



Safety Advice for Coasteering Providers

www.nationalcoasteeringcharter.org.uk

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Developed by members of the National Coasteering Charter.

An easy to follow guide to developing safe coasteering practice.

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Coasteering:

The National Coasteering Charter (NCC) defines the activity of coasteering as:

An activity that includes swimming, jumping, scrambling, and/or traversing along and in the fore-shore region of a coastline under the guidance of a coasteering guide. When participating in the activity of coasteering, participants should wear an appropriate wetsuit, personal floatation device, helmet, and closed-toe footwear that is secure to the foot.

NOP/SOP: *Normal Operating Procedures or Standard Operating Procedures*; A set of procedures or guidelines that outline the step-by-step instructions that assist team members to perform tasks consistently when dealing with a given activity.

Throughout this document, the term “NOP” is used.

EAP: An *Emergency Action Plan* should give specific instructions on the action to be taken in the event of any incident, accident, or emergency situation.

Risk assessment (RA):

Risk assessment identifies possible hazards, their likelihood, and consequences (the risk), and the steps taken to manage the risk.

Outline of the NCC Guide award structure:

On 1st April 2022, the NCC launched the Guide award scheme. The scheme provides the training and assessment of candidates in a range of personal and group management skills in a coasteering environment.

The training course is delivered by assigned providers over a two-day period with the assessment taking place over one day. The award is a skill- and competency-based scheme and not a specific location-based award. On successful completion of the award, candidates will have been trained and assessed in a range of techniques and personal/group skills. They will need to undertake further site-specific inductions with their deployers to actively undertake the guiding of groups.

<https://www.nationalcoasteeringcharter.org.uk/coasteeringguideaward/>

NCC coasteering participation statement:

The NCC recognises that well managed Coasteering activity reduces the risk of serious injury or death to an acceptable level. It does not remove it entirely. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

Deployer: A member of staff within an organisation or company who has responsibility for allocating staff members/guides to a session.

Provider: A company or organisation that offers coasteering as an activity to clients.

Guide: A provider staff member who is approved to lead a coasteering session.

Participants: People taking part in the organised session under the leadership of a guide.

Personal protective equipment (PPE): Personal protective equipment is protective clothing, helmets, buoyancy aids, or other garments or equipment designed to protect the wearer's body from injury or infection.

INTRODUCTION

The fourth issue of this guidance, developed by active coasteering providers, is intended to be a practical easy-to-follow advice, assisting providers to continue to develop and promote safe coasteering practice. This advice has been developed to inform providers of the suggested minimum operating standards.

The advice is split into two sections: key principles and managing risk in practice.

The key principles cover approaches to risk assessment and management. The models and references used refer to common and accepted approaches within the outdoor sector and those recognised by regulators and safety organisations.

The practice section is based on collective experience and interpretation. Although these may not fit every provider exactly, it is expected they will provide a useful basis for you to build a robust safety strategy and working practice.

Note from the NCC committee: We hope that the following information is useful and that you will use this when planning and developing your activities. As ever we would like to know what you think of this document, and the work of the NCC; you can make contact via your local regional representative and/or via the website. We would welcome your involvement as a charter member, a future regional representative, or a committee member.

STATUS OF THIS GUIDANCE

Previous versions of this advice were created with technical input from members of the National Water Safety Forum and NWSF Recreation Group, of which members included: RNLI, RoSPA, MCA, RLSS UK, SLSGB, AALS, AAIAC, and coasteering providers. The Fourth Version has been updated by the NCC in consultation with its members and builds upon previous versions.

The following should not be considered definitive, nor exhaustive. The compulsion for the provider to follow this guidance is to ensure that the provider is aligned with current practice in the provision of coasteering.

The NCC is the main reference point for advice on safe coasteering. This information has been developed as industry-led advice. The guidelines within this document are intended for organised coasteering activities taking place in and around the intertidal zone.

The information contained within this document is intended to be a useful aid to managing participants' safety during a coasteering session, it is not a replacement for providers' safety frameworks. Providers are expected to develop their own robust safety management frameworks. Further, this advice has been created to complement and align, where possible, with other relevant safety advice and practices that the provider may undertake in their range of activities.

The use of the terms: should, consider, good or best practice are the opinions of the authors only, and as such, do not carry any legal compulsion. Where existing UK law, regulation, or code exists, these are highlighted.

Part One—Key Principles

DEVELOPING A WELL-MANAGED ACTIVITY

Leading coasteering requires sound judgement while operating within a dynamic environment. This judgement can be developed through a mix of structured education and qualifications/awards, and, as with many outdoor environments, relevant and recent experience is a critical measure for managing risk.

