Mountaineering Ireland

Single Pitch Award Handbook

For climbers leading and supervising groups in the Republic of Ireland and UK

Participation Statement

Mountaineering Ireland recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions. Mountaineering Ireland Mountain Training has developed a range of training and assessment schemes and associated supporting literature to help leaders manage these risks and to enable new participants to have positive experiences while learning about their responsibilities.

Acknowledgements

BOS (Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe -Irish Mountain Training Board) wishes to thank Mountain Training UK (MTUK) for their permission to adopt and use the MTUK SPA Syllabus and handbook.

Original version prepared by the officers and the administrative staff of the MLTB, NIMTB, SMLTB, WMLTB & UKMTB. This version was published by BOS, August 2002 and edited, March 2014.

Preface

Single pitch, outcrop climbing is the way many of us enter the sport of rock climbing and where many of us feel most at home. The accessibility and relatively defined nature of outcrops mean that many single pitch climbs are also natural places to introduce others to rock climbing.

The number of organised groups enjoying rock climbing and abseiling on outcrops, crags, quarries and climbing walls has risen for many years. BOS (Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe) is concerned to ensure that high standards of supervision are maintained, so that both enjoyment and safety are enhanced without compromising either the sport or the participation of others. High standards are achieved through experience, personal qualities, training and validation.
This Handbook provides advice for anyone involved in taking groups single pitch rock climbing and particularly for candidates working their way through the SPA scheme. It is designed to support the knowledge and experience of candidates, trainers and assessors without prescribing methods There are many technical manuals developed by climbers which will continue to illustrate evolving techniques and these notes are designed to complement such literature (see Appendix IV).

The booklet is divided into five parts:

1. Prospectus that explains the way you progress through the Single Pitch Award scheme from registration to assessment.
2. Syllabus that lists the skills of a single pitch supervisor.
3 & 4. Guidance Notes that help advise candidates and their trainers and assessors of protocols and procedures.
5. Appendices that provide background information.

Contents

Experience Pre-requirements

Please consider the advice given below. You should note that the figures given are absolute minimums and that most successful candidates have well in excess of the experience outlined;

To be involved in the SPA scheme you need to be a rock climber and have an interest in the supervision of novices in the activity. A minimum of 12 months rock climbing experience is required.

Before registering you must have led at least 15 climbs outdoors on routes where the protection is leader-placed. Without having done at least this amount of leading you are unlikely to play a constructive part on the course. This experience must be verified on a BOS SPA Registration Form by an SPA/RCL holder or experienced climber.

Before attending a Training Course you must first register with BOS. This will provide you with a logbook and your personal details will be entered on the national database.

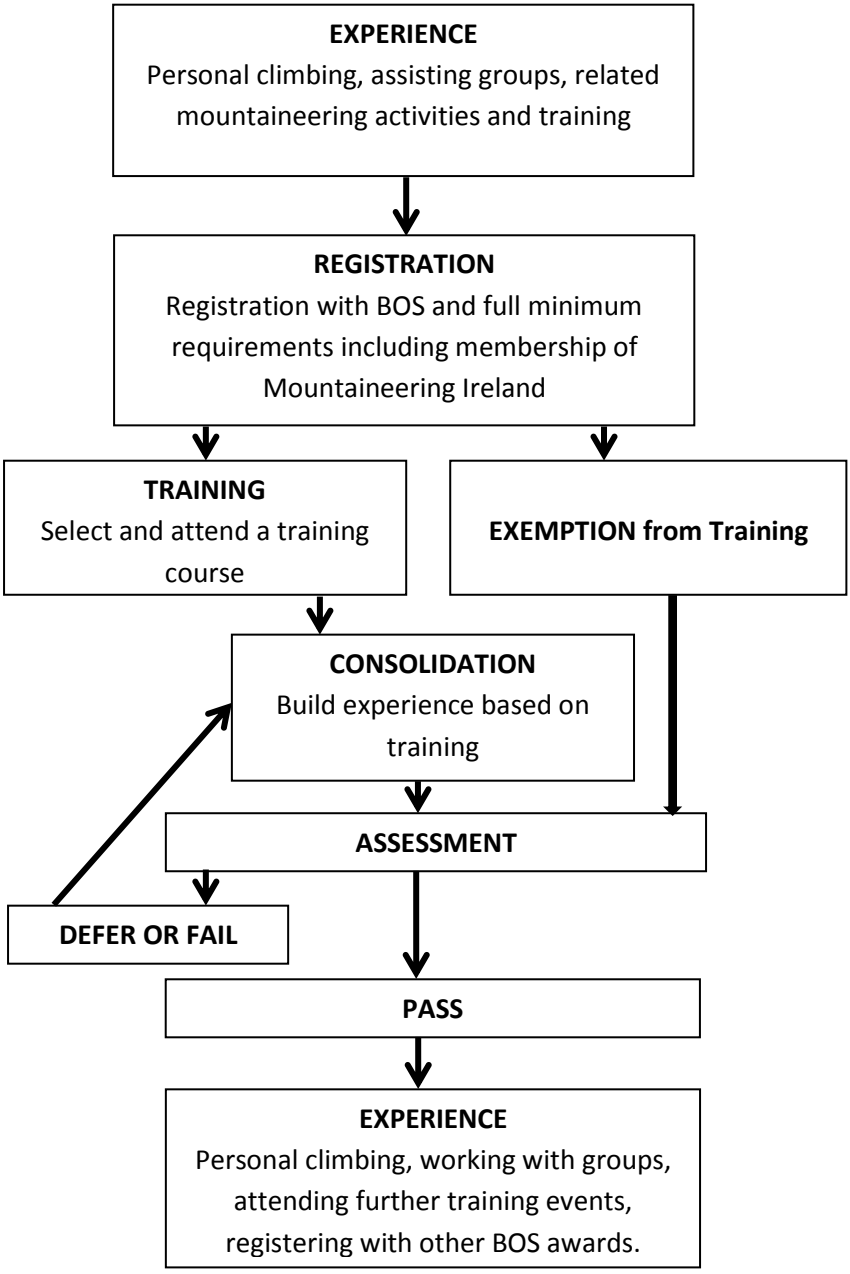
Between Training and Assessment you must consolidate new ideas and techniques and gain additional climbing experience. Your trainer will advise you about the amount and nature of the personal climbing and supervising experience you should gain.

Candidates should not present themselves for Assessment until they have:

1. Led a minimum of 40 climbs, outdoors on leader placed protection. A substantial number of these must be at least Severe grade and they should be on a variety of rock types.

2. Assisted with the supervision of climbing for approximately 20 sessions at a variety of locations (a session is a half day or evening). 10 of these sessions must have been completed under the supervision of a SPA/ RCL holder or higher award holder.

The SPA scheme at a glance



1. Prospectus

1.1 Introduction

The numbers of organised groups enjoying rock climbing and abseiling on outcrops, crags, quarries and climbing walls has multiplied in recent years. BOS is concerned that high standards of supervision are maintained, so that both enjoyment and safety are enhanced, without compromising either the sport of climbing or the participation of other crag or wall users. High standards of supervision and organisation are best achieved through experience, personal qualities, training and validation.

This scheme has been designed to provide a level of basic competence for those who are in a position of responsibility during single pitch rock climbing activities. Whilst the award does include a measure of personal competence it is not designed as such, and should not be used as either an entry requirement or measure of suitability for individuals who wish to climb on climbing walls or crags.

1.2 Scope of the Scheme

The scheme is for those who are in a position of responsibility during single pitch rock climbing activities. It is primarily concerned with good practice, leading to the safe and quiet enjoyment of the activity. Completion of a training course alone, without taking an assessment course, is not a qualification in itself, although it may be of considerable benefit to the trainee.

For the purposes of this scheme, a single pitch route is one which:

- is climbed without intermediate stances
- is described as a single pitch in the guidebook
- allows climbers to be lowered to the ground at all times

- is non-tidal
- is non-serious and has little objective danger
- presents no difficulties on approach or retreat, such as route finding, scrambling or navigating

If you are in doubt about a particular venue then the officers of BOS, members of the Association of Mountaineering Instructors or the British Association of Mountain Guides are the appropriate people to approach for advice.

It is the duty of the employer or organising authority to decide whether a leader possesses the personal attributes needed to take responsibility for the care of young people and beginners. It is the combination of technical skills, wide experience and personal qualities that form the basis for effective supervision. This scheme assesses the technical skills and experience; the employer or organising authority must gauge the personal qualities.

The scheme does not cover:

- general mountaineering skills, such as those needed to approach and return from mountain and moorland crags
- multi-pitch rock climbing skills
- the teaching of and supervision of leading (these are covered by the Mountaineering Instructor Scheme)
- access to tidal sea cliffs, or any location where escape is not easily possible
- the gauging of SPA candidate's personal qualities.

1.3 Stages in the Scheme

The scheme consists of six stages:

- pre-registration personal climbing experience

- registration, joining MI or an affiliated mountaineering club and being issued with a logbook
- minimum two day training course
- consolidation period between training and assessment
- two day assessment course
- continuing experience entered in logbook

1.4 Registration

Candidates wishing to register with the Award should:

- have a genuine interest in rock climbing and the supervision of groups on single pitch crags
- have at least twelve months' experience of rock climbing
- be not less than 18 years of age at the date of registration
- be an individual or club member of MI
- have led at least 15 graded routes where the protection is leader placed.

