

Climbing Wall Development Instructor

Guidance for trainers and assessors

INTRODUCTION

- These guidance notes should be used together with the Climbing Wall Development Instructor handbook.
- Trainers and assessors are responsible for assessing the experience of their candidates at registration (there is no vetting by Mountain Training). It is important that candidates have the appropriate level of experience to allow engagement with course content. Candidates must satisfy prerequisites on training and assessment courses and this must be evidenced in writing, ideally in DLOG.
- Given that the Climbing Wall Development Instructor scheme centres on developing lead climbing and its instruction, trainers and assessors will need to make skilled judgements on the appropriateness of any teaching activities and their progression in relation to candidates' knowledge and competence during the course.
- The Climbing Wall Development Instructor syllabus does not define a prescribed 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 trainers and trainees.
- Assessors should set realistic tasks or scenarios rather than request specific techniques be demonstrated. Tasks set should not demand solutions that use techniques beyond the scope of the qualification. Assessors must provide feedback to candidates and should explain how this will be given. A realistic and objective assessment of each individual candidate has to be made against the nationally recognised standard.
- Assessments should allow for a possible range of responses to any given situation. A key task for an assessor is to determine a candidate's level of judgement in relation to providing appropriate progressions of activity and their risk assessment.
- Course staff should encourage candidates to engage in reflective practice.
- In conclusion, Climbing Wall Development Instructor courses are for participants with considerable personal experience. While course staff should endeavour to maintain a safe working environment, participants also have a duty to exercise judgment regarding their own personal safety and that of other members of the group.

1-3 TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

Trainers

Candidates should be encouraged to bring along their own equipment to the course. This can prompt good discussion on its use, care and maintenance in line with manufacturers' guidance. Additional items should be supplied by the course provider, particularly items which are widely used with groups. Good sources of additional information should be highlighted.

Note should be made on the function and appropriateness of harness design for lead climbing, for participants of different ages and shapes.

Lead belaying is a complex skill that requires well developed reactions, sound judgement, concentration and adaptability. Candidates may have experience in depth, but not in breadth and training should cover the different techniques that may be needed for lead climbers of different ages weights, skill levels and motivation. The ability to anticipate the climber's movements and provide rope, security and support for them at all times constitutes the core skills at this level.

Candidates should be shown good practice for holding falls with lead climbers of different weights. The ability to create a soft catch by moving with the falling climber is a skilful technique that requires much varied practice, with back up, to be performed safely and appropriately. This is mainly achieved by moving the belayer's body with the falling climber. It is beyond the scope of the scheme to employ techniques that let significant amounts of rope slip through the belay device.

It is particularly useful to demonstrate and discuss the fall potential when clipping protection points at different heights on the wall and relative to the body. Practical and theoretical applications of fall factors and the safety chain can be explored here, while reviewing candidates' performances.

Assessors

As with training courses, candidates should be encouraged to bring their own equipment to assessment courses. They should be able to talk through their choice of equipment, suitability, its history of use and maintenance. Candidates should know where to access information on appropriate use of equipment if they appear unsure. Candidates should understand the importance of adhering to the rules of the climbing wall when using fixed equipment.

It is recommended that a home research or question paper is used, where a section on equipment should be included to ask more in-depth questions about equipment use, care and maintenance. Candidates should have a basic understanding of how the safety chain reacts to dynamic forces, including fall factors and how the climber's and belayer's actions may affect the forces experienced by either.

Assessing belaying skills goes beyond the physical action of belaying and should include the selection of an appropriate device for the given scenario, which should also take into account the properties of the rope, the venue, route and the climber. The assessment of belaying skills needs to encompass the candidate's decision-making process.

Candidates should be able to demonstrate safe and consistent lead belaying skills that are anticipatory and supportive of the lead climber. They need to be able to give a soft catch when appropriate, and to be able to achieve this through a variety of techniques, depending upon the weight of the climber. Likewise they should be able to take small lead falls themselves, safely and without undue stress. This area of assessment carries significant risk and should be managed in a progressive and carefully controlled way, with close supervision and backup if necessary.

Top tips

- Manufacturers produce great resources for detailed information on their climbing equipment. Consider using some of their materials to set tasks such as learning how to use a new piece of equipment, or researching the storage and maintenance requirements.

- Use a variety of different belay devices (including assisted breaking), ropes (varying diameters) and environments (slab, overhanging, traversing etc.) to give a broad context to the skills.
- Don't forget the importance of down climbing as an essential safety and tactical skill for lead climbers. It also introduces basic lead belaying skills in a relatively safe manner.

