



**Mountain  
Training**

# Climbing Wall Development Instructor

Candidate handbook





# Contents

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1. Qualification pathway .....	4
2. Course structure .....	6
3. Course delivery.....	7
4. Awarding organisations .....	7
Syllabus and guidance notes .....	8
1. Equipment .....	8
2. Belaying .....	8
3. Personal climbing skills .....	9
4. Instructor responsibilities.....	11
5. Leadership and decision-making.....	13
6. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques .....	16
7. Hazards and emergency procedures .....	18
8. Teaching and learning skills.....	20
9. Etiquette and ethics.....	22
Appendix - Additional information .....	24



## Preface

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This handbook has been designed to support candidates through Mountain Training's Climbing Wall Development Instructor qualification. It contains useful information about the various stages in the qualification as well as the syllabus and guidance notes.

### Participation statement

Mountain Training recognises that walking, climbing, and mountaineering are activities that have associated risks. Mountain Training provides training and assessment courses and guidance to help instructors develop the skills to manage the risks associated with the environment in which they operate and to enable new participants to have positive experiences.

All instructors owe a heightened duty of care to the people they instruct, their colleagues, and the wider public who may be impacted by the instructor's actions.

Mountain Training qualified instructors will act in the best interests of their group, individual group members and others, and they will always act within their competence to prevent harm to them.

### Acknowledgements

Mountain Training would like to thank all the staff members and volunteers involved in the Climbing Awards Review 2014-2016.

Thanks also to the following individuals and organisations whose photographs bring the handbook to life: Bryn Williams, Jessie Leong, Karl Midlane and Rob Greenwood.



### Rock Climbing

Throughout this handbook there are references to Rock Climbing by Libby Peter which we publish to support developing rock climbers and instructors. It is packed with essential information and techniques and we have listed the relevant chapter(s) for each syllabus area.



# 1. Qualification pathway

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## 1.1 Introduction

The Climbing Wall Development Instructor qualification enables experienced climbing instructors to teach advanced indoor climbing techniques, including lead climbing, on indoor or outdoor artificial climbing walls and structures with fixed protection in the UK and Ireland.

## 1.2 Scope of the qualification

A qualified Climbing Wall Development Instructor can:

- Support an indoor climber's progression.
- Foster an indoor climber's independence.
- Teach indoor lead climbing skills.

### 1.2.1 Terrain

A qualified Climbing Wall Development Instructor can operate on:

- Indoor and outdoor artificial bouldering venues.
- Indoor and outdoor climbing walls.

### 1.2.2 Exclusions

The qualification does not cover:

- The rock climbing skills needed to climb and/or supervise others on natural crags and quarries (these are covered in the Rock Climbing Instructor scheme)
- The supervision of high or low ropes courses.



## 1.3 Stages in the qualification

### 1.3.1 Registration prerequisites

- You must have passed either the Climbing Wall Instructor or Rock Climbing Instructor assessment.

### 1.3.2 Training prerequisites

- You must be registered on the qualification.
- You must have an up-to-date logbook (preferably DLOG) with evidence of the following:
  - ❓ 50 led routes
  - ❓ Climbed at 3 different major climbing walls
  - ❓ Belayed a lead climber 50 times
  - ❓ 25 led routes at grade 6a/F6a on indoor climbing walls
  - ❓ 20 supervising sessions after passing either the Climbing Wall Instructor or Rock Climbing Instructor qualification. A session is at least an hour. At least 5 of these sessions must have personal reflective comments recorded on DLOG.

### 1.3.3 Consolidation period

Climb at a wide range of venues, both as an individual and when assisting with the supervision of others.

All but the most experienced candidates should 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 qualification.



**Mountain  
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Association

Our association can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications. We are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.



### 1.3.4 Assessment prerequisites

- You must have completed a Climbing Wall Development Instructor (or Climbing Wall Leading Award) training course or have been granted exemption from training.
- You must be familiar with the syllabus.
- You must have logged a minimum of 100 different lead climbs, at least half of which must be at grade 6a/F6a or above at 3 different major climbing walls.
- You must have assisted or observed at least 5 teaching leading sessions delivered by a suitably qualified person. These 5 sessions must have personal reflective comments recorded on DLOG.
- You must have physically attended and completed (i.e. not online) a first aid course which involved at least one full day or eight hours of instruction and included an element of assessment.

