what to look for in providers, with questions to ask
- considers what needs to be done to brief participants and to integrate outdoor development with other developmental processes
- looks at safety issues
- includes the CIPD viewpoint.

Outdoor development became important in the 1950s and has since developed into a sizeable sector of the training market. It varies from what some people describe as 'survival training' to the gentler forms of management development - indeed, some 'outdoor' courses may be conducted partly indoors. But precisely because it is different from traditional 'classroom training', it poses particular questions.

There are several criteria defining where a provider can be placed on this range, including:

- the degree of focus on management issues
- the extent to which exercises are designed to address such issues
- the degree of physical exertion
- the quantity and quality of performance review and feedback.

The better providers tend to use a business-focused project methodology which mirrors and reproduces business situations, but which is free from the influence of organisational culture, status or functional specialisms. Thus they might use and practice the skills used at work - such as managing people, managing time, interpersonal skills, allocating scarce resources, communication, problem-solving, creative thinking and so on.

Outdoor activities should usually be preceded by briefing sessions in order to establish the purpose of the training and why the outdoor method is appropriate. The outdoor activities themselves should be followed by debriefing sessions, in which the trainer draws out the lessons learned and enables participants to relate them to work. These sessions should enable the trainer to give relevant input from accepted management theories if necessary; in this respect, there should be no difference in process between an effective management training exercise that is wholly based outdoors and one that is conducted entirely indoors. If activities take place without any attempt to draw out the lessons learned, it is doubtful whether they can legitimately be described as 'development'.

What to look for in potential providers

Some providers are relatively large; others are one or two person operations who may buy in expertise, accommodation and training facilities. With the larger operations, one may sometimes be buying confidence at the expense of the flexibility and ability to tailor courses to precise needs that smaller providers may be able to provide. The starting point should be a focus on the client's needs, not tasks or locations; these are the means of achieving the desired end, not ends in themselves.

There is a wide range of qualifications for outdoor tutors and instructors (see below for the distinction between the two), including several National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs). This means that providers should be asked:

- whether their training staff are qualified in, or working towards, the relevant qualifications
- what other relevant (other than outdoor) training qualifications they have - such as CIPD qualifications.

They might also be asked about:

- their industrial or commercial backgrounds
- their abilities in terms of review or facilitation skills
- their knowledge of management theories and processes, and their ability to handle any management issues that may arise.

A more difficult issue to assess (and one that comes up in other forms of training, but is arguably particularly significant in outdoor development) is whether the personality of the tutor is suited to the group being trained.

The **Institute for Outdoor Learning** (see Useful contacts section below for details) has a professional accreditation scheme.

Tutors and instructors

Outdoor training providers have two sorts of training staff:

- **Tutors** - who should have experience and qualifications in training, development and facilitation.
- **Instructors** - who have experience in outdoor activities, for example, canoeing or climbing, for which they will usually have qualifications from an appropriate body (but not always; a few activities may not be covered by qualifications). It is important to distinguish between qualifications that relate to the ability to perform an activity (proficiency) and those that are about facilitating operations (coaching). Customers should look for coaching qualifications that are at a higher level and have included elements of risk management.

Some people may be qualified as both tutors and instructors. However, except in low risk activities, the roles of tutors and instructors should not be combined because it is difficult for one individual to look after safety while seeking to draw learning outcomes. If the roles are to be combined, the provider should be able to provide good justification.

Questions might be:

- Do instructors have coaching qualifications, and if so, at what level? What experience do they have?
- What is the policy on ratios of instructors to trainees for various activities and in given conditions?

Insurance

Employers should check with their own organisation's insurers whether delegates attending outdoor courses are covered under the normal policy. And also ask the provider:

- Are they insured, and if so, with whom, for how long and to what value?
- Are they covered by personal injury insurance as well as public liability insurance?
- For what exactly are they insured? Does the insurance specifically cover all the activities of your course or are there any exclusions?

References

As with other training providers, it is sensible to ask providers of outdoor training about their other customers and to contact one or two of them (perhaps in the same sector as your organisation) to provide information about their experiences and views.

Venue and associated issues

Accommodation can be fairly basic at some outdoor training events. At others it may be of hotel standard. Some providers have their own accommodation; others will arrange it. All this needs to be checked, as does the distance of the accommodation from activity sites and the type of transport to be used if travel is included in the programme.

A breakdown of costs should be obtained.

- Are costs cited per delegate per day? What do they include? Is accommodation extra?

Also ask:

- What indoor facilities (such as seminar rooms and equipment) are available for group development work?
- What changing and drying facilities are available?
- How far are delegates expected to look after themselves - for example, by washing up?
- What is the policy on alcohol - for example, is drinking allowed with meals and at other times?

Before the training

Having selected the training provider, a full pre-programme briefing should be provided. Ideally, this should be conducted by the provider to build trust and answer questions at first hand, particularly if the course is being held for

the first time. If trainers cannot be present, they should have helped to prepare the brief. The briefing should cover health and safety, as well as aims and objectives and practical questions, such as appropriate clothing.