A *“willingness to learn and commitment to continuous improvement”* are essential components for providers, deployers, and guides.

In this section, we highlight a few key principles and approaches that are common and accepted as good practice.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Activity risks are dynamic. Because the activity of coasteering takes place in a highly dynamic environment, the assessment of risk is dependent on being able to assess several variables. The interaction between the participant, sea conditions, weather, and physical features could be seen as a very complex assessment.

Relevant and timely experience is critical. In a led activity, the key factor in being able to manage dynamic risks comes from the experience, competence, knowledge, and judgement of the provider and guide. The duty of care bestowed upon the guide is executed by their ability to continually assess the participant and environment, and reasonably adapt the experience, based on their competence and knowledge to make good decisions.

Risk and benefits in context. It is not possible, nor desirable, to eliminate all risks in coasteering. It is, however, possible to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. RoSPA terms this approach: “As safe as necessary not as safe as possible”.

Water as a resource for recreation and leisure purposes presents the attraction of challenge and of being at one with nature. All adventurous activity has an element of danger; adventure infers that there is an element of the unknown, and it is this that presents the biggest challenge.

The issue is how best to balance the need to offer excitement and the feeling of potential danger, with methods to judge the optimum balance between the benefits and the risks of the activities available.

Informed consent for both guides and participants. Participants and guides should have access to appropriate information to make an informed decision, acknowledge that risks exist, and have the opportunity not to participate. This approach allows the participant to take some responsibility in partnership with the provider/guide for their own safety within a challenging environment.

Additional and careful thought needs to be given as to the extent of a child/under 18’s ability to make these judgments, and how the information is given to and accepted by the participant and their parent or legal guardian. The deployer should recognise this within their safety framework.

The act of risk assessment is the core and often the best/first step to take when managing activity safety. It is important to remember that it is one step of a wider ongoing approach.

The Health and Safety Executive sets out a simple step-by-step guide to conducting a risk assessment (RA):

1. Identify hazards.
2. Decide who might be harmed and how.
3. Evaluate risks, evaluate existing precautions, and determine if more is required.
4. Record findings.
5. Review or establish a review process.

Irrespective of the risk-assessing model undertaken, providers must have a clear methodology for managing the risks associated with coasteering. Written documentation that outlines the steps taken to identify, manage, review, and, importantly, act upon significant risks gives the most auditable mechanism to prove that a provider has been diligent.



HSE: Plan, Do, Check, Act model (HSG65)

Image credit: HSE

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/steps-needed-to-manage-risk.htm>

It is important to remember that the critical aspect is what you do to identify and manage the significant risks, rather than what you write. Depending on the size of your organisation, it is important to have both the action and document.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON RISKS IN COASTEERING?

It is not possible to identify every risk, at every site, for every participant. Providers will need to identify their site-specific hazards. However, there are common risks that can be themed into three groups.

These are impact, drowning, and environmental effects. Some examples of the factors within these themes are as follows:

IMPACT

- Rock falling from above.
- Falling or slipping onto rocks below.
- Stepping/falling onto submerged rocks.
- Jumping from a height into the water.
- Being swept onto rocks.

DROWNING

- Entrapment under the water.
- Repeated submersion in waves or sea swell.
- Unpredicted sea state changes.
- Being swept out to sea.
- Tidal cut-off.
- Getting caught in rip currents.
- Sudden immersion into cold water.
- Lack of water confidence.
- Group separation.
- Near drowning.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

- Panic (being overwhelmed by environmental stimulus).
- Immersion hypothermia (cold water).
- Exposure hypothermia (cold air).
- Exposure to high temperatures, hyperthermia, sunburn, and dehydration.
- Wildlife contacts, i.e., weaver fish stings, jellyfish.

These risks can be thought about further from four potential contexts:

- Where there is no (realistically) foreseeable possibility of a participant ending up in the water.
- Where participants may end up in the water.
- Where participants will end up in the water.
- Incidents that occur on the approach to and from the coasteering venue.

Risk assessments are a tool used to document the process of identifying and mitigating risk. There are 3 commonly used forms of risk assessment:

- Generic RA:** covers the general risks that may be associated with an activity or event such as drowning, impact with rocks, changeable sea conditions, etc.
- Site Specific RA:** this document would deal with a specific site or activity location and usually covers risks that may occur at that location such as access issues, local wildlife considerations, and local currents.
- Dynamic RA:** this is the continuous process of identifying hazards, assessing risk, taking action to eliminate or reduce risk, as well as monitoring and reviewing any given activity or event.