On receipt of the registration form and appropriate fee, BOS will issue a logbook, (allow 10 working days). Candidates' personal details will be retained and progression through the scheme will be recorded on the BOS Database.

1.5 Training

Before attending a training course, candidates must be registered with the Single Pitch Award (SPA) (see 1.4 above).

Training courses are run by approved course providers who are either Mountaineering Instructors or Mountain Guides, are at least two days long and include evening sessions (20 hours contact time). Training courses run with a minimum of four candidates and a maximum of eight. The maximum trainer/candidate ratio is 1:4. Larger courses have dual

benefits: the varied experience of the candidates enables an individual to have a better chance of seeing how their own skills compare and they also get the opinion of two trainers. Lists of all approved providers are available from Mountaineering Ireland office.

The training course is for potential leaders and assumes basic competence as a rock climber with experience of leading climbs (see Experience Pre-Requirements, page 5). It will emphasise those skills which candidates might have difficulty in learning without expert guidance. A few minor aspects of the syllabus may not be covered during the training course and candidates are expected to deal with these items themselves.

The Director of Training will give oral comments to each candidate and will endorse the training course report page of the logbook with comments about the programme, crags and walls used and conditions encountered.

Candidates will receive individual recommendations for the consolidation period. The training course does not involve any written reports concerning the performance or standard of candidates. An approved sticker will be put on the endorsement page of the logbook by the Course Director and will show the date and specific Course Provider number. In exceptional circumstances it may be possible to register during, or immediately after, the course, but the trainer is obliged to submit a report to the Training Board containing all registered candidates' details within 30 days.

Candidates are encouraged to use the skills checklist in the logbook to evaluate their current skills and to plan, with their trainers, their particular route towards assessment. BOS maintain close links with every provider through reports submitted after each course and moderation visits to courses. If you have concern regarding the quality of instruction received on a SPA course, please discuss this with the course director of your course. If this does not resolve the issue, please contact BOS with details of your concerns.

1.6 Logbook

Experience gained by candidates should be recorded in the logbook. Entries should be concise, easily read and should include all rock climbing and other relevant experience.

The logbook is divided into six sections:

- Personal details, contents and sample pages
- Pre-training experience
- Training course report
- Logged experience between Training and Assessment
- Assessment course report
- Post-assessment experience

The logbook is designed to help you demonstrate your previous experience to others. You should fill it in before a training course to enable the trainers to discuss your particular training needs and to agree which areas of the syllabus you may need to concentrate on before taking an assessment. Few of us can remember every detail of every climb we have done, but this is no reason to avoid using the logbook. List examples of the variety of experiences you have gained and give details of the most notable (or exciting) days out. The information you give does not have to be verified by a third party but will form the basis for discussion at training and assessment.

1.7 Consolidation Period

Candidates will generally see many new ideas and techniques during training and will therefore need some time to practice and evaluate these before taking the assessment. During this period of consolidation, candidates are advised to climb at as wide a range of venues as possible, both as an individual and when assisting the supervision of others. BOS recommends that all but the most experienced candidates allow a minimum of six months between training and assessment. There is currently no time limit on the validity of a training course and some candidates may take several years to complete the award.

1.8 Assessment

Before attending an assessment course, candidates should:

- have registered
- have attended a training course or been granted exemption from training
- have gained further experience (see Experience Requirements)
- be proficient in the use of climbing walls
- be competently leading Severe grade climbs on outdoor crags with leader-placed protection
- have led a minimum of 40 climbs on outdoor crags on leader- placed protection at a variety of venues
- hold a valid First Aid Certificate

During the assessment course, which is two days long and includes evening sessions, candidates will be tested in accordance with the syllabus requirements. The assessment takes 20 hours (often a concentrated weekend) and is run by an approved course provider who is either a Mountaineering Instructor or a Mountain Guide. Lists of all recognised providers are available from Mountaineering Ireland office.

Assessors work on a ratio of 1:4 (or less). The overall course size can range from two candidates to eight. Larger courses have dual benefits: the varied experience of the candidates provides individuals with better opportunities of comparing skills whilst ensuring that each candidate receives the opinion of two assessors.

The Director of Assessment will endorse the logbook in one of three ways:

PASS: where satisfactory knowledge and application of the syllabus and the necessary experience and attributes were demonstrated. The Course Director issues a pass page and numbered sticker.

DEFER: where the performance was generally up to standard but complete proficiency was not attained in some aspects of the syllabus. Some form of reassessment will be required.

FAIL: where the performance has been generally weak, or the necessary experience and attributes have not been shown. Further training may be recommended before another complete assessment is taken.

In all cases the result will be discussed with you and recorded in your logbook (the page is inserted by the course provider). Candidates who are deferred or failed will receive specific written feedback, including an action plan. This will include the reasons for the result, recommendations on the additional experience needed and details of the timing and format for subsequent re-assessment.
In considering the decision of the assessors, candidates are asked to listen to all elements of the final interview and wherever possible to raise any concerns at that time. If, on reflection, the discussion and the written report do not fit your impression of the assessment and your performance, then contact the course provider for additional clarification, in writing if necessary.

In the case of a deferral, candidates are encouraged to return to the original assessment Provider but can be re-assessed by any assessment Provider approved by Mountaineering Ireland. Practical re-assessments cannot take place within three months of the initial assessment. All deferrals must be completed within five years of the original assessment. Only two re-assessments are permitted before having to take the entire assessment again.

1.9 Exemption from Training

Experienced climbers who already have substantial personal climbing experience and experience of supervising groups on single pitch cliffs and climbing walls may apply to BOS to be exempted from attendance at a training course. There is no exemption from assessment.

Before applying for exemption, candidates should consider the following points:

- The training course is not a personal skills climbing course. It introduces candidates to the skills necessary for supervising novices on single pitch rock climbs.
- It includes material that might be unfamiliar to even experienced climbers.

Candidates applying for exemption should:

- Be registered with the scheme
- Complete an exemption form, www.mountaineering.ie
- Submit a copy of the completed logbook experience pages with the form and appropriate fee.
- **There is no exemption from assessment.**

1.10 Single Pitch Climbs

For the purposes of this scheme a single pitch rock climb is one which:

- is climbed without intermediate stances
- is described as a single pitch in the guidebook
- allows climbers to be lowered to the ground at all times
- is non-tidal
- is non-serious and has little objective danger
- presents no difficulties on approach or retreat, such as route finding, scrambling or navigating

1.11 Equal Opportunities

BOS is committed to promoting equal opportunities for all participants in climbing and mountaineering. Candidates, trainers and assessors should express a positive attitude towards equal opportunities and act as positive role models.

1.12 First Aid

Prior to attendance on an assessment course candidates

must hold a valid first aid qualification. The minimum requirement is that such a course must involve at least sixteen hours of instruction, include an element of assessment and cover basic life support and emergency aid. It is the responsibility of award holders and/or their employers to evaluate their likely work and the type of situations that they can reasonably expect to encounter and to maintain current appropriate first aid training and qualification .

1.13 Complaints and Appeals Procedure

Everyone has the right to complain. All complaints are subject to Mountaineering Ireland's Complaints Policy and Procedures as updated from time to time. This policy can be found on www.mountaineering.ie

2 Syllabus

2.1 Technical Competence

Candidates must demonstrate competence in the following areas:

2.1.1 Equipment

- identify equipment suitable for personal and group use at a given venue
- demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of equipment and ensure appropriate care and maintenance
- demonstrate the ability to use climbing wall equipment appropriately

2.1.2 Anchors

Select suitable, sound anchors in a variety of situations including:

– spikes and blocks
– nuts and camming devices
– threads, chockstones and trees
– fixed equipment

2.1.3 Belaying

- connect self and others to the rope
- set up sound belay systems to single and multiple anchors
- attach self to the belay system
- demonstrate the use of direct and indirect belays
- use a variety of different belay techniques/devices competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation
- set up top and bottom rope systems and choose the most appropriate system for a given situation
- arrange appropriate runners and belays to protect a seconding climber
- hold falls and carry out lowers

2.1.4 Abseiling

- abseil without the use of a safety rope
- set up fixed and **releasable and disposable** abseils
- use a variety of different devices and methods competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation
- solve common abseiling problems such as tangled ropes, inadvertent locking and pendulums
- choose an appropriate abseiling site with consideration for:
  - -ease of take off
  - -loose rock
  - -impact on the environment and the climbing resource
- demonstrate methods of safeguarding a novice abseiling

2.1.5 Personal Climbing Skills

- interpret guidebooks effectively
- choose routes suited to personal ability
- move with confidence on Severe grade rock climbs
- place runners suitable for lead protection
- demonstrate a basic understanding of the safety chain and fall factors

2.1.6 Background Knowledge

- demonstrate some understanding of:
  -the history, traditions and ethics of Irish rock climbing
  -BOS and Mountaineering Ireland
  -the club system
  -competition climbing

2.2 The Climbing Environment

Candidates must demonstrate competence in the following areas:

2.2.1 Access

- understand and observe current access and conservation guidelines
- interpret and use effectively the access information given in guidebooks and other sources of information
- show an appreciation of and care for all aspects of the climbing environment
- show an awareness of, ability to obtain information on and willingness to comply with, locally important crag issues and agreements

2.2.2 Conservation

- demonstrate good practice in the conservation and care of the environment
- operate in such a way as to minimise impact on the environment (including the climbing resource)
- define problems of conservation and the effects of human pressure on the climbing environment
- manage groups so as to leave the crags in an improved condition where possible
- demonstrate an awareness of locally important species and the legal situation relating to protected flora/fauna
- demonstrate some knowledge of different rock types and crag features

2.2.3 Etiquette

- demonstrate an awareness of responsibilities to the general public, environmental agencies, local residents, landowners and the climbing community
- demonstrate an awareness of local rock climbing ethics related to single pitch crags
- operate a flexible programme of activities so as to accommodate other site users
- be aware of the hazards presented to other site users by the actions of a group, and act to minimise these
- demonstrate an awareness of the site specific requirements and agreements relating to different crags, climbing walls and artificial structures

2.3 Supervision

Candidates must demonstrate competence in the following areas:

2.3.1 Organisation

- plan a day's programme of activities to take place at a crag and an artificial climbing structure
- assess the abilities and objectives of the group participating in this plan
- check underlying aims and the objectives of the event
- demonstrate an awareness of responsibility to any authorising organisation, parents, individual group members, the group as a whole and other site users
- demonstrate an understanding of the impact of weather on climbing
- have built-in flexibility when planning activities in order to respond to changing circumstances
- know how to call for expert help in the case of an accident or injury

2.3.2 Group Management

- choose an appropriate venue and route for group use considering:
  -suitability of approach/descent
  -terrain at the base of the crag
  -objective dangers such as loose rock

- demonstrate the safe and responsible management of all group members irrespective of whether or not they are directly involved in the climbing activity
- brief individuals and the group appropriately manage the individuals and the group effectively by:
  -good communication skills
  -setting and reviewing targets
  -identifying and reacting to the needs of the group in relation to involvement, interest, enjoyment and achievement
- supervise a group of novice climbers belaying, manage time appropriately in relation to the plan, activity and conditions

2.3.3 Supervising the Session

- issue appropriate rock climbing equipment and check correct fitting and use
- deliver technical instruction to individuals and the group including:
  -choice and fitting of suitable harnesses
  -attaching the rope to the harness
  -advice, demonstration and coaching on climbing movement
  -demonstration of effective use of chosen belay device
  -safe use of friction device for abseiling
- demonstrate an understanding of how to avoid common problems such as a stuck climber/abseiler
- solve common problems including:
  -stuck climber whilst on a safety rope
  -stuck abseiler whilst abseiling with a safety rope
- demonstrate the use of bouldering activities with groups
- demonstrate an understanding of warming up and injury avoidance techniques
- demonstrate an understanding of the needs of those with physical and mental disabilities and medical conditions
- Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the Code of Ethics for Good Practice for Children's Sports

(Published by the Irish Sports Council / SCNI and available from MI Office).

2.3.4 Personal Safety

Throughout any training or assessment course there will inevitably be times when all or some of the party will be operating from or near the top of the crag. Trainers must ensure that all the candidates are comfortable with the situation they are placed in and should offer guidance and training in how candidates may protect themselves appropriately. This should be ongoing throughout the course and should take into consideration that the weather, prevailing conditions and locations will vary.

2.3.5 Children and Vulnerable Persons

All Providers, Course Directors and staff involved in the delivery of SPA courses must be aware of and comply with current legislation regarding children and vulnerable persons.

3 Guidance notes for Candidates and Trainers

3.1 Technical Competence

The SPA syllabus does not define a set of techniques; rather it describes a range of skills with which candidates should be familiar. It is likely that training courses will be run as a series of open discussion workshops taking advantage of the experience of trainees as well as that of trainers.

The SPA syllabus is based on the assumption that candidates are already rock climbers with experience of leading climbs at crags. It will be expected that candidates already have some experience of selecting anchors, belaying, climbing and abseiling, so the emphasis on a training course will be to provide opportunities to share ideas and refine techniques. As far as possible, an integrated approach to the syllabus

should be adopted with issues such as problem avoidance and environmental impact considered throughout the course rather than as isolated modules

3.1.1 Equipment

Potential supervisors should be aware of the range of equipment suitable for use by novices as well as that for personal climbing use. It would be expected that a candidate could offer advice on choice and suitability of equipment, as well as having a reasonable knowledge of its care, maintenance and life expectancy. In addition to being able to offer advice on the selection and use of equipment a candidate should be aware of sources of information, such as current publications and materials produced by the Mountaineering Councils. A training course offers the opportunity for candidates to extend their experience and this particularly applies to the use of equipment. It is expected that the training course will use gear provided by candidates themselves, as well as that of the trainer, to illustrate the appropriate use of different equipment.

3.1.2 Anchors

Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of anchor types during training. Emphasis should be placed on the ability to select sound anchors and different ways of using the anchor. As the selection and appropriate use of anchors is often a weakness, this element of the syllabus should be covered practically.

It may be useful to consider anchors in the following three categories; (1) natural anchors such as spikes, blocks, threads, chockstones and trees, (2) hand placed anchors such as nuts and camming devices and (3) fixed equipment such as stakes, bolts and pitons. Trainers should ensure that candidates are aware of the characteristics of different rock types, and how this affects the selection of sound anchors. This can be achieved by visiting more than one rock type during a training course, suggesting venues to be visited during a period of consolidation between training and assessment, discussing logbook entries, etc.

3.1.3 Belaying

Harnesses: As well as ensuring that candidates are aware of best practices with their own harnesses, the appropriate use of a variety of others should be included within a training course. Consideration should be given to occasions when a full body harness is appropriate.

Tying on: The harness manufacturer's recommended method of tying onto the rope should be encouraged for personal climbing. The differences in attachment appropriate to different harnesses should be illustrated.

Constructing a belay: The ability to set up a sound system for oneself as well as others should be covered. The way in which candidates construct belays to single and multiple anchors should be reviewed. The trainer should demonstrate alternative systems and emphasise the benefits of being able to adapt different systems to suit different circumstances. Construction of belays using the rope only to link the anchors should be covered, as well as construction of belays using slings to link the anchors.

Considerations when setting up a belay include essential elements such as:

- selection of safe and independent anchors
- tying-off the anchors independently, in line of the expected force
- ensuring that the anchors are taut and equally loaded
- ensuring that the position of the belayer is stable when tied into the anchors

Desirable elements include:

- use of the rope loop central tie-in rather than the harness webbing loop as a focal point for attachment to the belay system
- systems that are easy to adjust
- simple, and therefore quick, fool proof systems

Single and Multiple Anchors: In different situations it may be appropriate to construct a belay from either single or multiple anchors. A supervisor should have the ability to do either as appropriate, and not always have to rely on the same system. Although candidates may prefer to always adopt their favoured system trainers should make every effort to illustrate the fact that the climbing medium is not uniform and that to operate safely, different crags and circumstances may well require very different techniques. Trainers should encourage debate regarding the advantages and disadvantages of a range of belay/anchor systems, including environmental impacts and safety issues.

Direct, Indirect and Semi - Indirect Belays: A "direct belay" is one in which the load on a rope is passed directly to the anchors without passing through the belayer. An "indirect belay" is one in which the belayer's body is an integral part of the belay system.

A "semi- indirect belay" is one in which the belayer's harness is tied into and is part of the belay system, which is the usual practice when a climber has led a route and belays at the top of a climb. The advantages of each should be evaluated during a training course and the appropriate uses of each technique identified. It should be stressed that techniques that have advantages in top and bottom roping situations are often inefficient and unnecessary for personal climbing.

Top and bottom ropes: Setting up "top ropes", where a climber at the top of a climb controls the rope, and "bottom ropes", where the rope is controlled from the base of a climb should be trained and practiced. A distinction should be made between the techniques of a climber with a competent partner, in which routes are led and then seconded, and those of a supervised session, when the ropes may be set up without the supervisor climbing the route first.

A range of systems, including the use of separate rigging ropes, should be demonstrated for setting up top ropes and bottom ropes. As well as the technical aspects of constructing

these systems, other considerations such as the potential impact on the environment or other climbers should be considered.

Belay techniques: A wide variety of belay devices is available. A training course should enable candidates to evaluate a range of techniques and devices so that they can choose the most appropriate for a given situation. Trainers should ensure that a variety of devices are available during a course and candidates should be encouraged to experiment with new devices under the guidance of a trainer. The positioning of the device on the belay system relative to the direction of pull, the anchors and the nearby rock should be considered. Factors affecting a belayer's ability to hold a fall include the type of belay device, the weight of the climber, the slickness of the rope, the gripping strength of the belayer and the runners in the system.

Falls and lowers: This element of the syllabus should be practiced only in the most controlled situations. Holding a fall when top roping and bottom roping should be included in a training course. In effect this should amount to no more than taking the weight of a climber, as good belay technique would result in a fall being arrested before the climber has gained momentum. This provides an opportunity to illustrate the importance of good belay construction and should be performed under careful supervision. In addition to arresting a fall and then performing a controlled lower to the ground, candidates may benefit from tying off the belay device before commencing a lower. Trainers may judge that it is appropriate to teach tying-off techniques in a situation where climbers are not exposed to the risk of being dropped to the ground.

