



Climbing Wall Instructor

Candidate handbook





Contents

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	10
3. Personal climbing skills	12
4. Background knowledge	13
5. Instructor responsibilities.....	16
6. Leadership and decision-making.....	18
7. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques	22
8. Hazards and emergency procedures	24
9. Managing/supervising other staff.....	25
10. Teaching and learning skills	27
11. Etiquette and ethics	29
 Appendix - Additional information	 31



Preface

This handbook has been designed to support candidates through Mountain Training's Climbing Wall Instructor qualification. It contains useful information about the various stages in the scheme 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: Jessie Leong, Karl Midlane, NICAS, Rick Singh, Rob Greenwood and The Adventure Brand.



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

1.1 Introduction

The Climbing Wall Instructor qualification enables experienced climbers to instruct climbing on purpose built artificial climbing walls and boulders in the UK and Ireland.

It is ideal for people who work at climbing walls or at venues with permanent or mobile climbing towers.

1.2 Scope of the qualification

A qualified instructor can:

- Teach climbing skills.
- Take people climbing and bouldering.
- Manage groups safely in these activities.

1.2.1 Terrain

A qualified Climbing Wall 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 qualification).
- The teaching or supervision of leading.
- The supervision of high or low ropes courses.
- The supervision of ice climbing walls, including dry tooling.
- Adaptive rope techniques for disabled climbers.



1.3 Stages in the qualification

1.3.1 Registration prerequisites

- You must be at least 17 years old (18 at assessment).
- You should have at least 6 months of experience of using a variety of climbing walls.
- You should have an interest in climbing and in supervising groups on climbing walls.
- You must be a member of a mountaineering council (British Mountaineering Council, Mountaineering Ireland, Mountaineering Scotland).

1.3.2 Training prerequisites

- You must be registered on the qualification.
- You must have an understanding of the wider sport of climbing.
- You must have an up-to-date logbook (preferably DLOG) with evidence of the following:
 - Visits to 3 different climbing walls on at least 15 different occasions; this must include at least one major public wall.
 - 10 led routes at grade 4/F4 on walls.

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 by 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.



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 be at least 18 years old to attend the assessment.
- You must have completed a Climbing Wall instructor (or Climbing Wall Award) training course or been granted exemption from training.
- You must be familiar with the syllabus.
- You must have logged a minimum of 30 personal climbing visits to at least three different climbing walls.
- You must have led a minimum of 40 climbs on climbing walls.
- You must be confident leading routes at grade 4/F4.
- You must have assisted in the supervision of at least 15 instructed sessions on at least two different walls, including a large public facility, in a variety of contexts. A session is a minimum of an hour. At least five of these 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 8 hours of instruction and included an element of assessment.

2. Course structure

2.1 Training

Training will involve a minimum of 12 hours contact time delivered over a minimum of two days. The course must visit two climbing walls, one of which must be a public facility.

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

3.1 Training

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

Min course size: 2, max course size: 12, max ratio: 1:6.

3.2 Assessment

Course directors must hold the Climbing Wall Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must hold the Climbing Wall Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

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

4. Awarding organisations

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



Syllabus and guidance notes



Technical competence

Climbing Wall Instructors will have a sound knowledge of climbing. They will be able to identify and evaluate commonly used indoor climbing equipment and demonstrate its use to individuals during a climbing session. They will be personally competent in a range of indoor climbing techniques and be able to provide clear demonstrations and effective tuition to novice climbers. Climbing Wall Instructors will be able to provide effective supervision and safe management of climbing participants. They will be able to:

1. Equipment

- 1.1 Select and fit suitable climbing equipment for personal and group use.
- 1.2 Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of personal climbing equipment and ensure appropriate use, care and maintenance in line with manufacturer's guidance.
- 1.3 Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of climbing wall equipment and ensure appropriate use of:



- 1.3.1 In-situ ropes
- 1.3.2 Auto-belays
- 1.3.3 Fixed matting
- 1.3.4 Holds, features and volumes
- 1.3.5 Anchors/lower offs and fixed equipment

Guidance

A sound knowledge of equipment is important for a Climbing Wall Instructor because it is an integral element of climbing safely. Misuse of climbing equipment can have dangerous consequences. As an instructor you are also likely to offer advice to novices on choice and suitability of equipment which cannot be done well if you do not have appropriate knowledge and understanding.