The development of effective risk assessments and NOPs will require a thorough knowledge and understanding of all these areas as a minimum. Therefore, the individual or organisation assessing this risk must be able to demonstrate competence in being able to do so.

Tip: Key questions to ask yourself when risk assessing: *Does my assessment(s) cover the full range of things I actually do? And what are my critical risks?* For example: Does it consider travel with participants to the location? Does it consider what I do when there are adverse or marginal weather conditions? Does it consider the “what if” scenario?

A simple opportunity to establish this could be at a training or early season preparation day: have someone just note/record all the key phases/activities during the day, then go back and check if they carried any significant risks, and subsequently, if you have assessed and recorded these.

CONTROL MEASURES

Control measures are used to reduce or remove the potential harm or impact. There are a range of things that should be considered when choosing appropriate controls such as:

- Where possible, eliminating reasonable risk.
- Avoiding the risk (e.g., by using alternative areas or venues for an activity).
- Using appropriate group management strategies (e.g., safety briefings, setting up areas of safety on a route).
- Having appropriate training and competence of the activity leaders, this may also include external input from a technical advisor or expert (as per AALA guidance).
- Issuing appropriate PPE (e.g., wearing a PFD to reduce the risk of drowning).

Variances in participant, location, and environment may require adaptation or additional control measures, and thus this list should not be seen as exhaustive. Good practice relating to these measures is expanded upon in the practice section of this document.

NORMAL OPERATING PROCEDURES

Many elements can be put into an NOP and like risk assessments, there may be “generic” NOPs and more detailed “site/venue specific” NOPs that detail specific information about that site/venue. Deployers are expected to add their site-specific practices and processes into their NOPs.

The following is a list of things, in no particular order, that would normally be found in an NOP but is not exhaustive:

- Participant water confidence and fitness requirements.
- Medical considerations of participants.
- Age requirements.
- Group competence.
- Guides competence, knowledge, and training.
- Personal protective equipment required.
- Guides’ safety equipment.
- Forecasting conditions.
- Safety briefing points.
- Route options.
- Safe operating conditions.
- Communications.
- Guide/participant ratio (including lone guiding and/or use of assistants).
- Session duration.
- Route recording.
- Pre-checking entry from height.
- Alternative exits.
- Stopping or adapting the session.
- Remoteness of venues.

USE OF EMERGENCY ACTION PLANS AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) and contingency plans are important risk controls. In the event of an incident—perhaps a participant sustaining an injury that affects their ability to continue, it is essential that the group as a whole can be provided for.

Because EAPs often require a rapid response to complex situations, it is often beneficial to develop these in liaison with other services (e.g., RNLI). It is highly recommended to test the EAP during guide training using a scenario-based approach. In addition, it is important to ensure that there are effective means of communication within the immediate reach of the guide. Information relevant to the EAP should be shared with the group prior to the activity commencing.

EAPs can also be led by shore-based staff; for example, an overdue group, or lack of expected communication could initiate an escalating EAP to ensure there is an appropriate response.

Examples of things to consider when developing an EAP:

- Who takes control in an emergency.
- Evacuation points.
- Safe areas for the group.
- Which emergency service to liaise with in the event of an emergency.
- Communication methods.
- Locations where communication is not possible.
- Aftercare procedures.

Contingency plans reduce the likelihood of a group continuing in less-than-ideal conditions. For example, conditions being different than expected, or overcrowding of the selected venue may trigger an opportunity for the guide to select a different opportunity.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF RISK

An important factor in managing risk effectively is the fifth step of the HSE process: review.

In coasteering, there are some easy ways to undertake this critical phase.

Debrief and lessons learned:

- From the group, there should be an opportunity for each participant to provide feedback or thoughts on their activity session, including any near misses, in a discrete way.
- Guides should be able to feedback and review coasteering sessions and have the opportunity to learn from sessions and deal with any specific issues and/or themes that become apparent.
- In a more formal way, all accidents and near misses should be logged and reported per all current regulations and legislation. A provider should develop a collaborative culture of discussion around near misses.
- Information gathered in any review of an incident, accident, and/or near miss or where there are any clear patterns of adverse events occurring should trigger a review of relevant RAs, NOPs and/or EAPs.
- Incidents, accidents and near misses should be logged on the NCC incident form found on the website: <https://www.nationalcoasteeringcharter.org.uk/coasteering-incident-report-form/>. All entries are logged anonymously.