## 2. Course structure

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### 2.1 Training

Training will involve a minimum of 8 hours contact time.

Results: Completed, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show, Exemption.

### 2.2 Assessment

Assessment will involve a minimum of 6 hours contact time.

Results: Pass, Defer, Fail, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show.

There is no exemption from any element of the assessment.

Practical reassessments cannot take place within three months of the initial assessment to allow sufficient time for practice and preparation. All deferral reassessments must be completed within five years of the original assessment. Candidates may undertake two short reassessments after a defer result. Subsequently a full assessment must be undertaken.



## 3. Course delivery

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### 3.1 Training

Course directors must be existing Climbing Wall Instructor course directors and hold Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must hold Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Min course size: 2, max course size: 8, max ratio: 1:4

### 3.2 Assessment

Course directors must be existing Climbing Wall Instructor course directors and hold the Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must hold the Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Min course size: 2, max course size: 8, max ratio: 1:4.

## 4. Awarding organisations

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- Mountain Training Board Ireland
- Mountain Training Cymru
- Mountain Training England
- Mountain Training Scotland



# Syllabus and guidance notes

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## Technical competence

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Climbing Wall Development Instructors will have a sound knowledge of lead climbing on fixed protection on climbing walls and artificial structures. They will be able to identify and evaluate commonly used indoor climbing equipment and demonstrate its use to individuals during a lead climbing session. They will be personally competent in a range of indoor lead climbing techniques and be able to provide clear demonstration and effective tuition when teaching novice climbers to lead on fixed protection. They will be able to:

### 1. Equipment

1.1 Select and fit suitable climbing equipment for personal and client use when leading routes.

### 2. Belaying

2.1 Demonstrate a range of belaying techniques appropriate for lead climbing.





2.2 Demonstrate the skills of a competent lead belayer including holding falls and controlling lowers.

### 3. Personal climbing skills

3.1 Choose and lead routes at French 6a in a safe, competent and assured manner, using good technique.

3.2 Demonstrate ability to take leader falls in a controlled manner.

3.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the safety chain and fall factors with relevance to lead climbing.

## Guidance

As a Climbing Wall Development Instructor you may be asked for advice from novice lead climbers, experienced climbers and other instructors. Your significant experience will support you choosing appropriate equipment both for personal lead climbing and teaching leading to novices. When lead climbing, climbers need to have good fitting rock shoes and a well-fitting and specifically designed harness. The nature of lead climbing presents the possibility of falling, which can cause the climber to invert or pendulum resulting in the possibility of head and other injuries. Instructors should be fully conversant with the advantages and disadvantages of wearing a helmet while lead climbing.

Lead belaying with a range of different devices, including assisted braking ones and compatible karabiners and ropes may be new skills for a novice lead climber. Your familiarity with using such equipment is therefore very important and will help to shape the way you introduce new belaying skills which lend themselves more to lead climbing. You should be fully conversant with, and be accomplished at, dynamic belaying; paying out and taking in rope in anticipation of the climber's movements. You should be able to hold a fall to prevent the climber slamming against the wall. Consider how you might adapt dynamic belaying techniques to compensate for leaders and belayers of differing weights.

When lead climbing, elements of the safety chain include the rope attachment to the climber, the quick draws and top anchor and the belayer. Belayer position and equipment choice can compromise the safety chain when a climber is leading and falling. You must be able to recognise and make others aware of the risks posed and how to avoid them.



Chapter 6 Technical essentials

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing



## Key practice points

- Practise lead belaying with a range of different devices, including assisted braking devices and consider how you would teach correct use to novices.
- Familiarise yourself with different ropes suitable for lead climbing including their wear and handling characteristics.
- Gain experience of belaying at a competition. The mountaineering councils have details of regional competitions that welcome competent volunteer belayers.





