

Team Building Activities/Away Days or similar events -Health & Safety Considerations

This guidance relates to activities that staff may participate in as part of events such as Team Away Days/Team Building Activities.

Responsibilities

The University has a legal duty to look after the health, safety and wellbeing of employees in all activities that are carried out as part of the employee's work. Participation in team building events or away days would be as part of that person's employment. Such events might include unusual and/or high risk activities (e.g. climbing, assault courses) or in unfamiliar environments.

Although team building activities may be facilitated or provided by an external company or group, the University as the employer, still has a responsibility for the health and safety of staff who participate. An external facilitator or provider would be primarily responsible for the safety of the equipment and the conduct of activities provided by them. However, the University is responsible for making reasonable attempts to establish the competency of the provider and the suitability of the activity. There is also likely to be a need to provide information to participants to ensure that they are properly prepared and know what to expect.

To fulfil the University's responsibilities the Head of School/Department must ensure that health and safety issues are considered as part of the planning process, which confirms that external providers have in turn considered the health and safety of their activities.

Key duties include:

- Ensuring a risk assessment is carried out for any hazardous activities
- Ensuring appropriate health and safety information is obtained from the event provider
- Checking suitability of the activity for participating staff
- Ensuring appropriate levels of employee and public liability insurance is in place where external providers are used. (For hazardous activities organised within the University, check insurance implications with Commercial Services.)

Risk assessment

The key to planning any activity is a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. It is important that the risk assessment is undertaken early on in the process to ensure that the activity chosen is appropriate. A suitable form for recording the risk assessment is appended to this document.

The following list, which is not exhaustive, identifies some key hazards that if involved in the activity, would require careful consideration within the risk assessment.

- Use of hazardous substances [i.e. exposure to chemicals or infectious material - some paints or cleaning agents could be harmful through skin contact or inhalation, especially if ventilation is poor].
- Use of machinery with moving parts/sharp blades, such as lawnmowers, hand tools and hedge clippers.
- Use of a vehicle [for example a car, quad bike, tractor]
- Use of any lifting equipment [hoist, pulley, abseiling]
- Working at height [i.e. need to use a ladder, mobile tower or other access equipment, abseiling]
- Working in extreme temperature or weather conditions [in excessive heat, cold, exposure to sun, rain or strong winds etc.]
- Lifting or moving of loads.
- Strenuous physical activity [assault courses, sporting activities]
- Risk of damaging buried services such as electricity cables, gas or water pipes – (For example from deep digging or driving long spikes into the ground).

Where the activity involves any of the above then organisers are strongly advised to consult with staff and, if necessary, the University Safety Office (ext. 13401) for advice, before making a final decision to include the activity as a Teambuilding event. In addition, it must be noted that use of certain equipment, e.g. mobile towers, tractors, involve ensuring staff are trained and competent to use it.

Additional guidance on risk assessment is available on the Safety Office web site.

Individual suitability

Having conducted the preliminary risk assessment and arrived at a decision to run with a particular event then it is important that the more detailed assessment considers the physical attributes of the participants. It is important that participants are not put into a position whereby they are expected to perform beyond their physical capabilities or risk exacerbating any other health condition.

It is important to be aware that individuals may have phobias, concerns or medical conditions that may not be apparent during their normal work activity, but which may affect their ability to participate successfully in a team building event. Consideration should also be given towards reasonable adaptations that could be made to enable inclusion of those with a disability who would wish to participate.

After the Event

It is usual to have a feedback session at the end of the event and it is recommended that participants are given the opportunity to raise any health and safety issues that might affect future events.

Please note that any accidents or ill-health incidents relating to the activities must be reported as they would be if the employee was taking part in their normal work, i.e. on a University accident report form.