

CLIMBING WALLS

Information for Wall Owners and Managers



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Mountaineering Scotland's stance on the management of walls is the same as that outlined in the BMC's 'Climbing Walls Manual'. Mountaineering Scotland believes it is better to have a discrete approach to management, both because this better fits with the whole ethos of climbing and also because, in the experience of many walls, it has been found that restrictive management practices have tended to cause more public management problems than they solve.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

From a management point of view it is far better to get away from the 'gate-keeping' approach to safety management and adopt one more in line with a customer-care approach.

There are around 700 climbing walls in the UK and it is common practice to not insist on any form of induction for climbers. Although at the outset this might sound strange, it is fully in line with Mountaineering Scotland (and BMC), policy for wall management, which is in turn agreed to by the HSE as good practice. The above statement means:

It should be borne in mind that if the centre management are in any way judging the competency of adult climbers to use the wall facility and those climbers have an accident then the management are leaving themselves open to a greater degree of liability. It is much better to let adult climbers make an assessment of their own abilities and then make a declaration to that effect.

If a climber registers as a novice/beginner, it is at this point that some form of 'course' can be offered to ensure basic competence at the wall. The situation is different regarding minors as in law they are not capable of making such decisions (although in fact many will be, see below).

COURSES FOR BEGINNERS

A course need not be very extensive and should not be structured so as to be off-putting to eventual unsupervised participation. It should, however, be set up by a nominated **Technical Advisor (TA)**. This person will most usually be contracted in to help set up such a course, its administration and can give in-house training to centre staff. The TA need only be contracted in during the set-up and for a number of days per year to make ongoing alterations to wall systems, to ensure new staff have the necessary knowledge and possibly to oversee the checking of equipment and practices. Centre staff trained by TA's need not be holders of an NGB climbing award, although of course it would be prudent to ensure that they have some knowledge of climbing and, as such, various NGB awards do give centre management an indication of an employee's competency. There are many walls that give in-house training to their staff who do not possess an NGB award and these staff members are able to work quite satisfactorily and safely, within the parameters set out by the TA. However, this work will always be backed up by training by the TA, along with paperwork evidencing the level of training given and the subsequent remit.

The relevant NGB awards for staff working at climbing walls are:

- The Climbing Wall Award (CWA)
- The Single Pitch Award (SPA)
- The Climbing Wall Leading Award (CWLA, only available to CWA and SPA holders)
- The Mountain Instructor Award (MIA)
- The Mountain Instructor Certificate (MIC)
- Other awards, such as British Mountain Guides and various Military awards may also be accepted.

Generally speaking, staff taking part in floor-walking or introductory course delivery will hold the CWA or SPA award, with any teaching of leading being carried out by a CWLA, MIA or MIC holder. However, the above may well be covered by appropriate training by a TA, along with frequent checks and updates.

TECHNICAL ADVISORS

It is generally accepted that a suitably qualified TA will hold the MIA or MIC awards. In addition, they may also hold an International Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA) qualification and a Route Setting Association (RSA) Level 2 award, which gives them knowledge relevant to the more industrial issues relevant to climbing walls. It should go without saying that they should also have extensive experience of working with climbing facilities and a knowledge of the legal aspects of climbing wall management.

MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

There are various excellent systems being operated in walls across Scotland and the rest of the UK. They allow for freedom from undue restrictions and it is suggested that you contact some for advice: many will be happy to help. Some of the more pertinent issues are outlined below:

1) ENTRY FORMS: UNSUPERVISED CLIMBERS

Many walls address the issue of safety management and liability by having an entry form which everyone must sign. Visitors are asked to register certain particulars:

- that they are experienced climbers, able to participate unsupervised;
- that they understand the risks of climbing (as set out in the **Mountaineering Scotland Participation Statement**);
- that they understand climbing etiquette (various hazards, climbing under other climbers, at what height to stop bouldering, etc.);
- that they know how to use climbing hardware (harness, belay device, appropriate knots etc.), necessary for the normal use of the facility.

Regarding the first point, it has already been explained why this decision should be left to the individual climber and not the centre management. The centre obviously takes this on trust but the management should not be overly concerned as asking this information, and them subsequently declaring and signing as being competent, fulfils any Duty of Care and liability in this respect. In practice, those unsure of climbing will normally be honest and will register as beginners (and as such they often would not normally have the necessary climbing equipment), and can be catered for as detailed below.

The form should then ask for a signature and normal waiver: that they understand all the above and take responsibility for their own safety.

See the sample 'Unsupervised Adult Registration Form'

It is common for walls to ask 'stock' questions to new visitors filling in the unsupervised user form. This is most simply accomplished by showing three or four pictures, maybe a knot, a belay device, a harness buckle and a belay position, with two pictures each depicting right and wrong, and asking the visitor to identify the correct picture of each type. This does not constitute an assessment of any type but will go some way to reinforcing the visitor's declaration on their form.