# Management and decision-making



Climbing Wall Development Instructors should be able to independently organise, plan, manage and deliver safe and progressive learning-to-lead climbing sessions to novice climbers. They should be able to:

## 4. Instructor responsibilities

- 4.1 Explain their general responsibilities to the climber(s) and, where appropriate, to parents/guardians, the organising authority, committee or manager of the activity, facility management and users, local residents and the general public.
- 4.2 Explain their specific responsibilities to choose appropriate aims and objectives, to complete detailed preparations and ensure that the climbers are adequately equipped and briefed for the activity.
- 4.3 Demonstrate an understanding of current legislation and the legal responsibilities that relate to the duty of care to individuals and climber(s) under their charge, including safeguarding issues specific to supervising young people and vulnerable adults.
- 4.4 Demonstrate an awareness of the variety of barriers to participation, including mental and physical disability, ethnicity, fitness/health and be aware of the impact of various medical conditions.



- 4.5 Describe how to access national guidance on instructor responsibilities and good practice.

## Guidance

As a Climbing Wall Development Instructor, your responsibilities are increased from those of a Climbing Wall Instructor due to the nature of the activities you will likely be instructing.

Two-way communication between you and the climber(s) is crucial, not only to facilitate their progression but also from a safeguarding and duty of care perspective. Conversations with parents/guardians of young people about progressing to lead climbing may require different language or a different approach depending on whether they are climbers themselves; their understanding of the potential risks will vary so be prepared to explain them as clearly as possible. There is a lot of jargon in climbing, which it's easy to forget about the longer you've been using it, so be mindful of this in your conversations with parents/guardians and new climbers.



Chapter 6 Technical essentials

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

## Key practice points

- Explore what different organisations or employers expect from you as an instructor with regards to your responsibilities.
- Make yourself familiar with the legal aspects of teaching lead climbing, in particular to those under the age of 18. Similarly, become familiar with climbing walls' age policies with regard to lead climbing and parental consent.
- Research opportunities for developing skills or finding climbing companions that might be suitable for a range of climbers and individuals.



## 5. Leadership and decision-making

### 5.1 The leader demonstrates adaptable leadership behaviours and decision-making

5.1.1 Monitor the climber(s), environmental conditions (including when operating on outdoor artificial structures) and activity and can adapt their behaviours and decisions to meet ongoing safety, climber and task requirements.

5.1.2 Be consistent and confident in their decision-making to achieve positive outcomes and communicate these clearly to the climber(s).

### 5.2 Vision – The leader is a positive role model and aims to inspire others.

5.2.1 Articulate clear and agreed values for their climber(s), lead by example and behave how they want the climber(s) to behave.

### 5.3 Support – The leader creates a positive and supportive environment for the climber(s).

5.3.1 Recognise, respect and adapt to individual needs, differences, strengths and abilities.

5.3.2 Encourage independent learning; establish an environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities and provide clear and positive feedback to



support this.

#### **5.4 Challenge – The leader provides relevant and appropriately challenging experiences.**

5.4.1 Agree climber goals and calibrate the level of challenge to individual abilities and motivations.

5.4.2 Encourage and support the climber(s) to be part of the decision-making process and encourage them to overcome their own challenges.

#### **5.5 The leader understands the Mountain Training ethos of leadership and has developed their own. They should be able to:**

5.5.1 Articulate their own leadership ethos and beliefs along with those of Mountain Training.

5.5.2 Acknowledge and describe a range of leadership approaches, models and associated ethos.

## **Guidance**

There are seven components of leadership that contribute to the effectiveness of the instructor:

1. Instructor style: controlling versus non-controlling.
2. Decision making: what informs this and how to make them.
3. Instructor observations: what they should be and how to make them.
4. Instructor communication skills: verbal and non-verbal, listening.
5. Experience and ability: how this influences decision making.
6. Emotional intelligence: to support individuals
7. Group management: techniques, style and influences

Candidates should reflect on these when instructing climbers and seek to develop them over their career.

Judgement and decision making within a risk assessment framework is central to this qualification. Climbing Wall Development Instructors will have a range of techniques



through which climbers will learn the skills of leading; it will be up to you when, and if, they are ready to lead for real. You will use your experience to make sound, educated and informed decisions about what is right for the people you are teaching. It is important that you are clear about your duty of care when teaching lead climbing, especially with regard to minors. This level of judgement will only come through spending time in environments where new leaders are being taught and are experiencing their first leads.

