

Essex Outdoors Code of Practice 2024

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1. Introduction

Essex Outdoors is Essex County Council's (ECC) outdoor education service. The service has 4 centres in Essex:-

- Essex Outdoors Bradwell
- Essex Outdoors Danbury (including the SkyRopes facility at Great Notley Country Park)
- Essex Outdoors Harlow (including the Lock Climbing Wall)
- Essex Outdoors Mersea

The Service also delivers the Education Ranger service, at ECC's Country Parks

The service employs approx. 60 full time employees (FTE) across the service; rising to approx. 120 during peak season.

2. Background

Essex Outdoors is committed to delivering quality outdoor learning opportunities to the young people of Essex and the wider community.

As providers of high quality outdoor learning opportunities, working for and on behalf of a local authority, the service has a number of obligations to fulfil, including:-

- Legal, health & safety requirements
- Safeguarding, and the protection of young people
- Ensuring the quality of our operation, including customer service
- Ensuring a consistently sound financial performance.

This document sets out the various procedures that the service adheres to in order to fulfil these obligations. It also includes a risk assessment of the work undertaken by the service.

This document underpins Essex Outdoors's Operating Procedures and any local or 'centre-specific' procedures.

To this end, Essex Outdoors' *complete* operating procedures are comprised of three elements:-

1. Essex Outdoors Code of Practice (this document)
2. Essex Outdoors Operating Procedures
3. Local/centre-specific operating procedures and risk assessments

Both the Essex Outdoors Code of Practice and its Operating Procedures have been approved by the Essex Outdoors Operations Managers (for and on behalf of ECC) and Essex Outdoors' Technical Advisors, namely:-

- Martina Spisiakova – Mountaineering & Climbing Instructor (MCI)
- Justin Douglas - BCU Level 4 Coach, BCU Level 3 Inland & Sea Kayak Coach
- Jenny Miller - RYA Dinghy Coach and RYA Powerboat Trainer

3. Legal, Regulatory and Health & Safety Context

3.1 Health and Safety

As a provider of educational and adventurous outdoor activity, Essex Outdoors adheres to the following national and local legal and regulatory requirements and standards:-

- Outdoor Education Adviser's Panel (OEAP) National Guidance
- DfE's Health and Safety: Advice on Legal Duties and Powers (2014)
- The Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)
- The Management of Health & Safety Regulations (1999 and updates)
- The Children's Act (1989)
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Discrimination legislation
- Adventurous Activities Licensing Service (AALS) requirements.

All Essex Outdoors' instructional staff are First Aid trained.

3.2 Safeguarding and Child Protection

Essex Outdoors is committed to safeguarding the emotional and physical welfare of young people.

As such it adopts the Southend, Essex & Thurrock (SET) Child Protection procedures, with 'designated persons' at each establishment and clear reporting and disclosure processes.

In addition, all Essex Outdoors staff are vetted via the Disclosure and Barring Service prior to their employment by us, and all of our instructional staff receive safeguarding training. Hiring managers also receive 'safer recruitment' training.

3.3 Quality Assurance

Essex Outdoors is committed to delivering high quality outdoor learning opportunities, and as such takes the following steps to ensure the quality of its service:-

- Ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review of its services via:-
 - Customer evaluation forms
 - Observations of practice (both from a technical and a 'quality assurance' perspective)
 - Managerial review
- External inspection by appropriate bodies such as the Adventurous Activities Licensing Service, the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, and national governing bodies such as the Royal Yachting Association (RYA), the British Canoe Union (BCU) etc.

3.4 Financial Performance

As a trading unit of Essex County Council, Essex Outdoors is subject to robust local authority financial management regulations and always conducts its financial affairs with probity.

4. Equality and Diversity Policy

As a part of Essex County Council, Essex Outdoors is committed to ensuring that the life chances of all those who live and work in the county are not unfairly disadvantaged by race, gender, disability, religion, belief, sexual orientation, or age.

This commitment is extended to our customers, employees, and partners alike.

5. Environmental Policy

As a service committed to providing quality outdoor learning opportunities, both the natural and man-made environments play a crucial part in everything that we do.

Consequently, Essex Outdoors is committed to developing and sustaining an awareness of, and respect for, these environments in staff and visitors alike.

Furthermore, we are committed to continually exploring ways in which our centres' impact upon these environments can be reduced.

6. Operating Procedures

Our operating procedures have been drawn up following careful consideration of the following:-

- Our legal, regulatory and health and safety obligations (as set out above)
- Our mission statement, equality and diversity policy, and environmental policy (as set out above)
- National Governing Body (NGB) guidelines
- An assessment of the risks and hazards inherent in our work
- Ethical, participant, and instructional concerns.