Climbing equipment such as footwear, helmets, harnesses (including full body harnesses), belay devices (including assisted braking devices) and karabiners come in a variety of different styles and sizes to suit different user groups. Some equipment is better suited for use with groups and some is more suitable for developing climbers; developing your technical competence will help you decide which is which and enable you to offer advice accordingly. For example, the decision-making process around when, and what type of helmet should be worn is important.

Any in-situ equipment in a commercial climbing centre should be fit for use and climbing wall managers will appreciate your support if items are starting to look worn. You may also find yourself operating in non-commercial settings and you will need to have thought about how you are going to make decisions about whether or not the in-situ equipment is in good working order.

Given the prevalence of auto-belays in many climbing walls and the unique nature of these devices, candidates should be familiar with their use and be aware that walls may have in place unique processes for managing access to, and use of, these devices.



Chapter 6 Technical essentials



Key practice points

- Practise fitting a range of different helmets and harnesses. Research why there may be differences in the overall design or features.
- Take time to familiarise yourself with your own equipment by reading the manufacturer's guidance label each time you buy a new piece of kit.
- Develop an effective methodology for demonstrating the fitting of equipment to a group of novices.
- Seek out guidance on the storage of climbing equipment in particular for ropes and harnesses.
- Be familiar with using an auto-belay device.



2. Belaying

- 2.1 Tie into the rope. Attach group members to the rope.
- 2.2 Demonstrate the use of different belay systems and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 2.3 Set up bottom rope systems and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.



- 2.4 Demonstrate the skills of a competent belayer including holding falls and controlling lowers.
- 2.5 Supervise others belaying.

Guidance

Belaying is a crucial element of roped climbing and belayer error is a potential cause of serious accidents. Your personal competence and ability to supervise others in this task is therefore of the utmost importance. You need to be familiar with ways of tailing and understand the consequences of not doing this properly.

There are many knots that can be used for tying in. You should consider the pros and cons of commonly used knots and their variations. You should consider when it may be acceptable to use a karabiner to connect the harness to the rope and the extra checks this requires.

Most of the time you, or the participant(s), will be belaying from the harness or rope tie-in loop but you need an understanding of when it might be appropriate to use a system involving sandbags or ground anchors.



Chapter 7 Indoor Climbing

Key practice points

- Develop an effective method for demonstrating how to tie onto the rope and how to belay to a group of novices.
- Practise different belaying methods suitable for use with a group of novices.
- Familiarise yourself with a range of different manual and assisted braking devices and understand their use and application.
- Be aware of the interaction between different ropes, karabiners and belay devices. Alongside the belayer's experience this should inform your choice of equipment used.



3. Personal climbing skills

- 3.1 Choose and lead routes suited to personal ability (minimum F4).
- 3.2 Demonstrate a basic understanding of the safety chain and fall factors.
- 3.3 Move with confidence on appropriate routes and boulder problems.

Guidance

Being a good role model is an essential part of being a Climbing Wall Instructor. When you are climbing, regardless of the grade on which you are operating, you should look smooth, relaxed, unhurried and able to climb with the minimum of effort by demonstrating good, appropriate, movement skills.

You need to understand how the risks of lead climbing might be managed differently by climber and belayer when the climber is near to the ground compared to when they are higher up a climb.

You also need to understand how the position of the belayer may affect the forces they feel in the event of a fall.



Chapter 7 Indoor Climbing

Key practice points

- When leading a route remember you are a role model. You will need to climb well, clip well and generally 'look the part'.
- Always 'buddy check' your partner before they climb.
- Practise lead climbing and lead belaying in different venues with different partners so that you can do this safely and efficiently should you need to put a rope up.



4. Background knowledge

- 4.1 Describe an awareness of the history, traditions and ethics of climbing in the UK and Ireland.
- 4.2 Describe the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its qualifications, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and the NICAS schemes.
- 4.3 Describe the development of climbing walls in the UK and Ireland.



4.4 Describe the structure of competition climbing.

4.5 Describe the grading systems used in the UK and Ireland.

Mountain Training

The network of awarding organisations who administer skills courses and leadership qualifications. Approved providers deliver the courses.

Mountaineering councils

The councils protect the interests of walkers, climbers and mountaineers and the cliffs, hills and mountains they enjoy.



Mountain Training Association

Mountain Training's membership association providing support and development opportunities for trainee and qualified candidates.