Top tip: When thinking about the steps (i.e., procedures) you take to manage risk, it is useful to ask yourself: *How much do these steps actually support my/guide/participant safety? And do they affect the chance of the event happening? Or how do they limit how much harm is done?*

Steps that prevent the event from happening in the first instance are always better unless they fundamentally change or devalue the activity benefits. Being clear about core safety steps and the balance against quality or participant experience is important when budgets are limited.

It is important to appreciate that coasteering takes place on the basis that participants and guides are engaged in the activity on the basis of informed consent and acknowledgement of the risks involved.

A policy and structure informing the participants of the nature and extent of risks, and what to expect from the activity is a must. This is normally conducted both at the point of booking, and the point of participation, and is often called an “acknowledgement of risk”, information about which is referred to later in this document.

Once the participants have been informed of the extent of the risks, it is vitally important that the guide/provider gain individual assurance from the participants that they have heard and understood those risks.

It may be unreasonable to expect a provider to detail the hazards in their primary advertising. However, it may be reasonable, for example, to leave this information until the point of booking or even (in some cases) the point of departure. The identification of risks should be clear and allow realistic and uninhibited options to any participants who, as a result, wish to decline the activity.

It is the provider’s decision how this is managed, including what happens at the point of booking, at the point of departure, and how they manage any postponement or cancellation that may be the result of this.

Elements of the coasteering activity will provide challenge and coasteering guides should operate a challenge by choice ethos.

Top tip: the mantra “If in doubt, don’t go out” is well worth remembering for providers, guides, and participants.
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Part Two - Managing Risk in Practice

MEETING GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL NEEDS/MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS

It is important that coasteering providers are aware of any medical conditions that a participant may have, that could or will affect their ability to undertake coasteering safely and enjoyably.

It is recommended that all participants complete a company/provider medical declaration form at the point of booking, listing any pre-existing or current medical conditions that could affect their safety and that of others.

Medical information should be treated confidentially and be obtained in a manner that respects the rights and sensitivities of the individual. Time should also be made available for participants to discuss any medical concerns with a guide on a one-to-one basis.

Holding and use of medication

It is good practice for individuals to carry their medication and administer medication by themselves e.g., an inhaler. However, in the coasteering environment due to the lack of suitable pockets or containers, this may not always be possible and therefore it may be necessary or more suitable for coasteering guides to carry participant's medication.

If a guide is to carry medication for a third party, it is recommended that it is labelled clearly with the participant's name, exactly what the medication is for, and how it is best administered. Medication should be carried in a waterproof container/bag with the participant shown where it is being kept during the session. It is important that this guide and participant, therefore, always remain in the same group.

Age Requirements

Providers offering coasteering to participants under the age of 18 must conform to AALA Licencing Regulations (where necessary).

Parents or legal guardians should be involved in determining the suitability of sessions for very young participants. It is recommended that children participating in coasteering activities are offered bespoke and independent sessions, taking into consideration age, group size, supervision, ability, and behaviour. Where this is not possible, providers and guides should be aware of the potential safeguarding risks.

Under 18 will require parental/legal guardian permission to take part in coasteering activities.

There needs to be no upper age limit, so long as the participant meets the necessary insurance and medical requirements as determined by the provider.

Participant Profiling

“Don't get in unless you can all get out”.

Participant profiling can assist guides and/or the provider to make better decisions, help predict (or avoid) future events, and enhance a led activity. Alongside other group management tools, profiling is the learned skill of “reading people” (in this instance) in activities involving real risk.

Profiling includes the pre-activity briefing, observation, and the progressive steps taken to prepare participants and gauge their confidence/actual ability in the environment, on the day. Profiling is undertaken before, during, and after committing to the experience. It provides ongoing development of a guide's judgement.

A provider should have a safety framework in place that allows for the identification of participant competence. It is essential to identify the experience, confidence levels, specific needs, and physical and any medical conditions of the participants.

Water confidence—particular attention should be paid to establishing the water confidence of participants before undertaking activities, and dynamically during the coasteering session.

As a result of identifying group/participant competence, it would be equally acceptable to either select the route based on the group's abilities or select the participant group based on the venue.

The unexpected ‘panicker’

Sometimes even strong swimmers will panic when they fall or jump into deep, cold water. They may not be able to help themselves and their violent actions can sometimes make a rescue very difficult. It is good practice to anticipate this by

- Gradual exposure to the next progression of the activity.
- Carrying out realistic scenario-based training with guide teams (in a controlled environment) focusing on the importance and practicalities of shouting, reaching, throwing, and swimming (go) rescues, particularly of struggling casualties. In some situations, a throw bag may be appropriate, although its use needs to be practised.
- Positioning a competent person where they can affect a rescue, preferably by reaching or throwing.
- Be practised in physically assisting/rescuing participants from the water, in the real environment.

