



## **RLSS UK Guidance Note**

### **Organising Open Water Training and Assessment**

#### **Lifesaving and Lifeguarding**

It is RLSS UK's aim to ensure that all activities in or on open water are conducted at recognised and safe locations with appropriate supervisory arrangements in line with the local operating plans (Safety Operating Procedures SOP's) and supplemented by an activity specific risk assessment.

When undertaking training and assessment for open water lifesaving awards and vocational qualifications, safety provision should be made in accordance with these guidelines.

#### **Site Specific**

The Activity Organiser must liaise with the site operator with regard to gaining permission to use the site for lifesaving activity and compliance with the local safety operating procedures. Safety Operating Procedures consist of Normal Operating Procedures (NOP's) and the Emergency Action Plan (EAP). The Activity Organiser has the responsibility for checking that the open water site is fit for purpose and that the appropriate site specific safety arrangements are in place on every visit.

Under no circumstance should the Activity Organiser allow activity to take place where there is any doubt about the prevailing conditions or uncertainty about safety arrangement.



- Before organising any RLSS UK training the Activity Organiser (or designated Safety Officer) should complete a full risk assessment and be satisfied that the level of risk for training activity is acceptable. A site specific evaluation form is available for download from [www.rlss.org.uk](http://www.rlss.org.uk)). The Risk Assessment should inform the production of Standard Operating Procedures outlining how the activities will be run.
- Wherever possible the Activity Organiser should seek local knowledge appertaining to the open water site.
- At every session the Activity Organiser (or designated Safety Officer) should perform a dynamic risk assessment to determine whether the activity is safe to proceed.
- It is recognised best practice to display and record both the water and air temperatures (displaying temperatures will help participants make a decision about participation and recording results will help inform decisions about activity in the future).
- For RLSS UK training and assessment it is recommended that the water temperature should be 18C/64.4F or above at a minimum of 40cm below the surface.
- Training and assessing in temperatures below 18C must only take place where the participants have experience in cold water swimming and the appropriate protective equipment is available.
- For Lifesaving activity RLSS UK recommends that if the mean water temperature 40cm below the water surface is 14C/57.2F or below the session should be cancelled. Where training takes place below this temperature the expectation is that additional control measures will be identified and implemented as part of the standard operating procedures.
- For Vocational Training RLSS UK recommends that if the mean water temperature 40cm below the water is 11C/51.8F or below the session should be cancelled. Where training takes place below this temperature the expectation is that additional control measures will be identified and implemented as part of the standard operating procedures.

NB Cold water tolerance is not an exact science. Great care should be taken when introducing any lifesavers to cold water activity. RLSS UK strongly recommends the following guidelines:

- ✓ That all participants should be encouraged to wear wetsuits, appropriate footwear and a high visibility hat.
  - ✓ That appropriate accommodation is provided for changing and shelter.
  - ✓ That particular attention is paid to air temperature and wind chill as this can have a dramatic effect on cold swimmers.
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- The Activity Organiser (or designated Safety Officer) must cancel any lifesaving session where other activities at the site present a risk to the participants.
  - The Activity Organiser must not allow activity to take place at any time when the site is deemed unsafe by the operator



## Safety Cover

For guidance on Health and Safety always refer to the current edition of the RLSS UK Code of Practice

- For Open Water courses an RLSS UK registered Lifeguard Club or other appropriately qualified unit must be in attendance. Consideration should be given to providing at least one paddle or powered rescue craft for the duration of the in water element of all training and assessment.

For guidance it is recommended that the safety arrangements should be capable of recovering a casualty to shore within 3 minutes of identifying anyone requiring assistance.

- The activity organiser must ensure that anyone with a responsibility for safety has a relevant and current qualification. RLSS UK Qualifications suitable for Open Water locations are: The National Beach Lifeguard Qualification (NBLQ), Emergency Response-Activity Supervisor (ER-AS) and Emergency Response-Open Water (ER-OW).