6.1 General Principles

- Essex Outdoors will employ a well-qualified and professional staff team throughout the year.
- Staff will attend a comprehensive training and induction programme before working unsupervised with customers.
- Staff will always act professionally and appropriately.
- Only staff trained and qualified to deliver a particular aspect of work will do so, and only after assessment by an appropriately qualified person.

- Staff will continually assess any risk inherent in the delivery of that work.
- A senior member of staff will be on site, or available via a dedicated duty phone, whilst any customers are present.
- Careful consideration will be given to the age, ability, experience, maturity and needs (including any medical requirements) of the customer.
- Careful consideration will be given to the weather and/or the local/natural environment, if applicable.
- Any equipment used must be fit for purpose and should be PPE/CE/UIAA/BCU approved where applicable. All equipment is subject to a schedule of routine checks will be checked before use, and any defective equipment is identified and isolated.
- Consideration will be given to any potential impact or damage that may be caused to the environment in which any work is taking place.
- Systems and procedures will be reviewed regularly to allow the exploration of any potential for improvements or to reflect changes to national guidance or 'good practice'.
- Any accidents, incidents or near misses will be reported and acted on accordingly.

6.2 Staff Qualifications and Experience

Only staff trained and qualified to deliver a particular aspect of work will do so, and only after assessment by an appropriately qualified person.

Consequently, all Instructional staff delivering activity sessions will:

a) Possess the relevant national governing body award for that activity, where required [see Appendix 1];

or

b) Have satisfactorily participated in local/site-specific training regarding that activity.

In either case, staff will only be eligible to deliver a particular aspect of work after assessment by an appropriately qualified person.

NB. Where local/site-specific training is applicable, training procedures will be documented and stored at the relevant centre.

6.3 Instructor: Client Ratios

Essex Outdoors will adopt a 'default' ratio of 1 instructor to 10 clients for all activities being delivered at, or in the vicinity of, the centre. This ratio is inclusive of any visiting staff/parents/leaders participating in the activity.

However, where National Governing Body guidance allows or proscribes different ratios, Essex Outdoors will adopt these.

Ratios are also subject to change depending on a consideration of the level of risk within the activity, the level of competence of instructional staff and any visiting staff/assistants/leaders, and the nature of the group. In such cases ratios may rise above 1:10, but this will be at the discretion of a manager or senior instructor.

6.4 Equipment Concerns

All equipment used by Essex Outdoors will have been designed for the purpose for which it is employed.

Where national or international standards are applicable, we will adopt these as the minimum requirement.

Where no standards exist, we will adopt 'best' or industry practice. This may be derived from discussions with other industry practitioners.

All equipment will be used and stored in line with guidance from manufacturers.

All equipment will be checked before use, and any defective equipment identified and isolated. Periodic checks will also be made on all our equipment and apparatus, and the results logged and stored onsite in an appropriate place, and available for inspection upon request. The frequency of these checks will be determined by the amount of use and the environment in which it has been used.

6.5 Environmental Concerns

All Essex Outdoors staff will have completed an induction and training programme in the area of operation(s) in which they will be expected to work. This programme will include the highlighting of any hazards associated with that area; and how to manage clients/groups accordingly.

Nevertheless, staff will continue to consider the nature of those hazards before, during and after delivery of the activity session and 'dynamically' assess any risk accordingly.

Where activity takes place in an environment to which the public has access, additional measures will be taken to reduce the risk to others outside of our client group. In most instances this will be as a result of dynamic risk assessment, adapting to the situation as it prevails.

In other situations where known hazards are present (e.g. at road crossings, other river users etc) staff training will identify the options in managing these hazards.

6.6 Participant Concerns

We will gather as much information as possible about participants before the delivery of any activity session and make any appropriate adjustments. However, where this is not possible then the session will follow a published format, so that participants can make an informed choice to take part or not.

The nature and ability of the group will also be assessed before and during any session, and any appropriate adjustments made.

7. Risk Assessment

Risk is inherent in all adventurous activity. The following table sets out the hazards that comprise that risk; the relevant control measures that will be implemented by Essex Outdoors in order to mitigate that risk; and the effectiveness of those control measures.

Hazard/Risk	Control Measure/Mitigation	Risk Mitigated? (Yes/No)
Separation from group	Staff competence; instructor : client ratio	Yes
Slips, Trips and Falls	Staff competence; personal protective equipment	Yes
Muscular Injury	Staff competence	Yes
Collision	Staff competence; personal protective equipment	Yes
Fall from height	Staff competence; personal protective equipment	Yes
Drowning	Staff competence; personal protective equipment	Yes
Burns	Staff competence	Yes
Hypothermia	Staff competence; equipment	Yes
Road Traffic Accident	Staff competence	Yes
Poisoning/Infectious Diseases	Staff competence	Yes

8. Remote/Offsite Working

Where staff are required to work offsite, but in the vicinity of the centre, then the appropriate offsite procedure will be instituted. This will always include:-

- Ensuring that the main office is aware of intended route, and the expected time of return
- Ensuring that an effective means of communication is in place
- Ensuring a senior member of staff is onsite/at the centre, or available via a dedicated duty phone.