An acknowledgment of risk form should outline the associated risks and fitness / medical requirements of participants undertaking a coasteering activity with that particular provider. Such forms must capture the participant's name, contact details, emergency contacts, water confidence, and pertinent medical information, as well as their signature to confirm they accept the risks, and agree to the terms and conditions outlined by the provider.

It is vitally important that all coasteering participants have had an opportunity to see and/or hear and to understand the provider's acknowledgment of risk statement prior to undertaking an activity. Each individual participant should be able to indicate to the session's guides that they have heard, understood, and accepted the risks involved in the planned coasteering session. They must also have the opportunity to opt out of the activity at appropriate times should they wish to.

A signed acknowledgment of risk is not a disclaimer and does not indemnify the provider from any statutory responsibility.

NCC participation statement:

The following statement has been developed for providers to use as a part of their promotional material or on their acknowledgment of risk forms if they wish.

"The NCC recognises that well managed Coasteering activity reduces the risk of serious injury or death to an acceptable level. It does not remove it entirely. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement".

Deployers may need to expand on this as appropriate to their site, clients, and the environment.

A note on disclaimers: Disclaimers have no standing in UK law and do not remove the duty of care held by each provider.

Forms that explain a common understanding of risk associated with the normal conditions of activity and in recording who the participant was are useful.

Forms that seek to indemnify the provider from a negligent act have no standing and are nullified by the Unfair Contracts Act (1977). They should be treated as a signal that the provider has a poor grasp of the required safety arrangements.

SESSION DURATION

The duration of the session needs to be appropriate to the age, abilities, equipment, and expectations of the participants (individually and collectively). Guides should be empowered to make dynamic decisions regarding the duration of any session based on several varying considerations and their judgement.

GUIDE / PARTICIPANT RATIO

It is appropriate for any provider to have a section within their safety framework (normally found in the NOPs) on guide and participant ratios, group size, use of and competence of assistants.

It is up to providers to identify their own ratios and develop their safety framework appropriate to their venue(s). Particular attention must be paid to address how a guide who is lone working will manage and deal with an emergency situation.

As a guideline, providers should consider the following points when deciding their working ratios:

- Guide familiarity with the venue.
- Guide coasteering and group management experience.
- Operating conditions (weather/sea state).
- Personal skills based around rescues including swimming and rope rescues.
- Provider EAP strategy.
- Venue location, accessibility both for entry and exit.
- Limits of known communication methods.
- Guide level of competency.
- Group size, experience, and water confidence.

This list is not exhaustive.

Purchase and maintenance.

Equipment provided to participants is often a key control measure for risks associated with coasteering.

The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 is based on European Council (EC) Directive 89/656/EEC requiring similar basic laws throughout the European Union on the use of PPE.

There was a revision made to this policy in April 2022.

The PPE in coasteering activities usually consists of Helmets and Buoyancy Aids (PFD's) as well as other rescue equipment (e.g. throwlines) and aquatic clothing such as wetsuits and footwear. Any equipment or PPE provided to the participants or worn/used by the guides must be compatible, maintained according to manufacturer guidance, correctly stored and used in line with manufacturer's guidelines.

It is important to manage this equipment for safety, and for the best value of the equipment for the provider.

Items of PPE (e.g., buoyancy aids and helmets) should be individually identifiable. Records of when the equipment came into service, inspection, and retirement should be kept. A clear and separate quarantining procedure should be available for equipment with defects. This equipment should be inspected by a competent person and either repaired and returned to service or disposed of correctly.

For participants

It is important that all participants have the correct safety equipment before leaving the provider or meeting location and are given the opportunity to try it on to ensure it fits well. The guide will typically be the best person to check individual fit at this stage. Equipment should be available in a range of sizes.

The following equipment is recommended for all participants, regardless of ability and experience.

Suitably fitting:

- Appropriate activity helmet.
- Appropriate adjustable buoyancy aid.
- Appropriate wetsuit.
- Closed-toe footwear that is secure to the foot.

For guides

Guides should wear and have immediate access to the following equipment and carry additional selected equipment to support the group while conducting a coasteering session:

Personal

Suitably fitting:

- Appropriate activity helmet.
- Appropriate adjustable buoyancy aid.
- Appropriate wetsuit.
- Closed-toe footwear that is secure to the foot.