**NBLQ** is required where there is any element of “free swimming” in the activity session. (Lifeguards must be clearly defined as such in red and yellows)

**ER-AS** is suitable for safety cover only where the session is structured and controlled as in programmed activity (RLSS UK assessments are classified as programmed activity).

**ER-OW** is suitable for volunteers who are not part of the designated safety cover but who may be available to be called upon to assist trained personnel during an incident.

- No open water activity session may commence without the designated safety cover being in place (in accordance with the NOP).
- Every session should have a designated Safety Officer who has the final say on whether conditions are suitable for the activity to take place and also has responsibility for stopping activity should conditions deteriorate.
- There should be fast and effective communication with Emergency Services and that all volunteers are familiar with the systems and procedures
- First Aid kit and a Qualified First Aider must be available for every open water session.



### **Trainer Assessors/Instructors**

Open water sessions must be led and overseen by an RLSS UK qualified trainer or Instructor with Open Water accreditation. Where the trainer holds a current and appropriate qualification they may also be considered as part of the designated safety cover.

A trainer to candidate ratio is limited to a maximum of 1:12 for all open water training and 1:4 for all assessing activity. Factors like age, ability, fitness and open water conditioning may influence this number and should be adjusted accordingly by dynamic risk assessment, taking advice from the safety team covering the activity.

### **Candidates and Swimmers**

- Hi visibility swim hats must be worn by all candidates and simulated casualties so that they are easily visible in the water.
- Candidates and simulated casualties must remain in visual contact with the designated safety cover. RLSS UK recommends that “activity areas” are clearly marked and restricted to a maximum of 20 metres from the nearest point of entry/exit/rescue. NB for most training and assessing activity the expectation is that both candidate/casualty will be no more than 10 metres from the nearest point of entry/exit.
- All swimmers should be advised to wear protective footwear, which may be discarded during simulated rescues at the candidates own risk.

### **Additional safety measures**

There are many other considerations when organising open water activity that will improve safety and general overall experience.

RLSS UK reminds and advises you to:

1. Develop the candidates open water experience and competency over a set period of time prior to assessment.
2. Ensure Lifesaving activity is run in accordance with current RLSS UK and site specific policies and procedures.
3. Inform participants about the risk of infection after swimming in open water (a sample statement/guidance note is appended).
4. Ensure parents/guardians are fully aware of the activities being delivered and facilities provided. Parents need to know what equipment/kit they are expected to provide.



5. Ask parents/guardians for written confirmation to approve individual participation of anyone under 18 years of age and gain information on pre-existing medical conditions.
6. Inform parents of the risks associated with swimming in open water.
7. Ensure a designated Officer is looking after the welfare of young swimmers.
8. Develop a “buddy system” so that swimmers/lifesavers work in pairs or small groups and are looking out for each other.
9. Offer clear guidance on issues such as changing facilities, clothing, food and drink as applicable to the site.
10. Have a clear “checking in and out” recording system to log swimmers in the water.
11. Keep an activity log to record the prevailing conditions and activity undertaken. This log will help support and guide decisions on future activity.
12. Ensure that all incidents/accidents are reported, recorded and reviewed to see if and how safety arrangements may be improved. Use the on-site system as directed by the site operating procedures.

**NB Whilst the activity programme is determined by the coordinating Activity Organiser, safety must remain under the control of the designated Safety Officer.**

## **Appendix one**

### **General Advice for Open Water Lifesaving**

Every effort has been made to ensure the site chosen is suitable for Open Water Activity. Where taken water quality tests provide a “snap-shot” indication of the suitability of a venue for open water swimming but they do not mean that there is a complete absence of potential pathogens. There are simple practices that lifesavers should be advised to adopt to minimise the risk of infection.

1. Cover cuts and abrasions, however minor, with sticking plasters. You should not consider swimming if you have deep cuts.
2. Wash hands in fresh water before eating after you have swum.
3. Take a full shower at the earliest opportunity.
4. Try not to ingest water while swimming.
5. All swimming kit (wetsuit, costume, goggles, hat etc) should be washed in clean water and thoroughly dried prior to the next session/event.

Lifesavers should be advised to seek medical advice should they fall ill after swimming in open water.