4-5. MANAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

Trainers

The developmental role of this qualification should be emphasised. At this level, candidates should be shown how they can plan for each individual in their group. Aims and objectives for sessions should be set through discussion and agreement with their students. They will need to be shown how to review the progress, and the physical and mental state, of their students and how to adapt their program accordingly. The topic of an instructor's duty of care, especially with younger climbers, should be discussed in detail with candidates. Parents and carers of young climbers will need to be advised and consulted for their informed consent, and the practical processes of doing this should be addressed.

There are many stages that a novice lead climber can be managed through to develop their lead climbing skills. Candidates should be introduced to as many of these as possible, ranging from belaying a down climbing climber on top rope to coaching redpointing techniques. The process of skill acquisition and how contextual changes (e.g. slab to overhang) can degrade performance should be discussed, along with how this is best managed.

It should be emphasised that almost all lead climbing problems should not occur under instruction – they need to have been prevented. There is relatively little control that an instructor can have over a lead climber once they have left the ground. Therefore they must have thoroughly assessed the understanding, ability and preparedness of their students before sanctioning them to lead climb without back up. However, the interventions that could be made should problems occur, and their attendant risks, should be discussed.

Assessors

Candidates should have developed methods for assessing the competence of their students with a mixture of questioning and tasks that build up a risk profile for each one. Assessors need to create situations where these skills and judgements can be demonstrated. Having live students for the candidates to work with is therefore very beneficial. Candidates should be tasked to assess and plan progressive activities that are individualised to the students' capabilities.

Home papers can be used to examine a candidate's ability to plan sessions for scenarios that might not be reproducible in the practical assessment. Assessors can use effective questioning to explore the judgements made by candidates in designing and adapting their plans. They should explore what a candidate would do differently were circumstances to change. A home paper can also examine a candidate's knowledge of their duty of care, especially in relation to minors, as well as technical knowledge of the climbing wall environment.

Assessing problem prevention and problem solving is best done through questioning and discussion. The use of open questions and fictitious scenarios should bring out the candidate's level of knowledge and judgement.

Top tips

- A traffic light classification system for common problems can be a useful teaching tool for the understanding of risk and its management in lead climbing.
- The three pillars of an instructor's duty of care are: risk assessment, informed consent, and progressive management. Candidates should be able to describe all three in some detail.
- Get candidates to brainstorm all the technical training techniques they can think of and order these into a progressive program of lead climbing skill development.

6-7 MANAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

Trainers

Formal and dynamic risk assessments should be introduced to candidates. This can be done as a paper exercise, through scenarios and practical tasks. Understanding the physical, psychological, tactical and technical abilities and limitations of students will greatly aid the assessment of their readiness to perform a particular task.

Trainers can show a range of methods for teaching and developing the specific climbing and movement techniques listed in the syllabus. These can involve floor exercises, bouldering tasks and various roped activities. Candidates should be shown how any of these techniques can be built up over time using any of these methods in an appropriate progressive fashion.

During training candidates should see and discuss what makes an effective demonstration on the skills of lead belaying, clipping quickdraws and holding falls. Additionally, candidates will need to develop good demonstrations of fundamental movement skills which can be applied to lead climbing such as keeping as much weight over the feet as possible and employing techniques that create efficient, stable clipping positions. The training course should give good opportunities for each candidate to practise demonstrations and for active discussion among the group and for feedback to take place. This is not a coaching movement course however and trainers should be able to signpost the relevant candidates towards the FUNdamentals of Climbing courses developed by the mountaineering councils for further training in this area.

Lead climbing is a much more tactical exercise than top-roping and candidates should be encouraged to interpret routes with students including spotting rests, key clipping holds, poor holds, crux sections and key sections that require specific techniques.

Assessors

Candidates should be able to demonstrate all the techniques listed in the syllabus with clarity. They do not need to demonstrate movement skills to a high performance standard, but should be able to reproduce fundamental techniques (e.g. rockover, twist and flag, precise footwork and balance) with accuracy and basic precision – enough to convey a clear image.

Candidates should have a methodical approach to supervising novice lead climbers and belayers. Assessors should question candidates about how they might adapt their methods for students of different ages and experience.

Determining the candidate's judgement of risk and the appropriate decisions they make to balance the management of such risk against desired learning outcomes is a key task for the assessor. As such they should set tasks that require these judgements of approach and management to be made by the candidate. Skilled questioning is required to review the thought processes that the candidate employed to arrive at their decisions.

Top Tips

- A common temptation for candidates is to introduce lead climbing tasks before students are ready. Having students with little experience can provide illuminating assessment opportunities.
- The bouldering wall is a very useful place to teach and demonstrate lead climbing techniques at all levels. Be creative.
- Asking candidates to find an appropriate area to teach or demonstrate a particular technique in a venue unfamiliar to them can show an assessor much about their wider experience and judgement.
- Consider the using a back-up bottom rope (sometimes referred to as an "M belay system" - see *Climbing Wall Leading* by Ian Fenton) for teaching and practising the taking and holding of lead falls.