As a SPA holder has responsibility only for climbers seconding or top roping climbs, holding a falling leader is beyond the scope of the SPA scheme.

3.1.4 Abseiling

It must be stressed that abseiling has a specific role in rock climbing - namely as a means to an end rather than as an activity in its own right. When abseiling on crags great care should be taken to avoid conflict with rock climbing by either causing damage to the climbing resource or interfering with other climbers. Although abseiling is a skill required by climbers, very careful consideration should be given to the venues at which group abseils are conducted and the context in which it is placed.

Setting up abseils: Crags included within the remit of the SPA scheme do not need to be approached by abseil. Abseiling is included in the Syllabus as a personal skill for such purposes as gear retrieval or getting close to a stuck climber or abseiler. An ability to control the descent and stop whilst abseiling is essential. Trainers are expected to demonstrate appropriate methods of self-protection to assist candidates in safeguarding themselves when abseiling.

Candidates should set up and use fixed and releasable and disposable abseils, with the rope attached to suitable anchors. A releasable and disposable system of attaching the abseil rope to anchors is useful in a supervisory situation and should be demonstrated at training. The advantages of each method of attachment in different situations should be evaluated.

Harnesses: The attachment of an abseil device and safety rope (where used) to the harness should be covered. At times it may be necessary to construct suitable additional support using a sling. This may be because the abseiler is a child or adult with an ill-defined waist, for whom an improvised chest harness would be advisable, or because the abseiler is particularly top-heavy, for whom chest support would also be advisable.

Friction devices: Different abseiling situations may require the use of different friction devices. Factors such as how slick the rope is, the steepness of the abseil and the confidence and weight of the abseiler all affect the choice of device. It may be appropriate to demonstrate a range of techniques and methods of altering the degree of friction.

Abseiling problems: Most abseiling problems are foreseeable and so should not occur, but nevertheless the solutions to simple problems should be covered at training. In addition to methods of solving situations, emphasis should be placed on the skills and judgements required to prevent problems from occurring in the first place. Solutions to problems such as tangled ropes, a jammed friction device, or a student moving to one side resulting in a potential pendulum should be considered.

3.1.5 Personal Climbing Skills

Guidebooks: Guidebooks are an important source of information for the rock climber. I in addition to route identification details, important access and environmental notes are contained within most guides. If this is out of date, other sources of information should be used.

The SPA is a national award and candidates are reminded that by the time they are ready for assessment they should feel confident about climbing on unfamiliar single pitch crags. Guidebooks are produced by a variety of different organisations in different areas of the country and candidates are expected to be familiar with more than just those books that cover their own locality. Misinterpretation of a guidebook leading to incorrect route choice can result in difficulties, so the importance of this seemingly simple element of the syllabus cannot be overstated.

Route choice: Judgement as to the suitability of a climb is as significant for one's own enjoyment as it is for the enjoyment of novices being introduced to climbing. The selection of a suitable route is a process of combining guidebook information with personal observation. Training courses should build in opportunities for candidates to choose routes from guidebooks and climb them.

Severe climbs: There is no requirement for candidates to climb at Severe prior to, or during, a training course. The ability to climb confidently at this grade is required prior to assessment and trainers should ensure that candidates are

fully aware of the additional climbing experience they need to gain between training and assessment.

Candidates at training should not feel under pressure to climb at any particular grade, other than that at which they feel comfortable. It is more important that they have experience of leading climbs than an ability to climb harder routes.

Leading climbs: The SPA assumes at least 12 months' climbing experience prior to registration. It is therefore not a basic skills course, but more a refinement of the techniques of personal climbing and an extension into the skills associated with supervising novice climbers. If candidates are rusty at leading a climb with leader-placed protection when attending a training course they will be limited in what they can contribute and potentially overwhelmed with new information.
During the training course the placement of runners to protect a leader should be covered and practiced. Depending on the prevailing circumstances this might not take place on graded rock climbs, but on ungraded rock or at a wall where gear placements are possible. The placement of runners to protect the second, as well as the lead climber, should be considered on climbs that involve horizontal traverses or roofs for example.

Safety chains and fall factors: The basic principle of keeping the number of links in a belay system to the minimum should be explained. The advantage of minimising unnecessary links in a system (such as single karabiners in place of quick-draws or use of the rope alone, in place of slings and karabiners) should be discussed.
Fall factors in theory predict the impact force of a fall. In reality this also depends on the frictional properties of karabiners and ropes, as well as the distance fallen, relative to the length of rope in use. A full knowledge of these complex calculations is not necessary, but the principles involved are important and at least a discussion of this topic should be included during a training course.

3.1.6 Background Knowledge

A sound knowledge and experience of climbing is fundamental to the SPA scheme. An award holder is not simply a safe operator of ropes and judge of anchors, but equally importantly, a climber with an understanding of and interest in sustainable use of the climbing environment.

History and Ethics: Climbing is not defined by a set of rules, but by an unwritten code of conduct that is the result of the actions of climbers themselves. Although the code of conduct is based on the history and traditions of climbing it is also continually changing as techniques, equipment and aspirations evolve. A SPA holder contributes to this process of development by introducing novices to the sport and so every effort should be made to ensure that this is done in a sensitive and understanding manner. Candidates are therefore expected to be aware of current issues through an active personal involvement in climbing and by reading the climbing press.

Clubs and MI

Climbing clubs provide effective means of participating in the sport. SPA award holders are expected to be able to advise a newcomer on how to contact local clubs and to explain some of the associated benefits.

The Mountaineering Ireland is not a governing body that imposes rules, but a representative body that acts on behalf of, and promotes the interests of climbers and walkers. At the point of registration on the SPA scheme, candidates must be current members of Mountaineering Ireland.

3.2 The Climbing Environment

3.2.1 Access

Access to climbing areas depends in some areas on the good will of landowners, and in all locations on the appropriate conduct of climbers. As an individual climber it is important to have an understanding of the issues and problems

affecting access to climbing areas. As a SPA award holder introducing novices to the activity, this responsibility is increased. Most guidebooks contain important information relating to the specific area covered. It is important to know how to access up-to-date information from local climbers and clubs, retail outlets, Irish Mountain Log or MI website.

In addition to knowing how to obtain this information, a sympathetic understanding of the issues is important if novices are to be encouraged to participate in a sustainable manner. By careful use of venues and provision of case study material trainers should illustrate a range of current national issues to demonstrate the importance of this element of the syllabus.

3.2.2 Conservation

Supervisors should demonstrate an awareness of the potential impact of climbers in general and groups in particular from the moment of selecting a venue through to the point at which the crag is left and the journey home begun.

The crag environment: Candidates must be aware of the potentially greater impact of groups upon the environment than that of individual climbers. If climbing as an activity is to be sustainable into the future, then the impact of all climbers on the environment must be minimal. The crag itself, as well as the ground in the immediate area at the bottom and top, should be considered. A benefit of visiting at least two distinctly different climbing venues during a training course is that real conservation issues may be observed. It should be borne in mind by trainers and candidates that the SPA is a national award and that candidates are expected to be familiar with current conservation issues relating to a wide range of climbing areas and rock types.

Designated sites: Many crags are of local, national and international importance in terms of their geological and ecological interests. Many crags support important populations of nesting birds or important species of flora

(plants, mosses, lichens etc.). Examples of ecologically or geologically important sites should be discussed during a training course and the importance of respect for these conservation issues instilled. If the local guidebook is not new, it is possible that the information within it is outdated. Alternative sources of information such as Duchas, MI website or local information centres may have more accurate, up-to-date information.

Current access guidelines: In addition to guidebook information, some areas have local agreements that have been established to help maintain sustainable use of climbing venues. If candidates intend to work in areas with which they are not familiar, every effort should be made to gain appropriate local information from available sources

3.2.3 Etiquette

Local rock climbing ethics: Candidates should be aware of local rock climbing ethics, particularly those that relate to single pitch crags. The fact that ethics differ markedly from one climbing area to another should be noted. Accumulated experience of climbing in different locations should be seen as an important part of the background of a good SPA holder. It is possible to read about the ethics relevant to different locations in guidebooks and other material, but the benefit of direct experience should not be underestimated.

Flexible planning to avoid conflict with individual climbers: There should be no conflict between a supervised group of novices and independent rock climbers. If local ethics are taken into consideration, routes are chosen carefully and areas of the crag are not occupied for long periods of time, conflict will not occur. It can be seen that considerable climbing experience on the part of the candidate is important in gaining an understanding of the interests and practices of independent climbers.

Awareness of group impact on other site users: Large groups of climbers can dominate specific routes and even whole areas of crag so every effort should be made to minimise this

possibility. The following strategies may help; working in small groups, climbing routes from the ground up, moving from route to route rather than repeatedly top roping the same route, never abseiling on recognised climbs and asking climbers if they wish to ascend routes occupied by top ropes etc. It is important to recognise that groups have no more right to use a crag than individual climbers and vice versa. The supervised climbing experience may be a formative one for group members, in which case the style of operation is very important for the future of climbing.