Refer to the sample 'Competent Climber Registration Questions'

Many walls operate a registered unsupervised user identity card system which is a very quick method of checking that someone is a registered user and as such knows all the above points, as they have declared this on a previous visit. This saves time at the reception desk as those issued with a card need not be asked to sign the waiver again (unless they are taking responsibility for another climber: see below).

2) NOVICES OR BEGINNERS

When adult visitors register as beginners and they are on their own, it may be prudent to:

- alert them to the fact that personal professional supervision is not available at the centre and that they should come back at another time with an experienced climber (offering a list of local clubs would be helpful: Mountaineering Scotland can supply various information); or
- offer them a 'taster' session so that they may try climbing with an instructor, most commonly in a group situation; or
- offer them an introductory course in rock climbing at the centre after which they should be competent enough to act responsibly at the wall. This should **not** have any element of assessment nor certification.

If an experienced climber is accompanying them then that climber can be asked to accept responsibility for giving supervision and a registration form could allow somewhere to indicate this (most commonly separate to the initial registration form on a 'guest' form). It would be usual for a registered climber to be limited to signing in a maximum of two guest climbers.

See the sample 'Guest Registration Form'

Note that the experienced climber, in this situation, would not be able to climb during this session as they would then not have direct supervision over their guests whom, by default, are not competent belayers.

3) MINORS

Regarding minors, there is a greater duty of care. Many walls operate different systems for minors between 14 years and 18 years (16 years being the 'Age of Legal Capacity' in Scotland, with 18 years of age being 'The Age of Majority'), as well as for those under that age. For climbers under 18 it is prudent to stipulate that they are accompanied by a responsible adult (who signs on the form for that responsibility), in the first instance.

If minors between 14 and 18 years of age wish to climb by themselves (bouldering or on an auto-belay), then it is acceptable in most circumstances. They may be regarded as 'Junior Members' by the management and subsequently undergo a course offered by the centre which is conducted by a competent person (and through a system overseen by a TA), if roped climbing is to be undertaken. If such courses are not being offered by the centre then supervision by a responsible adult is normal. It must be borne in mind that many minors between these ages are amongst the best climbers in the UK and are often highly technically competent. Those under 14 years are usually required to always be accompanied by responsible adults even though, once again, they may be technically competent.

Many climbing walls offer juniors unsupervised membership for the ages of 14 – 18. This would usually include an unsupervised junior member form, similar to that of an adult member, completed in the presence of a parent or legal guardian. The parent or guardian would then countersign that all the information on the form is correct. It would be prudent for wall staff to keep an eye on the new junior member for the first few climbs, just to ensure that their belaying and tying-on are up to standard, but this would not usually be any more than would be done for adult members and would still not comprise any element of assessment: the parental countersignature would cover this.

EMPLOYEE SAFETY

There are a number of requirements under HSE legislation (Work at Height, Confined Spaces Regulations, COSHH, etc.), relevant to employees. Activities commonly undertaken by wall staff include route-setting, setting up in-situ bottom-ropes, cleaning holds, structural checks, tightening holds etc. along with the usual floor-walking and instructional duties. It would be prudent to have a competent TA run through a variety of work-at-height related issues during training sessions and to ensure that each staff member is both aware and competent when carrying out jobs on a ladder or from ropes when at height. It is necessary, by law, to evidence that centre management have done everything reasonable to ensure the safety of employees working at a climbing wall of any type. It would therefore certainly be worth getting a TA to give training to such staff. If the management are intending to undertake a lot of route setting and work-at-height activity at the wall, then it may well be prudent to get staff to undergo a Route Setting Association Level 2 qualification course.

We hope that this information sheet will go some way towards helping managers design a system that is easy to operate, acceptable to the climbing wall users, and acceptable to the centre staff. Many resources to help with this are available online and from Mountaineering Scotland.

MOUNTAINEERING SCOTLAND CLIMBING WALL SUPPORT:

Mountaineering Scotland can supply electronic examples of the management tools described above as well safety posters that help back up the advised management system:

- Sample: 'Entry to Climbing Flow Chart' (see page 7)
- Sample: 'Unsupervised Adult Registration Form' (see page 8)
- Sample 'Guest Registration Form' (see page 9)
- Sample: 'Competent Climber Registration Questions' (contact the office for the sample)
- Sample: 'Incident Report Form' (contact the office for the sample)
- Good Practice Notices
- Conditions of Use Notices
- Climbing Wall Operating Procedures

Available as Posters:

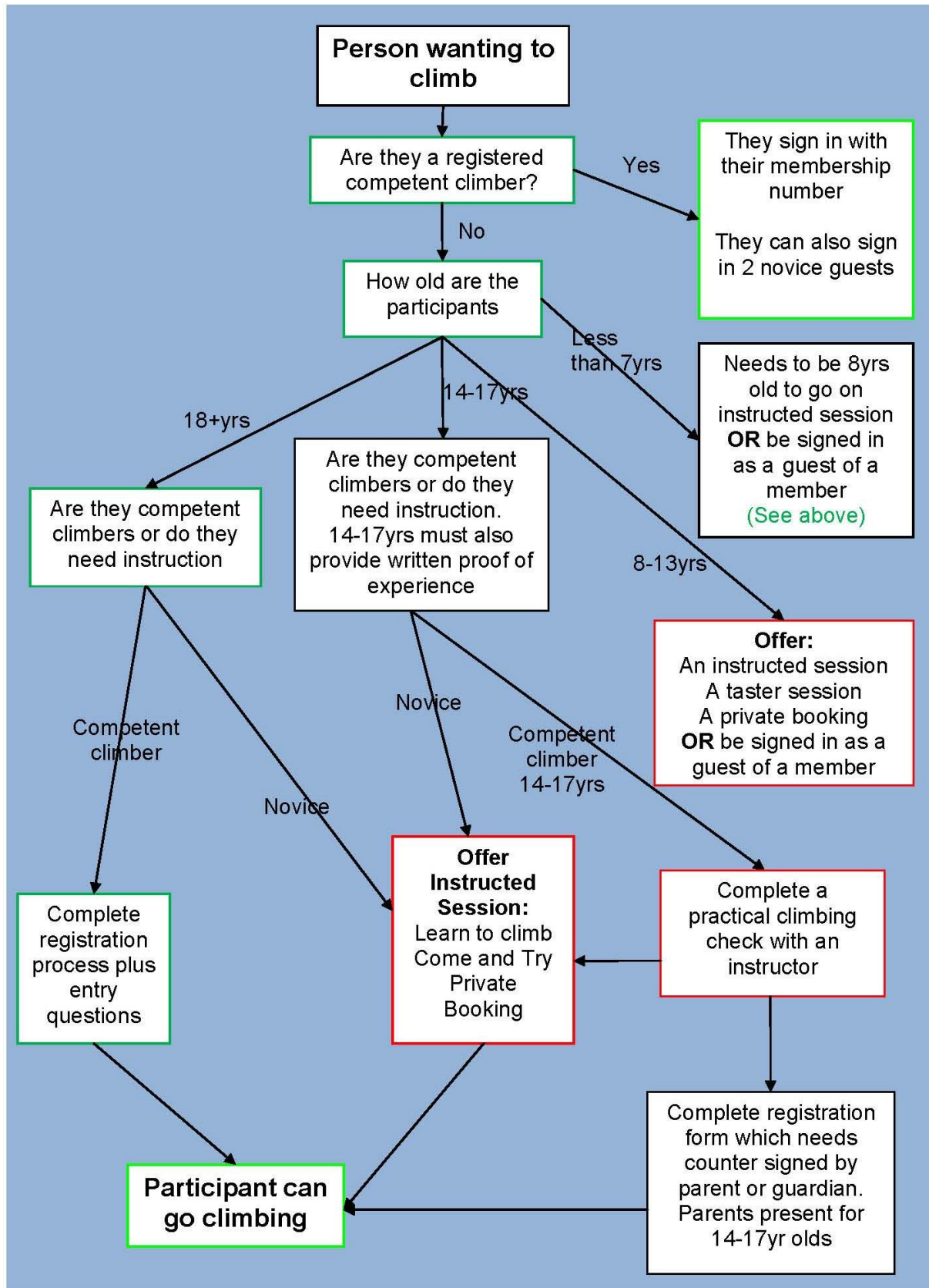
- Belaying: Get it right
- Check or deck: Check your knot
- Boulder Safe
- Participation Statement



Mountaineering Scotland Participation Statement

"Mountaineering Scotland recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement."

Entrance to the Climbing Wall





REGISTRATION FORM

Unsupervised Climbing at < > Climbing Centre

Participation Statement

"Mountaineering Scotland recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement."

Personal Details

Please complete the form in BLOCK CAPITALS.

Title	<input type="text"/>	First Name	<input type="text"/>	Surname	<input type="text"/>
Male / Female	<input type="text"/>	Address			
Date of Birth	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>			
Contact Tel. No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>			
Emergency Contact Name	<input type="text"/>	Post Code: <input type="text"/>			
Emergency Contact Tel. No.	<input type="text"/>	Email: <input type="text"/>			
How did you hear about Perth College Climbing Centre? <input type="text"/>					
Would you like to receive newsletters or promotional information via email? <input type="text"/>					

Conditions of Registration

If you are under 18 years of age **DO NOT** fill in this form! Please ask at Reception for the correct form.