8. TEACHING AND LEARNING SKILLS

Trainers

Candidates need to pass on their knowledge and enthusiasm effectively to their students. However, inspiring is not the same as impressing and a fruitful discussion can be had on the role of the instructor and the values that Mountain Training espouses. It is often worth spending some time looking at group communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal. Reference to specific techniques that a trainer may have expert knowledge in can sometimes be useful here.

The ability to plan a series of progressive sessions and adapt these to individuals' needs is a core skill set of any Climbing Wall Development Instructor. The ability to give timely feedback that is useful to the student is also an essential part of the learning cycle. Trainers should emphasise the importance of employing these skills in order to be an effective educator at this level. Candidates need to be able to assess individual students' abilities and progress, and provide differentiated learning tasks for them. Trainers can hold useful discussions about identifying the most relevant blocks to a student's progress and methods for addressing these. Examples may be as varied as the fear of falling, poor clipping technique or weak core strength. In any case candidates should be encouraged to develop exercises and an approach that will address these blocks and support the student's development.

Understanding and supporting motivation is especially important if working with students over a period of time. Fostering feelings of competence, control and community are as essential as developing climbing skills if the student is to be resilient. Trainers should discuss with candidates what instructional behaviours and methods are likely to encourage confident learners. Climbing Wall Development Instructors should be able to inspire their colleagues and students alike by establishing

rapport, offering sound guidance and presenting a positive role model. Reflective practice is the key to improving teaching skills and candidates should be encouraged to approach more experienced instructors for feedback and to experiment by modelling different behaviours with groups. The Mountain Training Climbing Wall Development Instructor Skills Checklist and Action Plan are useful tools for facilitating this process.

Assessors

Climbing Wall Development Instructors need to be effective educators with good planning, reviewing and communication skills. Assessors should be able to present scenarios for candidates to demonstrate these skills. Lesson plans and longer term programmes can be set as written tasks prior to the assessment course. These plans should have a clear structure describing aims and objectives, differentiated tasks, assessment criteria, review points, timings and teaching methodologies, for example.

A candidate should be able to communicate effectively with a range of students, employing different styles as appropriate, adapting their voice and body language accordingly. They should be proficient at checking for understanding from their students and be able to calibrate the appropriate level of challenge for each individual (e.g. choosing an appropriate style and grade of route). Setting practical scenarios where the assessor can observe these skills and judgements being performed will provide the evidence required to measure against the nationally recognised standard.

Top Tips

- Candidates should be encouraged to teach their fellow candidates during training and assessment to demonstrate their teaching skills. This can be prompted by setting scenarios
- Attending a Development Coach training course would be highly relevant for candidates preparing for a Climbing Wall Development Instructor assessment course.
- Getting candidates to prepare a session plan and then presenting them with students of a different ability to that of the brief will test their own assessment skills and adaptability.
- Teaching models that may be useful to refer to are: Kolb's learning cycle, Bloom's Taxonomy and Mosston's teaching styles. Good resources can be found on the web.

9-10 THE CLIMBING ENVIRONMENT

Trainers

Candidates need to be both prepared for, and able to adapt to, the local regulations of different climbing walls. Trainers need to present a wide range of issues that could either hinder access to, or dictate practice within, each centre. They should provide the candidates with enough examples of alternative techniques, practice and requirements in order to develop both an appreciation and a skill set to be able to operate within these differing demands.

Trainers should also point out the ethical and legal responsibilities that instructors have towards other people who may not even be part of their group. They should be made aware that their dynamic risk assessments should encompass all the people at a venue as well as environmental factors.

Assessors

Candidates should be familiar with both nationally agreed codes of practice and local regulations and requirements. They should be able to operate within these and adapt their practice accordingly. Assessors should test candidates in this area with detailed questioning, posing a range of scenarios. Candidates should have experience and knowledge of the wide range of UK and Irish climbing wall venues in both depth and breadth.

Busy climbing walls present their own hazards, particularly in relation to the teaching of lead climbing. Candidates should be able to demonstrate how they would risk assess and adapt their practice to accommodate these situations. Assessors can create scenarios to observe how candidates would adapt.

Top tips

- The Association of British Climbing Walls has produced a useful Code of Practice which can be downloaded from their website. It is often very beneficial to introduce a member of the climbing wall management to discuss issues surrounding instructing, duty of care, lead climbing and centre policies.
- Asking candidates on assessment to prepare for a 'first visit to the venue with a group' can present a good examination of their understanding of the procedures required to do this.