Safety equipment

Safety Equipment which is to be within immediate reach of the guide, at all times:

- Two reliable means of communication, suitable to your venue, out of the following list:
mobile phone, VHF (without distress function), VHF (with distress function), PLB (personal locator beacon).
- Throw line.
- Knife.
- Whistle.
- Watch.
- An appropriate first aid kit and familiarity with the use of its contents whilst in the coasteering environment. It is recommended the first aid kit only contains supplies that can be deployed to the level of the first aid training of the guide.
- EAP information (e.g., card or laminate) with instructions for requesting outside assistance including location information such as latitude and longitude, what 3 words, nearest postcode, etc. This would be considered an important aid for the group where a guide is lone working.
- Survival Bag.

Additional safety equipment (dependent on venue, conditions, ability, and session aims):

- Dry bag for medication, maps, and energy food/water.
- Group shelter.
- Additional suitable communication methods (e.g., day/night rocket or mini-signal flares, mobile phone, VHF, PLB, etc.).
- Karabiner and sling.
- Peterson/rescue tube.
- Fins.
- Reaching rope or sling.
- Extra rope.

Providers and guides should be familiar with the full range and the limitations of all safety equipment carried by the guide on a coasteering session. The deployer's NOP would detail a full list of what is carried, where it is carried, and how it is carried by the guide. Particular attention should be paid to the range of communication methods available and the ones that are best suited to their coasteering site, including being aware that in some situations, more than one method of communication may be needed to effectively contact and communicate with an emergency service.

Pre-activity checklist—before participant arrival

Prior planning is essential to the smooth enjoyable delivery of a coasteering session. Providers should ensure that the following elements are confirmed before every session begins and that any relevant information is passed onto the guide team:

- Identify which guide/guide team is undertaking the coasteering session.
- All guides must understand the RAs and NOPs for the session being delivered.
- Can the chosen route be led safely on that day, with that group, by the chosen guide/s, with particular attention being paid to elements such as the weather forecast, sea state, and tide positions.
- Cancellation/alternative plans are in place if the guide/s deem it necessary to abort/cancel the session due to factors such as sea conditions changing, or other factors varying or deteriorating.
- Escape routes, plans, and early completion exits are known and practised.
- The equipment is in a serviceable condition and is safe to use.
- All staff are familiar with the system used to collect details from participants—contact details, medical issues, acknowledgement of risk, etc. This could all be on one form with any relevant details being shared with the guide/s.

Top tip: Providers and/or guides may want to consider keeping records of any key decisions or changes made pre/during/post activity. This could include factors such as weather, tide, venues chosen, sea states, group dynamics, participant abilities, etc.

Cancellation at venue—the guide should have the ability to cancel the session at the venue or at any point during the session and this should be supported by the deployer. This could be due to many variations such as changes in conditions, group, venue, or if the guide was not feeling comfortable with the variable factors on that day.

Safety briefing

The safety briefing forms an intrinsic part of communicating informed consent and acknowledgement of risk by the participant to the guide(s).

Therefore, there will generally be a need for a policy on the existence, content, presentation, and participant clarification of an initial safety briefing. Participants should be advised on what they can do to help ensure their own safety.

It may not be appropriate for guides to deliver all relevant instructions regarding the route or specific aspects of the experience in one briefing; rather, a dynamic and ongoing briefing throughout the route may be more readily digestible by the participants, i.e., a little bit of information at appropriate points is better than one long brief at the commencement of the activity.

“What do they need to know, where, and when do they need to know it?”

Verbal communication at some venues can be very challenging, so prior thought should be given to what needs to be explained, where, and when.

The initial briefing/instructions at suitable stages along the route, commonly include subjects such as:

- Introduction of coasteering guide(s) and their role.
- The activity is classed as ‘Adventure by choice’ (or a similar phrase) and any element can be avoided.
- Description of coasteering, such as what coasteering is (and possibly is not).
- Planned venue and duration, ideally showing the route from an appropriate position.
- Keeping equipment on at all times, and should it become loose and incorrectly fitting let a guide know and it can be adjusted.
- Alternative plan due to a cancellation.
- How to enter the water safely.

- Swimming alongside the cliffs, submerged rocks.
- Exiting the water safely.
- Climbing on the rocks.
- Swell, tides and rip currents.
- Entry from height/jumping procedures and participants' competence and confidence.
- Swimming and walking through caves.
- Marine life (cuts, stings, poisons, barnacles, and others).
- Bunch-up/safe circle procedure.
- Emergency procedure in case of an accident, for example immediately halt activity and gain a safe position.
- Procedure for group self-help/rescue (including how to call for emergency assistance, access emergency equipment, etc.) in the event of a lone guide incapacitation.
- Emergency escape routes.
- Signals.
- Group safety.
- Environmental factors.
- Self-awareness and awareness of others.
- Communication.
- Please ask questions at the time they arise (the only silly question is one which is not asked).