Teaching leading is not something that can take place in one session. It is very important that you can plan and execute a series of progressive sessions that develop the skills required for leading in the people you are instructing. Further to this, remember that people develop at different rates and you will need to adapt to their needs. You should be calm and respectful of other users of the space and be prepared to follow instructions from the wall managers; even if it means you have to change your plans. Preparation time that includes speaking to the managers of any wall you are likely to be using to teach leading, and discussing your requirements, will always be time well spent.

Part of the process of teaching lead climbing will involve discussions around the risk assessment process and it is vital that this is brought into your progressive sessions. This will require you to be crystal clear when communicating. Key issues will include appropriate target setting and developing their understanding of risk and its mitigation. This includes the importance of safety at all times whether climbing or not.



Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Chapter 13 Inspiring others

## Key practice points

- Observe other instructors planning and delivering a session and review the decisions they made along the way. Why did they make those decisions? What would you have done?
- Get into the habit of using well thought-out, timed session plans and reviewing them after the session.
- Consider how you might discuss motivation and target setting with your climbers to make sure you are delivering appropriate sessions. The participants should be encouraged to form realistic aspirations.
- Explain your thinking and encourage and support climbers to be part of the decision-making process.
- Research how the level of your duty of care varies with the age of your students and how you might adapt your practice accordingly.



## 6. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

6.1 Deliver technical instruction to individuals and the group including:

6.1.1 Effective lead belaying.

6.1.2 The principles of appropriate route choice.

6.1.3 Use of leader-placed and in-situ quick draws.

6.1.4 Effective communication between leader and belayer.

6.1.5 Falling and holding a fall.

6.1.6 Lowering to the ground.

6.2 Teach and demonstrate basic lead climbing skills.

6.3 Demonstrate the use of appropriate climbing and non-climbing activities to develop lead climbing techniques.

6.4 Supervise climbers belaying and leading.





## Guidance

Through your own experience you will have built up a range of appropriate progressive exercises for teaching leading which involve both climbing and ground based activities into your session plans. These exercises should develop the skills referred to in section 6.1 and 6.2. The wider your knowledge and range of exercises here the more likely you are to be successful in achieving your aims of safely teaching sound leading skills.

As a Climbing Wall Development Instructor your ability to demonstrate and explain the significance of a climber's centre of gravity and its relevance to lead climbing is a fundamental element of teaching novices this new skill. For example; clipping the rope proficiently requires the adoption of the most stable and efficient position possible within reach of the quickdraw. This will be a new consideration for many climbers who have only top/bottom-roped and will take time to develop.

Smooth and fluid movement when bouldering or bottom-roping can be transformed to stiff and jerky movements when leading a route. Such radical changes in style can often be due to anxiety and you should be able to identify activities to help a novice lead climber transfer their movement skills to lead climbing situations. Climbing Wall Development Instructors should be able to support participants psychologically preparing to lead climb e.g. reducing anxiety by reducing the grade, providing calming breathing exercises etc.



## Chapter 13 Inspiring others

### Key practice points

- Practise teaching route reading to your climbers. Get them to mentally rehearse their route, including when they will clip, miming their movements, identifying key holds, rests and any challenging sections.
- Discuss the decision-making process with regards to letting novices lead for the first time with more experienced instructors.
- Don't forget to introduce backing off and down climbing as an important safety and tactical technique.



## 7. Hazards and emergency procedures

- 7.1 Identify appropriate and inappropriate areas of a wall to teach lead climbing and other associated skills.
- 7.2 Demonstrate an awareness of the hazards presented to other wall users by lead climbers and act in a way to keep these minimised.
- 7.3 Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate warming up and injury avoidance techniques for lead climbers.
- 7.4 Avoid common lead climbing problems.
- 7.5 Solve common lead climbing problems if they occur.

### Guidance

You have very limited control over a lead climber once they have left the ground. The whole point of a progressive, differentiated approach to teaching lead climbing is to avoid things going wrong in the first place. Making the decision to progress onto teaching lead climbing will require the instructor to be fully confident that the fundamental basics of tying in and belaying are well mastered and have been demonstrated in a competent manor.