In addition, where staff are required to work in remote locations, and/or engage in adventurous activity, then the relevant ECC Code of practice will be adopted, namely:-

- where staff are engaged in offsite DofE work, ECC's DofE standards will be followed.
- where staff are engaged in work overseas, then Essex Outdoors Overseas Code of Practice will be followed.

9. Accident/Major Incident Procedure

Records of all accidents, incidents and 'near-misses' will be recorded in the main office and forwarded to ECC's Health and Safety team as appropriate.

In the event of a major incident occurring at one of the Essex Outdoors centres, the Essex Outdoors Critical Incident Management Plan will be implemented.

10. Complaints/Grievance Procedure

Essex Outdoors strives to ensure that your experience will be a safe, educational, and enjoyable one. However, if you are unhappy with the service that you receive, please contact the manager of the appropriate centre. Alternatively, you may contact the Service directly at:

Essex Outdoors
Central Team Office
Essex Outdoors Danbury
Danbury
Essex
CM3 4AB

Tel: 0345 200 4220

E-Mail: essexoutdoors@essex.gov.uk

Appendix 1 - Activities/Qualifications Matrix

Showing the qualifications, national governing body awards (NGB's), and/or training required to deliver each activity. NB. Where the activity is being delivered offsite, the level of qualifications and/or training required to deliver that activity will be adjusted accordingly.

Activity	Minimum Qualifications, NGB's and/or Training Required
Abseiling (on site)	Climbing Wall Instructor Abseil Award (CWIAA) or Rock Climbing Instructor (RCI) or equivalent
Abseiling (offsite)	Rock Climbing Instructor (RCI) or equivalent
Aerial Runway (Zip Wire)	Essex Outdoors Training Programme
Archery	Essex Outdoors Training Programme
BMX	Essex Outdoors Training Programme
Canoeing/Kayaking (very sheltered/sheltered water)	UKCC/BCU Level 1 Coach or BC Paddlesport Instructor Award
Canoeing/Kayaking (sheltered water/ sheltered tidal water)	UKCC/BCU Level 2 Coach or BC Paddlesport Leader Award
Canoeing/Kayaking (moderate water)	BC Paddlesport Coach plus moderate water module or BC/UKCC Level 2 Coach plus moderate water module
Climbing & High Ropes (indoors or on climbing tower)	Essex Outdoors Training Programme. NB for further details on climbing at the Lock Climbing Wall please refer to the 'The Lock Climbing Wall Site-Specific Operating Procedures'
Climbing (rock/offsite)	Rock Climbing Instructor (RCI) or equivalent
Forest Schools	Forest Schools Leader NVQ Level 3
Gorge Walking	Local Cave & Mine Leader Award (LCMLA) Level 1 or Mountain Leader (Summer) Award
Gorge Walking (with abseil)	As above, plus Rock Climbing Instructor (RCI)
Hill Walking (lowland, rural terrain)	Basic Expedition Leader (BEL) Award or Countryside Leader Award (CLA) or Lowland Leader Award (LLA)

Hill Walking (upland and moors, but not mountainous)	Walking Group Leader (WGL) or Hill and Moorland Leader (HAML)
Hill Walking (mountainous, summer)	Mountain Leader (ML) Award
Hill Walking (mountainous, winter)	Winter Mountain Leader (WML) Award
Obstacle Course	Essex Outdoors Training Programme
Off-Road Biking (including Mountain Biking)	Essex Outdoors Training Programme
Orienteering	Essex Outdoors Training Programme
Power Boating	Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Level 2 Power Boat certificate
Problem Solving	Essex Outdoors Training Programme
Quad Biking	European All Terrain Safety Institute (EASI) Rider Award
Sailing (Dinghies)	RYA Dinghy Instructor/RYA Assistant Instructor certificate, supervised by Senior Instructor
Sailing (22' ketch)	RYA Keelboat Instructor/RYA Day Skipper or higher
Sailing (Drakkar keelboats)	RYA Keelboat Instructor/RYA Day Skipper or higher
Sailing/Yachting (Multihull)	RYA Multihull Instructor, supervised by Senior Instructor
SkyRopes	Essex Outdoors Training Programme
Stand Up Paddleboards (SUP's)	BC SUP Instructor Award; or UKCC/BCU Level 1 or BC Paddlesport Instructor Award, plus Sheltered Water SUP Award or record of attendance on BCU SUP bolt-on day