Guidance

Candidates registering on the Climbing Wall Instructor qualification will be a member of their mountaineering council, and so join a large community of climbers, walkers and mountaineers.

Mountaineering Scotland, Mountaineering Ireland and the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) publish good practice resources, deliver training events, and campaign to protect the freedoms of their members and the wider climbing, walking and mountaineering community, and so their work supports Mountain Training candidates.

In partnership with Mountain Training, the councils seek to help climbers develop their skills or undertaking Mountain Training qualifications. You could consider volunteering your time to support your mountaineering council to learn more about their work.

As a Climbing Wall Instructor, you should understand something of the history of climbing walls and how they fit into the wider world of competition climbing, outdoor climbing and mountaineering. In your role as a Climbing Wall Instructor you should be prepared to operate on walls of any style or age, using whatever grading system is in operation.

You should also have knowledge of how Mountain Training works and the qualifications they offer. You can then advise others for whom a Mountain Training qualification will support their own personal development.



Chapter 1 A brief history of UK and Irish climbing

Chapter 6 Technical essentials

Key practice points

- Consider taking part in a competition or volunteering for a mountaineering council competition during your consolidation period.
- Explore Mountain Training's and your mountaineering council's website to gain a greater understanding of their roles and the work they do.
- Familiarise yourself with [NICAS](#).



Management and decision making



Climbing Wall Instructors should be able to independently organise, plan, manage and deliver sessions to a wide range of participants, often with support from an assistant. They should be able to:

5. Instructor responsibilities

- 5.1 Explain their general responsibilities to the group and, where appropriate, to parents/guardians, the organising authority, committee or manager of the activity, facility users, local residents and the general public.
- 5.2 Explain their specific responsibilities to choose appropriate aims and objectives, to complete detailed preparations and ensure that the group is adequately equipped and briefed for the activity.
- 5.3 Demonstrate an understanding of current legislation and the legal responsibilities that relate to the duty of care to individuals and groups under their charge, including safeguarding issues specific to supervising young people and vulnerable adults.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 Describe how to access national guidance on instructor responsibilities and good practice.



5.6 Be able to evaluate the experience and signpost towards further participation.

Guidance

As a climbing instructor you have a clear duty of care to your groups, the level of which will vary according to the group members' age and experience. You owe a greater duty of care when you are acting in loco parentis with people under eighteen years of age. The indoor climbing environment presents hazards that may not be apparent to novice climbers, so participants and parents of children participating in this activity should be made aware of and accept these risks.

Many of your responsibilities as an instructor will be identified through preparation and planning and will likely include: parental consent (if participants are under 18), authority clearance (if required), personal and medical information, finances, insurance and transport. Employing/deploying organisations such as schools, Scouts, Girlguiding and local education authorities will have their own procedures in place to ensure that appropriate preparation has been undertaken. Your understanding of and ability to adapt to these procedures and underlying principles will enable you to independently prepare appropriate climbing activities.

The ability to prepare and motivate any group prior to the activity is important and you should seek opportunities to assess the participants in terms of their physical abilities as well as any equipment needs. If needed, a progression of climbs and venues may be used to develop participants' fitness and personal capabilities.

Your position of responsibility extends beyond the activity itself and participants may look to you for guidance on how to continue climbing independently or to develop their skills further. A rounded knowledge of suitable opportunities is therefore very useful.

Each and every climbing wall will have its own operating procedures. These do have much commonality, but you should look out for any special conditions which apply to each venue. The [Association of British Climbing Walls](#) may be a good source of information.



Chapter 20 The law and risk management

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 taking people climbing, particularly those under the age of 18.
- Research opportunities for developing skills or finding climbing companions that might be suitable for a range of groups and individuals.



6. Leadership and decision-making

6.1 The leader demonstrates adaptable leadership behaviours and decision-making.

6.1.1 Monitor the group, environmental conditions and activity, and can adapt their behaviours and decisions to meet ongoing safety, group and task requirements.

6.1.2 Be consistent and confident in their decision making to achieve positive outcomes and communicate these clearly to the group.

6.2 **VISION** – The leader is a positive role model and aims to inspire others.

6.2.1 Articulate clear and agreed values for their group; lead by example; and behave how they want the group to behave.

6.3 **SUPPORT** – The leader creates a positive and supportive environment for the



group.