Being able to foresee common issues in advance (such as Z clipping and back clipping) and choosing routes which minimise the chances of these occurring will allow the instructor to focus on the basics of lead climbing and not needing to overwhelm the client with excessive amounts of information before they set off. A progressive approach will allow the fine tuning of techniques and as the climber slowly gains experience you will be able to encourage them to identify potential issues themselves.

A key issue is ensuring that participants are realistic in their understanding of risk and its mitigation. Individuals must be encouraged to remain vigilant at all times whether directly involved in the climbing activity or not.



Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Chapter 20 The law and risk management

## Key practice points

- Make sure that you have 'checked out' that the climber and belayer are confident and competent at doing the tasks/techniques you are relying on them to do unsupervised.
- Develop the ability to focus on key risk areas whilst remaining situationally aware. For example, using the lead climbing area and appropriately graded routes may impact on other wall users, or they may impact you, depending on wall layout.





# Teaching and learning skills

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Climbing Wall Development Instructors need to give tuition and support to novice climbers who are learning and developing their climbing skills. They should be able to:

## 8. Teaching and learning skills

- 8.1 Demonstrate an ability to adapt the teaching style to meet individual needs.
- 8.2 Design and implement a plan to introduce progressive activities to ensure development of appropriate knowledge, skills and experience over time.
- 8.3 Observe and analyse individual performances to provide appropriate, effective and timely feedback for participants.
- 8.4 Evaluate a session and its outcomes for the climber(s) to inform the planning of future sessions.
- 8.5 Facilitate a review of their own performance in relation to the session to identify the lessons learned and inform the planning of future sessions.



## Guidance

Climbing Wall Development Instructors need to quickly build an environment of trust and confidence with their climbers so that they feel ready to tackle more challenging activities with greater personal responsibility. Age, ability, individual requirements, confidence and energy levels will all influence the best approach to achieving this with each individual climber.

Well-developed communication skills are essential. The foundations of effective teaching include the ability to create rapport, communicate at an appropriate level, use positive language, provide a variety of demonstration techniques, check for understanding through skilled questioning and give useful feedback and encouragement to individuals. In addition to these well-practised communication skills your accurate observation and assessment of individuals' abilities and confidence levels will form the basis of your sessions. The progressive nature of the activities you choose will build up an individual's skills in a safe and consolidated way.

Lead climbing requires many techniques to be acquired autonomously, combined and applied in a range of environments and situations. This can be challenging for the climber and therefore these techniques should be introduced progressively.

Individualised feedback significantly supports the developing climber. This may focus on technique, tactics, fitness or motivation depending upon the situation. By observing their strengths and weaknesses you can then prioritise feedback to ensure participants are safe and inspired/confident to progress further.

An effective Climbing Wall Development Instructor plans their sessions strategically, building up the skills and experiences of their students over time. The ability to review the outcomes of each session and to build upon these in the future is essential. Understanding that progress is rarely linear and that different climbers may require different strategies are key concepts at this level. You should understand how learning develops, and how this is applied to structuring activities at an appropriate level.



Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Chapter 20 The law and risk management

## Key practice points

- Review climber profiles before meeting them and discuss their experience and goals with them when you meet them.



- Build up your climbers' skills and risk levels gradually, consolidating each phase. Be aware of contextual interference when new environments appear to erode skill.
- Review progress with climbers and make sure they are taking on board the lessons being taught.
- Discuss next steps and provide signposting to ways ahead (beyond you if necessary).

## The climbing environment

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Climbing Wall Development Instructors should be informed and experienced in the indoor climbing wall environment, including both small and large scale (commercial) venues. They should be able to:

### 9. Etiquette and ethics

- 9.1 Operate a flexible programme of activities to accommodate other facility users.
- 9.2 Describe the site-specific requirements and agreements relating to teaching leading on different climbing walls and artificial structures.



## Guidance

Climbing wall managers have a duty of care to protect members of the public from foreseeable risks, be they climbers or spectators, and this extends to preparing codes of conduct, guidance and policy for wall users. Where these are absent Climbing Wall Development Instructors should be aware of good practice defined by the industry. Some climbing walls may require visiting instructors to produce specific documentation such as qualifications and insurance before commencing a session, therefore having prior knowledge of these requirements will help.

Having a good understanding of a climbing wall's layout, route selection and overall setup will give the instructor greater levels of knowledge to draw from when planning a lead climbing session with clients.