Manage sessions so as to minimise impact:
A group of climbers under supervision has an impact on the environment around a crag, on the rock itself and on other crag users. Potential impact on others may take the form of interference with what they are doing or plan to do, or present a more direct increase in risk. Candidates should develop ways of avoiding exposing others to risk by careful group management and organisation of a session. Single pitch crags are generally relatively free from objective dangers such as stone fall. As a result climbers rarely take precautions such as wearing helmets or basing themselves at a distance from the foot of the crag. Effective group supervision, careful choice of route and descent are all-important factors in minimising risks to others.

Leave the site in an improved condition:
A positive contribution can be made to the crag environment and this should be encouraged to engender respect for the environment amongst newcomers to the sport. Many crags are in environmentally sensitive areas where access may be under threat and the more that can be done to encourage respectful and positive behaviour, the less likely that access will be lost. However, a positive respect for the environment should be seen as an essential element of any outdoor activity, not just the required behaviour to ensure access. Heavy use of any site will result in environmental degradation, but every effort should be made to minimise this through the encouragement of caring behaviour patterns and positive action where possible. Simple steps such as the

use of footpaths rather than walking on the surrounding ground, because it is easier to hold a conversation when walking two abreast and the use of soft soled shoes, rather than clumsy boots where appropriate, will help to minimise impacts. Positive action may include removal of other people's litter as well as one's own, careful repositioning of loose stones at the top of abseils, rather than knocking them to the base of the site, retrieval of unsightly jammed gear and involvement in, or contribution to, local conservation schemes.

Awareness of impact on others at climbing walls: Climbing walls are often heavily used and climbers operate closer together than at outdoor sites. Similar principles should be applied to the use of a wall as a crag; namely that unless specific arrangements have been made, everyone has an equal right to use the facility, so no one group or individual should dominate an area or climb. In bouldering areas matting may be fixed or moveable. In the latter case great care should be taken to ensure that there is a common understanding about who is using the mat and where it is positioned. Due to the proximity of routes at walls, great care should be taken when top roping to ensure an understanding with climbers on adjacent routes about who is doing what. Many walls are public leisure facilities that are governed by their own rules and regulations and these must be fully understood prior to use with groups.

3.3 Supervision

3.3.1 Organisation

Effective organisation of a session requires good planning and this in turn requires a clear understanding of the objectives. Candidates must develop an awareness of how variables such as the weather, the abilities and motivation of the individuals and characteristics of different venues all have an impact on the effectiveness of the session. Often it is the quality of the experience that may suffer if these factors are not recognised, but safety may also be compromised. The ability to change plans to suit differing circumstances is fundamental to any successful session. Candidates must

possess a current first aid certificate for their SPA to be valid. In the event of an accident or illness they need to have a good understanding of the procedures for calling for outside help.

Unlike most crags, climbing walls are managed facilities with specific codes of conduct that apply to their use. Prior to using a wall with novices it is advisable to be familiar with these as specific equipment may be required. Moreover, adherence to certain ratios or completion of consent forms may be necessary. As with crags, different walls have different characteristics and may or may not be suitable for the objectives of a particular session. For example, some walls may have climbs mainly in the higher grades or have only limited insitu top ropes, while others may have predominantly bouldering areas.

3.3.2 Group Management

Ability to manage groups: An award holder is expected to be proficient in the management of group members while they are not actually climbing, as well as for the safe execution of climbing techniques. The supervision of novices whilst climbing should be seen as only one element of supervision, as it is the management of novices whilst not climbing that is often more complex. Considerable experience of novice supervision should be gained between training and assessment in an assistant capacity alongside more experienced supervisors and instructors. As with personal climbing, this experience should be gained in a variety of contexts: walls and crags, different rock types, different size groups etc. As well as being experienced in supervision techniques, candidates are expected to have knowledge of working ratios suitable for different situations.

Climbing techniques including methods of attachment to the rope and the supervision of students whilst belaying are easy to practice in isolation; the experience of a trainer should be used to demonstrate as much as possible the other more subtle skills of supervision.

Approach and descent from a route are aspects of climbing supervision that are more difficult to control than the act of climbing itself and so careful consideration should be given to these factors when selecting routes.
By careful choice of easy, as well as relatively complex crags, a trainer should illustrate the range of venues that are acceptable for use by a SPA holder. The definition of single pitch climbs within the scope of the award clearly excludes crags where access to either the top or base is difficult. At an acceptable venue, however, having gauged the qualities of a particular group, the award holder may judge that certain routes are inappropriate. The development of this judgement is greatly aided by accumulation of experience in a variety of situations, both when assisting with groups and when climbing independently. This element of the syllabus is clearly linked to the ability to establish clear and effective communications with a group.

Communication: Communication is the basis of good organisation and effective group work. Within a group at a single pitch venue or climbing wall communication is essential and this might not rely on the use of formal climbing calls. As with all aspects of supervision, experience is the most effective way of developing these skills.

3.3.3 Supervising the Session

Choice and use of equipment: Frequently, candidates at training have limited experience of equipment suitable for group use. Items such as low stretch rope, edge protectors, different harnesses and a wide range of other kit should be available for use during training to maximise the benefit of the course. It is particularly useful if trainers run larger courses for 6 to 8 students as this will usually result in a broader range of equipment being available. Different venues will encourage the use of specific items of equipment. Candidates are expected to be aware of equipment suitable for use in a wide range of circumstances.

Supervision of group members belaying: Belayer error is a potential cause of serious accidents. Correct use of a belay

device is fundamental to climbing and the decision as to when a student is capable of undertaking this element of rope management is an important one. Candidates at training often have limited experience of using different belay devices and of supervising novices who are learning to belay. It may often be appropriate to create several opportunities during a training course to demonstrate a variety of methods of group organisation and supervision of novices belaying. Between training and assessment candidates are strongly recommended to gain experience supervising novices belaying, preferably in controlled situations.

Route choice and problem avoidance: The choice of route is a key element of problem avoidance when supervising climbing. A well selected route should be appropriate to the skills and ability of the group members and therefore problems such as over-anxiety or jammed limbs should not occur. Equally important is consideration of the safety of a route, taking into account such factors as the likelihood of swinging falls or the position of difficult moves in relation to ledges. If the hardest moves are directly off the ground or from a ledge then it would be difficult to prevent a falling climber from making contact with the ground/ledge.

Training and Injury Avoidance: Climbing provides intense physical demands that can result in injuries such as strained finger tendons or, in the case of bouldering, lower limb injuries from poor landings. Candidates should be aware of these dangers and take steps to minimise their likelihood by promoting good practice among novices under their supervision. Issues such as warming up prior to climbing routes at the limit of one's ability and the risks of training injuries should be discussed. Training techniques are continually evolving in climbing and candidates should be aware of how to go about gaining suitable information to ensure safe and effective training.

Solving Problems: Crags that are appropriate for use by SPA holders have ready access to top and bottom and are non-remote. With this in mind, complex rescue techniques such

as hoists and improvised pulley systems are beyond the needs of the scheme. This element of the syllabus should therefore be seen in context as a series of simple steps that can be implemented in the event of a climber getting stuck whilst climbing or abseiling on a crag on which it is always possible to lower to the ground.

Emergency procedures should be introduced during a training course in a progressive way. The skills relate to many other aspects of the syllabus and should be incorporated into general sessions rather than dealt with in isolation. Most emergencies relating to novices getting stuck whilst climbing or abseiling can be anticipated. It should be illustrated repeatedly that careful planning and organisation should prevent these situations from ever occurring.

More emphasis should be placed on the good practices that avoid problems than on specific techniques required to solve them once they have occurred. Opportunities to discuss and demonstrate good practice in choice of venue, choice of route, setting appropriate expectations of the students, establishment of clear communications, positioning of ropes systems and positioning of the supervisor should be integrated throughout the training course.

In addition to an integrated approach to problem avoidance, a hierarchy of actions to solve simple problems if they do arise should be considered.

A sequence is provided below, although any approach that stresses the importance of simplicity and avoids the tendency to look at a worst case scenario first is appropriate. In normal circumstances it would be expected that a training course would include the following in either discussion or theory:

- eye contact and verbal encouragement
- tight rope to give reassurance
- in the case of abseiling, consider releasing the tension in the abseil rope
- approach the stuck climber (from above or below) - to give encouragement from nearby. The climber then

continues the supervised ascent/descent or is lowered to the ground.

- approach the stuck climber (from above or below) - to give physical assistance. The climber then continues the supervised ascent/descent or is lowered to the ground.

The methods outlined above would solve any common stuck climber scenarios without the introduction of any additional personal skills at training.

Bouldering: Bouldering is a form of climbing that, by definition, should not present the climber with serious risk of injury resulting from a fall. It is both a distinct element of climbing in its own right and also an effective and enjoyable means of training for roped climbing.
Whereas rock climbs have clearly defined objectives (getting to the top) bouldering is much more variable and dependent upon the imagination of the supervisor, provided they have first-hand experience of the activity. At walls, unless they can be booked exclusively, bouldering will take place amongst other wall users. Strategies to control the session, as well as providing direction, should therefore be evolved to avoid conflict and ensure that the sessions are constructive, well managed and enjoyable. Due to the typically steep nature of bouldering walls, an important additional consideration for the supervisor is that of injury avoidance. The development of warming-up methods and a progressive approach to climbing on bouldering walls, whereby easy problems with large holds are climbed first, is advised. By its very nature, bouldering can become a very competitive activity, but this can be countered to some extent if supervisors encourage supportive interaction, where small groups help and spot each other whilst bouldering.