- 6.3.1 Recognise, respect and adapt to individual needs, differences, strengths and abilities.
- 6.3.2 Encourage independent learning; establish an environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities and provide clear and positive feedback to support this.

6.4 CHALLENGE – The leader provides relevant and appropriately challenging experiences.

- 6.4.1 Agree group goals and calibrate the level of challenge to individual abilities and motivations.
- 6.4.2 Encourage and support the group and individuals to be part of the decision-making process and encourage them to solve their own problems.

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

- 6.5.1 Articulate their own leadership ethos and beliefs along with those of Mountain Training.
- 6.5.2 Acknowledge and describe a range of leadership approaches, models and associated ethos.

Guidance

Climbing instructors need to demonstrate the basic skills and decision-making of adaptive leadership. They should have a well-researched plan for their group which incorporates factors such as the groups' abilities and needs, the weather and climbing conditions (if the artificial wall is outdoors), as well as the climbing venue and intended climbs. What is most important is to match their leadership choices with the desired outcomes for the group.

In spite of the best made plans, things can and do change; the weather, the group, how busy the venue is, etc. A good instructor will notice, and be on the lookout for, these changes before a problem arises and adapt their approach accordingly. For example: if the climbing wall is very busy, you may need to adapt the session to make use of available space.

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 groups and seek to develop them over their career.

Underpinning the role of an instructor are the values, beliefs, and ethos that shape every individual's view of what leadership should be. All instructors tend to have preferred behaviours (leadership styles) that are heavily influenced by these and their personality traits. Instructors will need to adapt their preferred behaviour to an appropriate set of actions required to balance the needs of both the situation and the group.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' model of transformational leadership provides a framework that instructors can use to plan, execute and review their leadership behaviours. In this way, groups who receive the right balance of the three categories can be encouraged to perform beyond their own expectations. Transformational leadership is a model of positive behaviours (known by the mnemonic INSPIRE) that instructors can use to promote the best outcomes for their groups:

Inspire and motivate your followers with a unified vision.

Nurture an environment of team-focused goals

Set the example you want to see in your followers.

Praise and give constructive feedback to help your followers develop.

Insist on setting high standards, relative to each individual.

Recognise and respond to each individual's needs.

Encourage followers to create and implement their own solutions.

Instructors need to develop trust amongst their group. This requires an appropriate



balance of consultation, empathy and instruction to engineer success. Effective instructors will, for example, adapt the way they communicate to best suit their group and will give different degrees of responsibility to groups of varying ability and experience.



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?
- Make sure your group is ready to receive instruction when you need to give it – gather them together and make sure they are all looking at you before you speak.
- Challenge by choice. Calibrating and establishing agreed goals is the art of good leadership. Too low and they will become disengaged, too high and you will lose their trust.
- Praise in public, give constructive criticism in private. Call people aside if you need to challenge their behaviour, unless it was directed at someone else.
- Explain your thinking. Group members have a right to know why you are telling them to do something; but retain your authority.





7. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

- 7.1 Deliver technical instruction to individuals and the group including:
 - 7.1.1 Choice and fitting of suitable harnesses.
 - 7.1.2 Attaching the rope to the harness.
 - 7.1.3 Effective belaying.
- 7.2 Demonstrate the use of bouldering activities with groups, using appropriate games and activities, including setting simple boulder problems.
- 7.3 Teach and demonstrate fundamental climbing movement skills.
- 7.4 Supervise a group of novice climbers in the following activities:
 - 7.4.1 Belaying and tying-in.
 - 7.4.2 Climbing
 - 7.4.3 Bouldering

Guidance

Well thought out demonstrations, appropriate to the group, are essential for novices. To be able to give effective demonstrations you must ensure that you know your subject well and have practised demonstrating each skill, ideally with feedback and criticism. See also syllabus section 10 Teaching and learning skills.

Climbing games can be a great way of motivating groups and getting everybody involved at a level which suits them. Think about why you've chosen any games being used and how they relate to the aims of your session and desired outcomes.

Your training course will cover teaching movement skills so that your group can enjoy their climbing session to the full. The emphasis should be placed on getting individuals actively involved in the activity rather than their long-term development. For a more in-depth appreciation, consider attending a FUNdamentals of Climbing workshop delivered by the mountaineering councils and the Foundation Coach qualification, all of which will develop these skills in much greater depth.