During the training

Design of activities

Activities should be stretching but designed to include the maximum range of people, including younger and older age groups, those who are fit and those who are less fit, and the able-bodied and those with disabilities of a less severe nature.

Participation in activities

It should be made clear to participants right at the beginning of the event that they can decline to do things about which they feel uncomfortable or uncertain (in certain circumstances, it may take more courage to decline to do something than actually to do it). They should not feel pressurised to undertake such activities, although on the other hand doing them, and in the process conquering fears, can be valuable.

Peer pressure from fellow participants may sometimes mean that individuals may feel obliged to do things that they would rather not do. The process should enable people with fears to be helped and supported through them by other participants, with tutor support. Different tasks require different skills and if, for example, the objective of the training is to build a successful team, it should be perfectly acceptable for someone else to pick up a task.

Reviewing or debriefing

Tutors need reviewing skills to identify the learning that has occurred during the activities and to transfer it to the participants' real work situations; there must always be a comprehensive review at the end of (and sometimes during) activities to ensure that learning is consolidated. Tutors will need to be helped by clients, so that they know enough about the organisation and participants' work to be able to help them transfer their experiences to the job.

The overall ratio of time spent on activities to time spent on reviewing will depend on the nature of the activity and the intended learning outcomes. However, asking about time ratios in relation to specific proposed activities may help to provide comparative information about suppliers.

It is the tutor's job to carry out reviews, not the instructor's, and instructors should not participate in reviews. (They may sometimes sit in on them as part of their own development, especially if they have ambitions to be tutors, but if so this should be cleared with the group.)

After the training

Outdoor development, like other forms of training, needs to be evaluated. Particularly in the case of outdoor development, it may take time for the lessons to sink in and to be applied. It may therefore be worth considering the following:

- Gathering together the group involved in the outdoor development for a follow-up a month or more after the programme, focusing on reinforcing the learning outcomes of the course.
- Asking individuals or the group to commit themselves to specific objectives or plans for improvement on their return to work in order to maximise the benefits of the outdoor development.

Safety issues

The safety record of outdoor training providers is good. However, participants in courses may well be asked to do things that they have never done before, or where their physical (or even mental) fitness becomes a factor.

The legal background

Adults attending a training event are deemed to be at work and are therefore covered by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Regulations under this Act require employers to carry out risk assessments of all activities undertaken by their employees, the aims of which are to assess the risks of activities 'over and above normal working life' and to specify control measures to minimise or eradicate such risks.

Most outdoor activities are outside what is expected of people in their work and should therefore have documented risk assessments. These can be completed by the employer but in most cases the training provider is best placed to do this. When developing a programme with a provider, risk assessments should be documented for each activity, or for the event as a whole, and copies should be available if required.

All staff, whether tutors or instructors, should have had first aid training. Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, organisations have a responsibility to ensure that they do not discriminate unfairly against people with disabilities regarding access to goods and services.

Some outdoor training providers who cater for young people as well as adults are licensed under the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 1996, but those who cater solely for adults will not be.

Checking safety issues

Questions to ask potential suppliers might include:

- May I see the written risk assessments for all activities? (This may be fairly complex, for example covering particular sites and/or activities.)
- May I have details of your safety record? May I see the accident book?
- May I see the standard operating procedures for your activities?
- What are the emergency procedures?
- Is equipment checked and, where relevant, maintained (or discarded) on a regular basis?
- Have all staff had first aid training (and, for water-based activities, life-saving training), with national certificates attesting to their competence?
- Are alternative activities or venues prepared and available in case of bad weather?
- Have all staff had first aid training (and, for water-based activities, life-saving training)?

CIPD viewpoint

Because it can present employees with challenges in situations away from their everyday surroundings, outdoor development can be a powerful means of developing self-understanding and interpersonal skills and in building teams. But sometimes other forms of development may be as effective or cheaper. The best forms of outdoor development are those where providers make real efforts to understand and mirror work situations, rather than emphasising outdoor activities for their own sake.

Useful contacts

- [Institute for Outdoor Learning](#)
From 2007 the Institute for Outdoor Learning will have an on-line directory of practitioners, including freelancers

Further reading

CIPD members can use our Advanced Search to find additional Library resources on this topic.

- [Go to Advanced Search](#)

Books

MARTIN, A., FRANC, D. and ZOUNKOVA, D. (2004) *Outdoor and experiential learning: an holistic and creative approach to programme design*. Aldershot: Gower.

Outdoor source book (2005). 7th ed. Penrith: Institute for Outdoor Learning.

Journal articles

ALLEN, A. (2003) Out of the ordinary. *People Management*. Vol 9, No 24, 4 December. pp36-38.

DWYER, R.J. (2006) Adventure education: a new way to confront reality! *Development and Learning in Organizations : an international journal*. Vol 20, No 4. pp12-15.

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