Once you have read the **Conditions of Use and Rules** of the climbing centre, you must answer the following questions by writing either "YES" or "NO" in the box provided then sign the declaration at the bottom of the form. Only climbers who give satisfactory answers to the questions will be registered and allowed to climb unsupervised.

Are you over 18 years of age?	<input type="text"/>
Have you read and understood the Conditions of Use and Rules of the centre?	<input type="text"/>
* Can you put on a climbing harness correctly?	<input type="text"/>
* Can you attach a rope to your harness using a suitable climbing knot?	<input type="text"/>
* Can you use a belay device to secure a falling climber and lower a climber from the wall?	<input type="text"/>
Do you require instruction in any of the above three techniques (marked *)?	<input type="text"/>
Do you understand that failure to exercise due care could result in your injury or death?	<input type="text"/>
Do you have any questions regarding the application of the Conditions of Use or the Rules?	<input type="text"/>
Do you agree to abide by the Conditions of Use or Rules of the climbing centre?	<input type="text"/>
Do you understand that the matting provided under the walls does not prevent injuries and that broken and sprained limbs are potential injuries despite the matting?	
Do you understand and accept the Mountaineering Scotland participation statement above?	

Declaration of fitness

I certify that to the best of my knowledge, I do not suffer from a medical condition which might have the effect of making it more likely that I be involved in an accident which could result in injury to myself or others.

Declaration of fact

I also confirm that the above information is correct and if any information changes I will notify the centre:

Signature

Date

THIS PART TO BE FILLED IN BY RECEPTION STAFF

Registration Number

Registration Type

Amount Paid for Registration

£

Have you asked a sample question?

Signature

Date



REGISTRATION FORM

Supervised Guest Climbing at < > Climbing Centre

Participation Statement

"Mountaineering Scotland recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement."

Personal Details

Please complete the form in **BLOCK CAPITALS**.

Title	<input type="text"/>	First Name	<input type="text"/>	Surname	<input type="text"/>
Male / Female	<input type="text"/>	Address		<input type="text"/>	
Date of Birth	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
Contact Tel. No	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
Emergency Contact Name	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		Post Code: <input type="text"/>	
Emergency Contact Tel. No.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		Email: <input type="text"/>	

Signing-in Guests

If you are over 18 years of age and are a registered user, you can sign in two (2) guests. In doing so, you are taking full responsibility for their safety, behaviour and supervision whilst at the climbing centre and are undertaking to ensure they are aware of the **Conditions of Use** of the climbing centre. Only climbers who have successfully registered are allowed to supervise guests.

Guest 1		Guest 2	
Name & Address	<input style="height: 80px;" type="text"/>	Name & Address	<input style="height: 80px;" type="text"/>
Age:	<input type="text"/>	Age:	<input type="text"/>
Signature:	<input type="text"/>	Signature:	<input type="text"/>

Declaration of fitness

I certify that to the best of my knowledge, my guests do not suffer from a medical condition which might have the effect of making it more likely that I be involved in an accident which could result in injury to myself or others.

Declaration of fact

I also confirm that the above information is correct and if any information changes I will notify the centre:

Signature

Date

THIS PART TO BE FILLED IN BY RECEPTION STAFF

Registration Number	<input type="text"/>	Registration Type	<input type="text"/>
Amount Paid for Registration	£ <input type="text"/>	Have you asked a sample question?	<input type="text"/>
Signature	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>

FURTHER INFORMATION:

THE ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH CLIMBING WALLS

The ABC is an industry association for climbing wall companies. Although membership is not an insurance or lawful requirement, joining the ABC is the best way to ensure that a wall meets the industries best practise guidelines.



ABC members get access to guidance, reports and in depth analysis of the issues affecting the industry; seminars, newsletters and a forum help member's stay in touch with what's going on in the world of indoor climbing.

There are several levels of membership: 'Advised', 'Aspirant' and 'Approved' membership. There is also 'Associate' Membership for those who don't operate a wall but have direct links with the wall industry such as Technical Advisors and wall manufacturers.

To find out more about joining the ABC either go to the [website](#) or Email admin@abcwalls.co.uk

TECHNICAL ADVISORS

There are many instructors across the UK qualified with the Mountain Instructor Award or Certificate – the minimum standard for engaging a Technical Advisor to a climbing wall. However, not all have experience of indoor climbing walls, including general wall management, HSE requirements, staff management and training, structural wall requirements, route-setting safety and setting design and coaching qualifications. A list of instructors is available from [The Association of Mountaineering Instructors](#) (AMI). It is recommended you talk to a larger climbing wall in your area for recommendations and search AMI for possible Advisors based on the advice on page 2.



For further information and advice contact the Sports Development Officer:

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