Supervising roped climbing and bouldering requires excellent organisation skills, clear communication and constant vigilance. When the group is roped climbing, the belayers'



actions and every connection in the safety chain will be the key focal points for the instructor. When the group are bouldering, minor injuries can be more prevalent, making risk assessment and structured session planning essential. You will need to know when and how to spot individuals to support their safety.

Some key components of effective instruction and supervision include:

- Safety briefing and warm-up, including boundaries for the group (height and descent style if bouldering, attention when belaying, activity areas, behaviour).
- Instructor 'position of most usefulness', where you can observe and support participants.
- Participant engagement through structured activities.
- Clear landing zones when bouldering. Also note: while spotting is rarely needed indoors, the instructor should be prepared to assist climbers during critical moments. Seek consent for any physical support of climbers.

Further guidance on supervising indoor and outdoor bouldering sessions can be found on our [guidance page](#).



Chapter 4 Movement skills

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Key practice points

- Practise setting clear height boundaries when briefing a group about traversing, as ascent tends to be the human default setting.
- Observe experienced bouldering instructors – how do they encourage participants to climb down, hang and drop, rather than jump?
- Consider how your position of most usefulness will differ when the group are bouldering and roped climbing.
- Develop systematic ways of fitting helmets and harnesses. Watching experienced instructors working is the best way to do this. Instruction needs to be clear, concise and accompanied by flawless demonstration.
- Consider how you instruct individuals to belay. Your instruction should be applicable to the group and situation. Experiment with different devices and strategies to ensure



you are able to cope in different circumstances. Also consider using assisted braking devices in the teaching progression.



8. Hazards and emergency procedures

- 8.1 Identify appropriate and inappropriate areas of a wall for group use.
- 8.2 Describe the hazards presented to other wall users by the actions of a group, and act in such a way that these are minimised.
- 8.3 Demonstrate an understanding of warming up and injury avoidance techniques.
- 8.4 Avoid common roped climbing problems.
- 8.5 Solve common problems if they occur.
- 8.6 In the case of an incident describe how to call for relevant assistance.

Guidance

Climbing Wall Instructors need to be very mindful of the environment within which they are operating. The physical space may not have been designed with your purposes in mind and you will need to adapt your management of your group accordingly.



Outdoor structures are exposed to the full effects of weather conditions and instructors should be mindful of this when planning climbing sessions. Temperature changes, even indoors, can loosen holds if they are not pinned.

You must have a clear grasp of the principles of warming up. You need to have a range of activities in your repertoire so you can work effectively with a variety of age groups and with people of differing levels of mobility.

Given the prevalence of auto-belays in climbing walls and the unique nature of some of the incidents that have occurred, candidates should be familiar with identifying and mitigating common hazards such as snag hazards on the climber, helmet hangup, climber not clipping in to auto-belay, being lowered side-on to the wall as well as not letting go of the auto-belay attachment karabiner until it is clipped back to its 'anchor'.

In typical bottom roping situations roped problems are very rare. Focus on belaying and tying on to the rope as your first priority. Training and practising lowers low down on a route will prevent many issues. If you need extra security then a knot behind the belay plate, on the brake rope, will give you peace of mind whilst you consider your actions.

Problems should be foreseen and avoided by sound training, clear briefs and two-way communication. There is no need for a Climbing Wall Instructor to carry out rope rescues on the wall without further, site-specific, training.



Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Chapter 19 Incidents, accidents and getting help

Key practice points

- Consider how you would adapt your practice and briefings to the group to avoid common problems, for example, supporting a light belayer/heavy climber, a timid climber, a noisy climbing venue etc.
- Most climbing accidents happen in bouldering walls – don't relax here. Focus on how experienced instructors keep control and build up participants' skills and safety.



9. Managing/supervising other staff

- 9.1 Explain the role and scope of an assistant. Describe the opportunities and liabilities presented by using an assistant in a session.
- 9.2 Manage an assistant.

Guidance

An assistant is any person who supports an instructor in the delivery of their session but who does not direct or make decisions about the management of the session.

Assistants and unqualified staff can be of enormous benefit to a session provided that they are managed appropriately (read our [guidance on managing assistants](#)). They can support the talented, those with individual requirements, their peers, or their own students and children, and can be powerful role models for the participants. An assistant can help further with clearly defined technical roles such as fitting personal climbing equipment and backing up belayers. However the judgements as to what activities are to be undertaken, and how they are to be managed, remain with the instructor.