Providers should decide whether a system of hand signals is necessary and introduce this at an appropriate point.

It is essential to make sure that everybody understands the relevant procedure before they encounter that element of the coasteer.

Identification of route options

It is beneficial to have the option of alternative routes or alternative start or finish points. In some cases, the degree of difficulty or the duration of the session, or both, can be determined by varying these. On the day, the most appropriate route or variation on the route should be used depending on factors such as the tidal current, potential future sea state, weather conditions, experience, expectations, and composition of the group.

Guides should allow for groups and individuals to experience progressive challenges within a selected route. An example would be to start with low-level steps to enter the water, before asking a group or individual to step or jump from a higher platform or ledge on the chosen route.

New routes should only be considered by competent and experienced guides. Conservation and interaction with the natural landscape should be considered when selecting a new or alternative route. Permission from relevant stakeholders, landowners/managers needs to be agreed upon before establishing new routes, as per the NCC Environmental Policy.

Some of the basic and desirable attributes of a coasteering venue/route include the following:

- Ability to profile participants as part of the journey, allowing safe and easy initial water entry, and an option to begin with a dry section of the route with scope to train those unfamiliar with the terrain.
- Parking/drop-off point in a car park or area is able to facilitate the coasteering group and other location users—ideally not be on the roadside or location with heavy traffic.
- Start point or beach, sheltered with easy safe access for group and emergency access points—often used as the briefing area away from the immediate start point.

Further considerations:

- Group catch-up points—areas where all participants can assemble for a break or briefing along the route.
- Easy step/water entry at a low height to practice total immersion and water-entry and exit techniques, close to an easy exit point.
- Option of either a wet or dry route to allow for varying weather conditions and abilities within a group.

- Each step/entry point to have a safe take-off point; participants should be able to feel comfortable and balanced before committing to leaving their take-off position.
- Regular escape points on routes used by inexperienced participants.
- A coastline with natural protection from varying sea state conditions, allowing for a change in weather while on/in the water and coastline.
- Deep-water areas with sheer rock steps along the route allow for jumps and challenging sea conditions.

Route recording

Before a coasteering session commences, it is essential to leave, with a designated person (e.g. centre/office), details of the intended activity. This should include the following information:

- Number of participants/names including all guides.
- Start and estimated finish times.
- Group return cut-off contact time.
- Route details.
- Any known medical concerns.
- Identify any additional support needs within the group.
- Transport details (registration numbers, parking locations, etc.).
- Any further important information deemed necessary by the provider (in line with their NOPs and EAPs).

There should also be a written procedure for the designated person to follow in the event of a no-show/group late return/no contact on return or distress call, or other emergency situations, with details of who to contact and what steps to take. This procedure should follow the provider's EAP and NOP. It is also considered good practice for there to be training and stress-testing drills for the procedures.

Checking a site—entry from height

On arrival at a coasteering venue, it is advisable, particularly at low water, for the guide/guide team to make a judgment decision regarding the safety of the water entries. Depending on the location and proposed activity, this decision could be reached by

- Going down to the water level to examine exit points. Determine whether the second/assistant guide should be located there to assist with participants exiting and whether they should have the equipment to reach (or assist a guide to securely reach) or throw to a participant in difficulty.
- Wade in and, if necessary, duck-dive to check the bottom for obstructions, depth, current, and other hazards. A mask and snorkel search might also be considered at some venues.
- Guides must check unfamiliar depths before entry from height.

Water entry management

To reduce the risk of injuries and to promote safe coasteering, guides must continually risk assess and determine the suitability of any water entry being performed based on the environmental conditions, the group, the individual undertaking the entry, the take-off position height, and the participant's take-off and landing technique.

Factors to consider in the management of water entry are the following:

- Water entry heights need to be carefully considered with a dynamic risk assessment. Factors including participant ability, sea state/weather conditions, water depth, access, the stability of entry points, and participant behaviour all need to be considered when selecting a suitable site.
- It is essential that guides demonstrate entry techniques and provide the opportunity for participants to practice entry, multiple times, from lower-level heights first and only be allowed to progress to higher entries if their technique is consistent and deemed acceptable by the guide. The guides need to give participants individual feedback to improve their ability before allowing them to progress higher, if at all.