Candidates are expected to gain bouldering experience both as an individual and in a supervisory capacity prior to an assessment. Contrary to the apparently low risk associated with bouldering it is the one activity where students under supervision can, and frequently do, fall unprotected to the

ground. At walls it is usual to have some form of matting, but this is very variable and as a consequence the activity must be modified to suit the nature of the facility.

Bouldering at crags differs from that at walls in several respects:

- good bouldering may be associated with hazardous landings
- bouldering may conflict with established routes
- descents are usually more complex
- venues are often more difficult to define and manage

Where an appropriate bouldering site exists, this can provide an excellent activity either in its own right or as a supplement to a roped climbing session.

4 Guidance notes for Course Providers and Assessors

The following notes are for assessors and course providers and should be read in conjunction with Appendix V and any additional notes issued by BOS.

Assessors should use the logbook to evaluate the experience of a candidate. Experience cannot be measured simply in terms of the length of time a candidate has been climbing. With a minimum of 12 months climbing experience pre-training, it would be expected that most candidates would complete an additional 60 logged climbs on a variety of rock types prior to assessment. Typically, approximately 40 of these routes will have been led, with many of Severe grade. A reasonable proportion of routes led should be at different venues.

When possible Directors of Assessment should ensure that candidates are not trained and assessed in the same venue, especially if the majority of the candidate's experience has been gained at that same venue.

All candidates should have experience on a variety of crags and rock types. This is of particular importance if candidates are trained and assessed in the same venue.

In addition to this independent personal climbing experience a potential award holder should gain experience assisting with the supervision of novices climbing. This should comprise approximately 20 sessions and ideally include experience with young people as well as adults. This supervising experience should be gained mainly at crags, although some experience at walls is also essential. Ten of these sessions should be completed under the supervision of an SPA holder or higher award, at at least two different crags.

4.1 Technical Competence

Equipment: A candidate is expected to provide sufficient equipment for the assessment and be aware of its appropriate use. Assessors may choose to provide a range of equipment for candidates to use in addition to that which they bring themselves. It is usual for an assessment course to contain an element of training and assessors may create an opportunity to extend as well as to assess the knowledge of candidates in relation to suitable equipment for group use.

Anchors: Assessors should select venues to provide a wide range of choice of anchor. Candidates are expected to exercise sound judgement whatever the rock type encountered.

Belaying: In the first place assessors will often choose to assess the most fundamental aspect of climbing by observing the candidate rock climbing with a peer. Commonly the candidate will be given a free choice of routes on which to demonstrate competence.

Abseiling: Assessors may assess abseiling as a personal skill during a course. This may, for example, be when a candidate has to retrieve gear that has not been removed from a climb. The abseil should be prepared and conducted in a safe, methodical manner. Due care should be given to the risk of rope abrasions over edges and potential damage to the crag environment must also be anticipated and avoided.

Route choice: Route selection with the use of the guidebook or by a visual assessment of the rock can be revealing as to the experience of the candidate. Assessors should be cautious, however, about expecting quick and accurate route selection at a venue familiar to themselves, but new to the candidates. Candidates will usually have the opportunity to select and climb a route in consultation with their assessor. Exceptionally, an assessor may choose to select a specific route for a candidate to climb in order to assess certain aspects of the syllabus.

Severe grade climb: A candidate should have the ability to lead Severe grade climbs which will be recorded in the log book. During an assessment it is usual to demonstrate this competence on climbs with leader-placed protection, but in exceptional circumstances (such as extremes of weather) and where the candidate is particularly experienced, this requirement may be modified.

Leading climbs: The ability of the award holder to lead climbs and place suitable runners is a fundamental requirement of the scheme.

Leading a rock climb requires many of the skills of a competent supervisor; judging the difficulty of moves, placing sound runners, arranging solid belays and being correctly positioned to eliminate the likelihood of shock loading on a belay system. Leading can be used to evaluate the ability of a candidate and to stress the significance of personal involvement in the sport, from which safe systems for supervising novices will flow naturally.

Safety chains and fall factors: An understanding of basic principles relating to safe and efficient links in a belay system is important. It is usual for this to be evaluated during the practical elements of a course and to be extended through questioning and/or some form of written or discussion paper.

Climbing walls: Most assessment courses will visit a climbing wall. This may contribute to the training of candidates through discussion of relevant issues such as group-use regulations, the importance of warming-up and the benefits and limitations of walls as a medium for the introduction of novices. Due to the controlled nature of the indoor wall environment, many assessors find them useful as venues to assess the basic skills of rope management and teaching belaying in particular. Conversely, the controlled nature of the environment does not facilitate the demonstration of many of the important judgements that are essential for the sound supervision of climbing.

4.2 The Climbing Environment

It is possible that candidates who operate in a way that damages the environment or, jeopardises access would fail the course even if the technical aspects of their performance were satisfactory.

Once an assessor is satisfied that the candidate has basic empathy with the climbing environment it is common for these elements of the syllabus to be further trained during an assessment course.

Competent candidates should familiarise themselves with local access issues even if they are undertaking an assessment in an unfamiliar area.

The actions of a candidate in relation to conservation whilst at a climbing site should be observed and, where appropriate, discussed. The impact of climbers will be clearly visible at most popular sites and
strategies to minimise this should be debated.

Climbing ethics exist in the form of unwritten codes of conduct with distinct variations from area to area. An assessor would expect a candidate to be sensitive to and aware of both locally and nationally important issues currently being debated in the climbing press. The experience recorded in the logbook is likely to be a good indicator of the depth of knowledge of topical climbing issues. Assessors must ensure that candidates are sufficiently informed and able to operate in accordance with local ethics (often this may be evaluated through questioning rather than observation).

Assessors must be confident that candidates operate in a suitably sensitive way so as to avoid conflict between their group activities and the interests of other climbers. Sustainable climbing depends on sensitive and sympathetic use of the crag environment. Although assessment of the practical skills is easier than evaluation of the attitudes and actions of candidates relating to the environment, this should

carry equal weighting to the practical aspects. A variety of techniques exist for an assessor to evaluate the sensitivity with which a candidate regards the crag environment - such as discussion topics, written papers, scrutiny of the logbook, observation during all stages of the practical course and direct questioning as issues present themselves.

4.3 Supervision

The assessment of supervision may take place with groups of genuine novices through simulation with peers and through discussion. An assessor should consider the supervising experiences recorded in the logbook and use this to contribute to an overall evaluation of the candidate. The benefits of using real novices during an assessment must be balanced against the complications that result from having an additional group for which the assessor has overall responsibility. Unless this situation is carefully managed, the flexibility of a session may be lost and an assessment compromised by the needs of the novices. The benefits of assessing a candidate in a more realistic supervisory role however, may at times outweigh the potential difficulties. It is usual for an assessor to establish candidates' personal climbing competence before assessing them in a supervisory capacity. Assessing personal ability ensures an appropriate emphasis on the need for a candidate to be a climber first and foremost, rather than a supervisor of climbing with limited ability only.

The management of novices at a crag or wall can be difficult to assess without a group of genuine novices for the candidate to work with. When real novices are not used an assessor may choose to use role play and may have to use discussion and questioning techniques to ensure that a candidate has developed sound judgement in this area.

Belaying and Top-Roping: A common cause of failure is an inability to create efficient belay systems in a variety of situations. This often reflects a lack of climbing experience at a variety of different venues and rock types. As far as possible, an assessor should provide appropriate

opportunities for the candidate to demonstrate a range of skills by selecting situations where different solutions are required.

The situation in which one particular solution is the obvious one, but the assessor directs the candidate to perform a different technique, is less satisfactory than presenting the candidate with a situation which demands the use of a different technique. An important point an assessor must remember is that it is not just a range of technical skills that make a supervisor safe, but the judgement as to when to apply the different techniques that really matters. Assessors should build in opportunities throughout the course where different solutions are demanded, for instance, single anchors/multiple anchors, direct belays/indirect belays, top-roping/bottom- roping, use of slings to equalise anchors or a rigging rope, etc. The objective in creating choices, rather than being directive about the performance of specific skills, is that it provides the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate judgement as well as perform skills. One of the most difficult decisions a supervisor must make is when to allow novices to belay each other. To assess this, venues and tasks need to be selected with care.

Group Management: The importance of route selection should not be overlooked during an assessment, where the focus can often be on techniques in isolation, rather than an holistic approach. Candidates should be given the opportunity to select routes and venues used during a course. Providing real choices in the selection of routes, rather than directing candidates to specific climbs will assist in the assessment of the awareness of problem avoidance.

Supervising the Session: Problem avoidance is a theme that is best dealt with as issues arise throughout the course, rather than as a session in isolation. Route choice follows choice of crag and choice of approach in the sequence of decisions that contribute to a well-structured climbing experience. As far as possible candidates should be given the opportunity to contribute to these decisions during an assessment.