Teaching lead climbing involves the additional likelihood of both climbers and belayers moving quickly and unexpectedly. Party management must reflect this state of affairs bearing in mind the other wall users.

## Key practice points

- In communication with facility staff consider peak periods and how they might impact on the quality and safety of sessions. Consider how you might vary the location and/or activity to maximise learning and ensure safety during busy periods.
- Each time you visit a facility consider how the rules and policies vary with respect to lead climbing and instruction. Comparing and contrasting the differing approaches commonly gives food for thought.



## Appendix - Additional information

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### Personal reflective comments

Mountain Training presently requires assessment candidates to have reflective comments recorded in DLOG for the Rock Climbing Instructor, Climbing Wall Instructor and Climbing Wall Development Instructor. Reflecting on experience is an important part of an instructor's development. Although feedback from others can be very useful it is important we can also independently consider our experiences in relation to the desired outcome.

The key aim of undertaking these reflective comments is to identify and reflect on areas of practice from the relevant Mountain Training qualification syllabus, and supporting guidance notes, where there is a desire or perceived need to reflect on one's personal practice to develop fluency. Being able to effectively analyse experience can be challenging but a few critically analysed sessions are of great value in identifying potential improvements for the future. When making these comments candidates should ask themselves the following questions and outline their responses:

- What are the desired aims and objectives of the session?
- What were the actual outcomes of the session?
- What was successful and less successful (reference the relevant Mountain Training syllabus) in your delivery of the session?
- What you would change to improve the outcome?

Your responses can then be added into DLOG in the comments section of the relevant DLOG entry.

### Course delivery

Mountain Training courses are delivered by approved providers throughout the UK and Ireland. Providers of Climbing Wall Development Instructor courses will appoint a course director for each course.

Courses can be found by searching on the [Candidate Management System \(tahdah\)](#) or on [our website](#).

Your training and assessment result will be recorded on your account.





## Exemption from training

Experienced climbers who already have substantial personal climbing experience and experience of supervising groups on climbing walls may apply for exemption from training. To qualify for exemption candidates must, at the very least, meet the minimum experience requirements for attendance at an assessment course and demonstrate that they have received relevant training in the management of climbing groups and assistants.

Further details of the exemption process can be found on the Mountain Training website.

There is no exemption from assessment.

## Further experience

Once you have passed the Climbing Wall Development Instructor assessment you are responsible for remaining current and up to date with good practice for as long as you are using your qualification. Mountain Training would like to encourage you to regularly dedicate some time to your development both as a climber and as a Climbing Wall Development Instructor.

The Mountain Training Association is a membership association designed to support both trainee and qualified candidates by providing access to developmental workshops, conferences and peer learning events among other member benefits.

The responsibility for ensuring that instructor receive refresher training must lie with the provider of the service, or the individual in the case of self-employed leaders. Climbing Wall Instructors who wish to operate beyond the scope of their qualification(s) by virtue of their additional experience and/or training, for example a Rock Climbing Instructor taking a group climbing at a sport climbing quarry may be enabled to do so either through in-house training and/or within the context of a site specific scheme.

Mountain Training publishes a digital document called the National Guidelines which provides advice on good practice for anyone with a responsibility for climbing, walking and mountaineering related activities, and encompassing the principles of safety management.



Our association is a membership organisation that can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications.

As a membership association we are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.

### We can help you with:

- Big savings on clothing and equipment
- A wide range of accredited development workshops, events and opportunities for continuing personal/professional development
- Specialist mentoring for your qualification
- Regional networks and opportunities to build connections with others in the sector
- The Professional Mountaineer magazine offering advice, tips and guidance from experts and peers within the profession
- Specially negotiated rates for liability insurance for qualified members

Anyone can join from the moment they register for a Mountain Training qualification, and can join anytime when working towards a qualification or when qualified.

Join via your account on the Mountain Training Candidate Management System (Tahdah – CMS).

“The workshops I’ve done have been brilliant and have definitely made me a better leader” Alex, Association member.

“The Association offers an excellent range of CPD, which has given me a broader understanding of the role, skills and expertise required to be a great leader. Definitely recommend.” Charlie, Association member.