Assistants and other staff come with a wide range of experience and competencies and you are wholly responsible for assessing these. If in doubt you should not use an assistant and not be compelled to work with them either. By definition an assistant or an



unqualified member of staff cannot work independently and you are responsible for the group and the actions of an assistant at all times. All assistant deployment should be risk assessed before each session begins.

It is essential that assistants are appropriately supervised by you, the instructor, so that there can be constant communication and guidance given.

It is not possible to give specific guidance on instructor/student ratios with assistants as this will vary with the situation. For example, a disabled climber may benefit from the support of two or more assistants working very closely with an instructor whilst a talented academy group may benefit from an assistant working in sight of the instructor in a bouldering wall. The qualified instructor remains ultimately responsible for the group and must always be in a position to intervene if necessary.



Chapter 13 Inspiring others

Key practice points

- Practise briefing an assistant about their role and remit.
- Practise maintaining a position of maximum effectiveness, keeping assistants within sight and easy communication at all times.
- Get into the habit of discussing your session with an assistant to give and receive feedback.





Teaching and learning skills



Climbing Wall Instructors will frequently need to give tuition and support to a range of climbers from novices to experienced practitioners in a range of climbing related techniques. They should be able to:

10. Teaching and learning skills

- 10.1 Demonstrate an ability to adapt the teaching style to meet group needs.
- 10.2 Identify and use appropriate tasks to develop safe group activity.
- 10.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for evaluating a session and success of the outcome.

Guidance

Climbing Instructors need to quickly create an environment of trust and confidence within their group so that participants feel safe and comfortable to tackle new and challenging activities. Age, ability, individual requirements, confidence and energy levels amongst the group will influence the best approach to achieve this.



Good communication skills are key. 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 communication skills, effective teaching requires instructors to be able to observe and assess participants' abilities and confidence levels. They then need to calibrate the appropriate level of challenge and structure a task to stimulate and stretch the climber but not to intimidate or defeat them. Instructors also need to be adaptive in their approach. If a particular technique or activity is not working well then they should adapt their approach to better suit the needs of the group.

Remember that assistants can offer a valuable resource to support you with your teaching. Assistants are often connected with the group and will know about their individual needs and potentially how best to deliver information to them.

All instructional sessions are different due to the nature of the group and the conditions of the day. Instructors should reflect upon the outcome of each session and consider changes of style or content that may improve the outcomes of the next one.

Effective Climbing Wall Instructors recognise that prior planning and good structuring of sessions commonly results in participants having a safe and enjoyable time. In many ways, preparation is the hallmark of high quality instruction. As a Climbing Wall Instructor you may be required to work with a group over a number of sessions. You should be able to plan a series of sessions which might be spread over a number of weeks. Each session will need clear objectives to achieve the overall aims of the course.

Time management is always a balancing act for instructors; being well prepared before a session is key. The pace of a session at a climbing wall can be relatively fast. You will need to be able to adjust the time allowed for particular activities within a session in order to respond to the needs of your group.



Chapter 13 Inspiring others

Key practice points

- Observe how other instructors plan and structure climbing sessions based around their clients' aims and objectives and how this might change with different circumstances.



- Learn some effective games/activities to engage learners at the beginning of a session and to enable you to observe group dynamics.
- Make sure everyone can see and hear you clearly.
- Experiment with different ways of checking for understanding.
- Practice different delivery styles and think about when/with whom you might use them.

The climbing environment



Climbing Wall 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:

11. Etiquette and ethics

- 11.1 Operate a flexible programme of activities to accommodate other facility users.
- 11.2 Describe the site-specific requirements and agreements relating to different climbing walls and artificial structures.



Guidance

You must manage your group in a manner which shows respect to other users of the space. You will also need to be mindful about where you would like non-participants to locate themselves and the level of interaction you are prepared for them to have with the group. You will need to be very clear with your group about expectations and be prepared to enforce these expectations in a way which supports their learning and does not diminish the experience for anyone else in the same area.

Key practice points

- Always talk to the management of a climbing wall about suitable areas to manage your group – particularly in a bouldering wall.
- Be considerate to other climbers who may wish to climb routes/problems your group are using. Don't monopolise an area for long.
- Don't leave equipment on the ropes or lying around on the floor/matting.



Appendix - Additional information

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 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 results 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 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 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.



Mountain Training

Association

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.