The supervision of abseiling provides good opportunities to assess aspects of environmental awareness and climbing ethos. These issues are best evaluated if the candidate is given a relatively free choice as to the site for an abseil. Assessors should avoid directing a candidate to use one specific site, as this will result in an assessment only of the technical and supervisory skills, without providing the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate and justify the reasoning behind their decisions. Most assessors will choose to integrate emergency procedures throughout the course rather than dealing with them as a set of skills in isolation. Because single pitch crags within the scope of the award have easy access to top and bottom, most solutions to problems may be solved by simply lowering the novice to the ground.

As a form of further training during an assessment course it may be useful to take advantage of situations as they occur and explore problems that could occur. The experience of the candidates and assessors should be pooled to establish what problems have ever occurred on single pitch crags. By providing real choice and getting candidates to justify their decisions, an assessor should be able to evaluate whether a candidate has the experience to foresee (and therefore avoid) likely problems. Where a candidate does not have the experience to foresee problems, it would be reasonable to set a testing scenario that requires appropriate skills to resolve. Equally, where an assessor has every confidence that a candidate has the experience and approach to foresee and avoid problems, it may be that they are not set a specific problem to solve.

The use of hoists, the ability to prussik up a rope and the use of counter-balance rescues are beyond the needs of a single pitch award holder. Although candidates may choose to perform these skills to solve problems, an assessor should not prescribe an arbitrary situation that requires them. It is recognised that an assessor may, at times, wish to set specific problem situations and every effort should be made to ensure that these are as realistic as possible. Assessors

should realise that the ultimate worst case scenario may be one where an SPA holder has to call for external help, but the probability of this situation arising is very low.

Aspects of bouldering should be assessed during a course. As a supervised activity at either a crag or wall, bouldering is potentially one of the more difficult sessions to control and assessors should strive for realism when setting tasks. Logbook evidence of experience combined with discussion will contribute to the evaluation of an individual's abilities in this area. Recognition of hazards, techniques for controlling the activity and imaginative delivery are all key factors to assess.

Appendix I

Sample Theory Paper

Written papers of some form may be given before or during the course. These should be considered as diagnostic tests designed to illustrate strengths and identify any gaps in knowledge. Results will not be taken in isolation. Rather, they will prompt the assessor into asking further questions and selecting appropriate tasks to be set in the latter part of the course. Written papers are likely to focus on areas of the syllabus which include the crag environment and knowledge of the sport.

SPA Assessment - Written Paper

1. Describe some of the factors which could lead to access being denied at a climbing venue.
2. What sources of information are there regarding access to climbing venues?
3. List points you would consider when trying to limit the impact of your group at a popular crag.
4. Who first climbed the following routes?
    a. Ground Control- Ailladie
    b. Sarcophagus – Glendalough
    c. Paradise Lost - Dalkey
    d. Cenotaph Corner - Llanberis
    e. Class Distinction - Mourne Mountains
5. Who would you recommend to wear a body harness rather than just a sit harness?
6. What is an HMS karabiner designed for?
7. What is a GriGri? List its advantages and disadvantages with regard to its use with groups of novices.
8. How would you assess the life expectancy of a climbing rope?
9. Which body is currently responsible for setting international minimum safety standards for climbing equipment?
10. Why should fall factors be of only theoretical interest in a bottom or top roping situation?
11. What type of rock is found at;

a. Dalkey Quarry, Co. Dublin

b. Ballyryan – Co Clare
c. Pigeon Rock – Mourne Mountains
d. Culdaff – Donegal
e. Fair Head – Antrim

12. What would you recommend as one of the most important methods of injury avoidance when climbing or training?
13. Where would you find information about local climbing clubs?
14. List three of the main interests of MI.
15. At your ideal climbing wall for novice supervision list five features/qualities you would like to see.
16. For the purposes of the SPA scheme what is the definition of a single pitch rock climb/crag? List five crags that would conform to that definition.

Appendix II

Training Course - Sample Programmes

Evening 1 (or pre-course)

Course introduction, paperwork
Review of personal climbing experience

Day 1 Meet at Crag A Bouldering

Guidebooks and route choice
Runner placements, belay construction and leading climbs
Belaying and lowering
Personal abseiling

Evening 2 Review of practical sessions

Gear review
Environmental case studies
Responsibilities of a group leader
Use of walls - management constraints, roped & un-roped activities, and injury avoidance

Day 2 Meet at Crag B

Impact analysis - choice of crag, mode of transport/parking, choice of approach & routes, style of ascent
Top roping, bottom roping, abseiling with novices
Rigging and supervising the activity - anticipating problems & minimising impact
Course review - Logbooks & personal action plans

Assessment Course

Pre-course Send in logbooks

	Receive home paper & discussion topic (optional)
Evening 1	Course introduction, complete paperwork
Day 1	Crag A Guidebooks & route choice Runner placements, belay construction & leading climbs Belaying & lowering Personal abseiling Dealing with common problems
Evening 2	Home paper discussion & topics presented Climbing walls - use, management constraints, roped & un-roped options, injury avoidance
Day 2	Meet at Crag B Impact analysis - choice of crag, mode of transport/parking, choice of approach & routes, style of ascent Top roping, bottom roping, abseiling with novices Rigging and supervising the activity - anticipating problems & minimising impact Supervised bouldering Course review, results & action plan

Note: assessments generally involve groups of novices. The candidate is normally responsible for 3-4 novices on Day 2.

Appendix III Useful Addresses

MI & BOS

Bord Oiliúint Sléibhe (BOS) is the Irish Mountain Training Board and is a sub-committee of Mountaineering Ireland. Information on BOS and MI can be obtained from;

Mountaineering Ireland (MI)
Irish Sport HQ, National Sports Campus, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15
Tel: +353 (0) 1 625 1115
Email: training@mountaineering.ie
Website: www.mountaineering.ie

Mountain Training Boards

Mountain Training United Kingdom (MTUK),
Siabod Cottage, Capel Curig, Gwynedd LL24 0ET
Tel: +44 (0) 1690 720272
Email: info@mountain-training.org
Website: www.mountain-training.org

Mountain Training England (MTE),
Siabod Cottage, Capel Curig, Gwynedd LL24 0ET
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Email: info@mltb.org
Website: www.mountain-training.org

Mountain Training Northern Ireland (MTNI)
MTNI, Tollymore Mountain Centre, Bryansford, Newcastle, Co Down BT33 0PT
Tel: 02843 722158
Email: admin@tollymore.com
Website www.tollymore.com

Mountain Training Scotland (MTS)
MTS, Glenmore, Aviemore, Inverness-shire PH22 1QU
Tel: +44 (0)1479 861248
Email: scotland@mountain-training.org
Website: www.mountain-training.org

Mountain Training Cymru (MTC) (Wales)
MTC, Plas y Brenin, Capel Curig, Gwynedd LL24 0ET
Tel: +44 (0)1690 720361
Email: info@mountain-training.org
Website: www.mountain-training.org

British Mountaineering Council
BMC, 177-179 Burton Road, Manchester M20 2BB
Tel: +44 (0)870 010 4878
Email: office@thebmc.co.uk
Website: www.thebmc.co.uk

Mountaineering Council of Scotland
MC of S, The Old Granary, West Mill Street, Perth PH1 52P
Tel: +44 (0)1738 493492
Email: info@mcofs.org.uk
Website: www.mcofs.org.uk

Appendix IV

Bibliography

The following publications are relevant to several areas of the syllabus:

Rock Climbing- Essential Skills & Techniques
Libby Peter, MTUK, 2004
Mountain Skills Training Handbook
P Hill and S Johnson 2000
Rock Climbing for Instructors
Alun Richardson, 2001
The Handbook of Climbing
A Fyffe & I Peter. Pelham Books, 1997
A Manual of Modern Rope Techniques
N Shepherd. Constable, 1998
Irish Mountain Log magazine and other Mountaineering Council magazines-Summit, Scottish Mountaineer, Climber.
Walking World Ireland magazine- access section

The following publications are listed under the relevant syllabus heading:

Technical Competence

How to Rock Climb: Climbing Anchors
J Long. Chockstone Press, 1993
How to Rock Climb: Face Climbing
J Long. Chockstone Press, 1992
Close Calls
J Long Falcon 1999
Knots Booklet, Rope Booklet, BMC
Further Modern Rope Techniques, N Shepherd. Constable, 1998
Performance Rock Climbing, D Goddard & V Neumann. Stockpole Books, 1993
Ropes Booklet, BMC Training for Rock Climbing, S Bollen. Penguin Books, 1994
Climbing Rock, Classic Climbs, Essential Skills, BMC, 1999

The Climbing Environment

Climbing Guidebooks, access and environmental sections, MI, BMC, CC, FRCC, SMC Climbing Anthologies e.g. Classic Rock, K Wilson. Granada, 1981
The Climbers C Bonnington Hodder & Stoughton 1994
The Games Climbers Play, K Wilson. Baton Wicks, 1978
Reading the Irish Landscape, F Mitchell & M Ryan, Town and Country House 1997
Mountaincraft & Leadership, Access & Conservation section, E Langmuir. MLTB/ SSC, 1995
Climbing Wall Manual, Design Development and Management. BMC, 1998

Supervision

Mountaineering First Aid, P Thurman, The Mountaineers 1996
Leading & Managing Groups in the Outdoors, K. Ogilvie. NAOE Publications, 1993
Mountain and Cave Rescue, MRC. Visual Communications, 1998
Medical Handbook for Mountaineers, Steele. Constable, 1988
Working Out of Doors with Young People, A Smith. ITRC 1987
Horizons, occasional articles on "near misses" National Guidelines, UKMTB, 2000

Appendix V

Outline of **BOS Requirements for Course Providers**, 2014.
These requirements may change from time to time.
Please contact MI office or see www.mountaineering.ie for the most up to date and exact detail on requirements and the approval procedure.