- At the take-off point for all water entries, guides should assess the possibility of being pulled off the ledge by a participant and the likely consequences. The guide may find it necessary to stabilize themselves, allowing them to approach the edge to give assistance or support.
- Ledges and projections: If it is necessary to jump outwards in order to clear ledges and projections, or simply to reach the water, it is recommended that participants start with jumps that do not require this practice, so that they are given the opportunity to build up technique and confidence.

Remember that the likelihood and seriousness of injuries from hitting the water incorrectly will increase with height. However, even if entering the water correctly, the likelihood and seriousness of injuries will increase with height. Considerations and consequences will vary considerably from person to person, entry to entry, and day to day. It is therefore unrealistic to determine a height below which a jump can be considered safe and above which it becomes ill-advised.

Showboating is defined as performing any form of water method that participants are not encouraged to do. This includes guides or instructors jumping from heights that exceed their organisational NOPs for participants. The NCC strongly discourages any instructor or guide from indulging in “showboating” whilst running sessions.

Alternative exits

Some venues have several possible entry and exit points. Knowledge and familiarity of these points have clear benefits as they add to the safety of a site, particularly if it becomes necessary or desirable to curtail an activity. Consideration and training should be given to guides in the use of any extra equipment that may be required for particular exits, ascents, or retreats.

Remote locations

Coasteering often accesses remote and isolated locations, and considerations associated with this should be factored into any associated risk assessment, whether they are pre-written within a management safety structure or developed on a dynamic basis. Some locations can be particularly remote, and a thorough review of some factors is necessary, particularly concerning the following:

- Communications (including mobile phone signal, VHF coverage, etc.).
- Emergency help access and egress.
- Emergency action plan.
- Food, drink, shelter, and warm clothes.
- Additional first aid equipment.
- Guide/participant ratio (including lone guiding).
- Group and guide experience (including detailed knowledge of the route and entry and exit points).

Forecasting conditions

A policy and structure for obtaining, interpreting, and recording weather forecasts, sea states, and other conditions at the provider/session planning stage, is a must.

Furthermore, it must be clearly outlined who is to make this recording, when it is to be undertaken, where it is to be stored, and what action should be taken for a range of possible forecasts.

Actions from the forecast could include, but may not be limited to, modification of the venue, change of venue, cancellation, postponement, and/or return of payment. If the addition of an assistant guide is the response, then there must be a mechanism whereby a suitable person can be deployed in the given period.

Insurance

Coasteering Providers must ensure they have appropriate and current insurance for conducting coasteering.

Provider competence and oversight

Every provider is responsible for ensuring a suitable and sufficient safety management framework is in place. In addition to documenting a risk management strategy (identifying hazards, assessing, and managing risk), providers are responsible for oversight of the strategy, which may include formal inspections by an external organisation, an activity-specific technical advisor, or both.

Providers of coasteering as an activity range from sole traders (where the owner is the provider, deployer, and guide), to multi-layered organisations with defined roles and responsibilities within the staffing structure. It is the provider's role to maintain a comprehensive safety framework, enabling the activity to be delivered safely. With this structure in place, the guide is enabled to focus on leading the activity itself. Exact details will depend on each provider's risk management systems.

Guide competence and training

Any deployed guide on a session (in any role—lead, assistant/2nd guide, or lone guide) is responsible for the ongoing balancing of risks and benefits (to all participants), and assessment and predictions of conditions in their chosen venue and for the duration of the activity. This is known as dynamic risk assessment, a skillset developed primarily through experience.

Providers should ensure and have the confidence that the guides they deploy can dynamically assess the complex combination of hazards associated with coasteering, such as environment, equipment, people, access and egress, the activity itself, delivery, concealed features, and location-specific hazards.

A provider should have in place a clear syllabus for guide induction, training, and assessment of the coasteering activity, which should be developed by a competent person—this could either be the in-house or external technical expert. Training should include clear allocation of guide responsibilities, familiarisation with the sharing of incidents or near-miss information, physical changes in the venue, updates to procedures, and their role in managing them.

There are easily demonstrable external qualifications, first aid, water rescue, and rope-based qualifications that can form a supplemental part of a guide's skillset and qualification documentation. These qualifications should be complementary to the activity being delivered.

The NCC Guide Award comprises training and assessment, delivered by approved providers. Further details of the Guide Award can be found here: <https://www.nationalcoasteeringcharter.org.uk/coasteeringguideaward/>

Whether a guide has been trained 'in-house' or has completed the NCC Guide Award, it is essential that guides must be approved for deployment at each venue and for the type of group they plan to lead.

Guides should also be subject to routine monitoring and observation, which is recorded by the provider/deployer.