

**A formal qualification for Coasteering Guides
– the view from the Adventure Activities Licensing Service**

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Coasteering is now in an almost unique position by having no formal qualifications structure. Most activities have a single recognised structure while some activities (such as Mountain Biking Leadership or Stand Up Paddleboarding) have two or more. This duplication does not seem to cause many problems for instructors or employers, nor does it cause much confusion. The absence of awards for Coasteering Guides, however, is causing both problems and confusion and this is likely only to increase.

We have already started to see a number of Coasteering Guides Training and Assessment courses. Search on line for 'Coasteering Guides Training' and the results run to several pages! With no official bench-mark it is impossible for prospective guides or employers to know what can be assumed from a guide who has been trained and assessed by these various courses. This proliferation of training and assessment courses with unknown provenance make it very difficult for all concerned.

Many providers use in-house training and assessment by Technical Advisors for their Coasteering Guides, as they do for many other activities. However, it is difficult to define the level of experience and other relevant qualifications that would be required to have confidence in the Technical Advisor. AALS inspectors have developed a diagnostic tool to help with this but it is far from perfect. (Copy available)

It would not be necessary for NCC to run all Training and Assessment courses. In fact, it would not be necessary for them to run any of them. Most NGB courses are run on a franchise basis, or have an Approved Providers scheme, with the NGB conducting periodic moderation visits.

Because of the highly site-specific nature of Coasteering NCC may decide to look at a 4 Stage process:

Stage 1: Basic Coasteering Guide (BCG) Training. NCC could determine course pre-requisites (which could include a valid 2-day first aid qualification and a life-saving award), content (this already exists with the NCC Coasteering Guides Syllabus and Good Practice Guidance) and crucially the duration. I would suggest that the pre-requisites should be such that the training course is no more than 12 contact hours spread over a minimum of 2 days. I would envisage NCC approving quite a few providers to deliver this. Many of the course available on line, for example, could be considered.

Stage 2: Basic Coasteering Guide (BCG) Assessment. As above, NCC could determine the ground rules. It would be prudent to require a candidate to have a different trainer and assessor. There could be fewer Assessment courses than Training courses, and perhaps quite a lot fewer.

Stage 3: Consolidation of Experience (CoE). NCC could set a minimum number of sessions for the Trainee Guide (TG) to act as an Assistant Guide over a given period of time. (Say, 10 sessions over a minimum of 6 months.)

Stage 4: Site Specific Induction (SSI) by an **employer**. This then becomes largely self-policing since it is the employer and not the Guide who carries all the Health and Safety responsibility. It is simply not in the employers' interest to have poorly inducted Guides. They suffer reputational loss for poor quality standards and face H&S enforcement for poor safety standards. NCC need not be involved other than to state that the BCG Award is not valid without evidence of the minimum requirements for Consolidation of Experience and evidence of an appropriate SSI. In this way NCC need not carry responsibility for the deployment of Guides. NCC may, however, decide to keep a Register of Award Holders.

I would suggest that the BCG Award lapses if a Guide leads fewer than a set number on sessions in a given time period. (Say, 10 sessions over a 3-year period). Minimum bureaucracy for NCC, no cumbersome re-validation processes etc which, in AALS experience, are of limited value anyway for maintaining either good quality or safety of delivery. However, active Guides could be encouraged (or perhaps required) to attend NCC-run Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops. They could, perhaps, be required to maintain first aid and/or life-saving awards.

Complaints about unsafe Guiding practices could be referred to AALS (if at an AALA Licensed centre) or referred to the Local Authority (Environmental Health Department) if not.

NCC may at some point decide to explore an Advanced Coasteering Guide (ACG) award. At that point, NCC may look to requiring an ACG to run BCG Training and/or Assessment Courses but that could be quite some way off.