1 Approval system

Course provider status is granted for three years only.

All providers must be holders of either a Mountaineering Instructor Award or Certificate or a Guide. They will also have experience of at least two SPA training courses and one SPA assessment courses before gaining approval for SPA Training providership. For approval to provide SPA assessments, applicants must have course directed 4 SPA Training Courses. All applicants have to satisfy BOS that they fulfill any additional requirements.

2 Workshops

BOS runs training events and workshops for its providers. Attendance at an approved workshop is required prior to gaining recognition as a course provider.

3 Ratios

1:4 on training courses, maximum course size 8, minimum 4. Additional staff for training must hold RCL multi-pitch award or higher award and meet any current BOS requirements.
1:4 on assessment courses, 1:2 when candidates are supervising novices. Maximum course size 8, minimum 2. Additional staff must hold MIA or a higher award.

See www.mountaineering.ie for the most up to date version of the BOS provider handbook.

Guidebooks available from MI

Mournes
Edited by Calvin Torrans & Clare Sheridan Paperback (pocket size) - 162 pages (1997)
Published by Mountaineering Council of Ireland.
ISBN 0-902940-12-0

Rock Climbs in Donegal
Edited by Alan Tees
Paperback (pocket size) - 336 pages. (2002)
Published by Mountaineering Council of Ireland.
ISBN 0-902940-17-1

Rock Climbing Guide to Dalkey
Edited by Howard Hebblethwaite & Colm O'Cofaigh
Paperback (pocket size) - 126 pages
7th Edition (1991)
Published by Mountaineering Council of Ireland Out of print.
Presently being updated by Howard Hebblethwaite & Ronan Browner.

Fair Head Rock Climbing Guide
Edited by Calvin Torrans & Clare Sheridan Paperback (pocket size) 216 pages (2002)
Published by Mountaineering Council of Ireland.
ISBN 0-902940-18-X
Plastic Cover (pocket size) - 346 pages (1998)
Published by Mountaineering Council of Ireland.
ISBN 0-902940-14-7

Wicklow
Edited by Joe Lyons & Robbie Fenlon Paperback (pocket size) – 226 pages (1993)
Published by Mountaineering Council of Ireland.
ISBN 0-902940-11-2

MI Interim Guides
Rock Climbs in Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan & Fermanagh
Edited by Paddy Mallon, MI, 1995

Twelve Bens Hill Walkers and Rock Climbers Guide

Edited by Joss Lynam, FMI, 1985

Bray Head & minor crags around Dublin
Edited by Joss Lynam/Liam Convery, FMI, 1978

Rock Climbs in the Comeragh Mountains
& South East
Edited Jack Bergin/Stephen Gallwey, Comeragh MC & MI, 1995

Single Pitch Award

Skills Checklist

Syllabus Area	Can I do this?	Notes
2.1 TECHNICAL COMPETENCE **2.1.1 Equipment** • identify equipment suitable for personal and group use at a given venue • demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of equipment and ensure appropriate care and maintenance • demonstrate the ability to use climbing wall equipment appropriately		
2.1.2 Anchors Select suitable, sound anchors in a variety of situations including: - spikes and blocks - nuts and camming devices - threads, chockstones and trees - fixed equipment		
2.1.3 Belaying • connect self and others to the rope • set up sound belay systems to single and multiple anchors • attach self to the belay system • demonstrate the use of direct and indirect belays • use a variety of different belay techniques/devices competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation • set up top and bottom rope systems and choose the most appropriate system for a given situation • arrange appropriate runners and belays to protect a seconding climber • hold falls and carry out lowers		

Skills Checklist*2*

Syllabus Area	Can I do this?	Notes
2.1 TECHNICAL COMPETENCE CONTINUED **2.1.4 Abseiling** • abseil without the use of a safety rope • set up fixed and releasable abseils • use a variety of different devices and methods competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation • solve common abseiling problems such as tangled ropes, inadvertent locking and pendulums • choose an appropriate abseiling site with consideration for: - ease of take off - loose rock - impact on the environment and the climbing resource • demonstrate methods of safeguarding a novice abseiling		
2.1.5 Personal Climbing Skills • interpret guidebooks effectively • choose routes suited to personal ability • move with confidence on Severe grade rock climbs • place runners suitable for lead protection • demonstrate a basic understanding of the safety chain and fall factors		
2.1.6 Background Knowledge • demonstrate some understanding of: - the history, traditions and ethics of Irish rock climbing - BOS and MI - the club system - competition climbing		

Skills Checklist *3*

Syllabus Area	Can I do this?	Notes
2.2 THE CLIMBING ENVIRONMENT **2.2.1 Access** • understand and observe current access and conservation guidelines • interpret and use effectively the access information given in guidebooks and other sources of information • show an appreciation of and care for all aspects of the climbing environment • show an awareness of, ability to obtain information on and willingness to comply with, locally important crag issues and agreements		
2.2.2 Conservation • demonstrate good practice in the conservation and care of the environment • operate in such a way as to minimise impact on the environment (including the climbing resource) • define problems of conservation and the effects of human pressure on the climbing environment • manage groups so as to leave the crags in an improved condition • demonstrate an awareness of locally important species and the legal situation relating to protected flora/fauna • demonstrate some knowledge of different rock types and crag features		
2.2.3 Etiquette • demonstrate an awareness of responsibilities to the general public, environmental agencies, local residents, landowners and the climbing community • demonstrate an awareness of local rock climbing ethics related to single pitch crags • operate a flexible programme of activities so as to accommodate other site users		

Skills Checklist *4*

Syllabus Area	Can I do this?	Notes
2.1 THE CLIMBING ENVIRONMENT CONTINUED • be aware of the hazards presented to other site users by the actions of a group, and act to minimise these • demonstrate an awareness of the sitespecific requirements and agreements relating to different crags, climbing walls and artificial structures		
2.3 SUPERVISION **2.3.1 Organisation** • plan a day's programme of activities to take place at a crag and an artificial climbing structure • assess the abilities and objectives of the group participating in this plan • check underlying aims and the objectives of the event • demonstrate an awareness of responsibility to any authorising organisation, parents, individual group members, the group as a whole and other site users • demonstrate an understanding of the impact of weather on climbing • have built-in flexibility when planning activities in order to respond to changing circumstances • know how to call for expert help in the case of an accident or injury **2.3.2 Group Management** • choose an appropriate venue and route for group use considering: - suitability of approach/descent - terrain at the base of the crag - objective dangers such as loose rock • demonstrate the safe and responsible management of all group members irrespective of whether or not they are directly involved in the climbing activity		

Skills Checklist 5

Syllabus Area	Can I do this?	Notes
2.3 SUPERVISION CONTINUED • brief individuals and the group, appropriately manage the individuals and the group effectively by: - good communication skills - setting and reviewing targets - identifying and reacting to the needs of the group in relation to involvement, interest, enjoyment and achievement • supervise a group of novice climbers belaying, manage time appropriately in relation to the plan, activity and conditions		
2.3.3 Supervising the Session • issue appropriate rock climbing equipment and check correct fitting and use • deliver technical instruction to individuals and the group including: - choice and fitting of suitable harnesses - attaching the rope to the harness - advice, demonstration and coaching on climbing movement - demonstration of effective use of chosen belay device - safe use of friction device for abseiling • demonstrate an understanding of how to avoid common problems such as a stuck climber/abseiler • solve common problems including: - stuck climber whilst on a safety rope - stuck abseiler whilst abseiling with a safety rope • demonstrate the use of bouldering activities with groups		

Syllabus Area	Can I do this?	Notestes
2.3 SUPERVISION CONTINUED • demonstrate an understanding of warming up and injury avoidance techniques • demonstrate an understanding of the needs of those with physical and mental disabilities and medical conditions • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport in Ireland.		

Assessment Checklist

Requirements	Done
Member of MI or an affiliated club	
Personal details page	
Personal profile page	
First aid certificate (16 hours)	
Single Pitch Award Training course report	
Personal climbs, a minimum of 40 led routes	
Climbing Severe	
A variety of different rock types	
Assisted on a minimum of 20 sessions	
A minimum of 10 of the 20sessions signed by an experienced SPA or higher	
A minimum of 2 different venues	
Variety of groups	
SPA written paper	
Read and understood all aspects of MI's Children's policy	
Read and understood all aspect of MI's Environmental Policy	
Read and understood all aspects of MI's Good Practice Guide	
Read and understood all aspects of the BOS SPA syllabus	