

## FSC OPERATIONAL CODES OF PRACTICE

### No. P7 : Safety for Swimmers

**Mandatory** : All UMs.  
If swimming by students is allowed at a Unit, all FSC employees leading or assisting with groups carrying out fieldwork

**Discretionary** :

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1. It is FSC policy that swimming by students and visitors is **not** allowed unless there are specific, detailed codes of practice drawn up by the UM and approved by the CEO and recommended to the HS & W.
2. In accordance with the above policy, the UM **must** ensure that the following conditions are fully complied with.
  - 2.1. If the UM, in their professional judgement, decides that swimming is **not** permitted at any time or under any circumstances at any sites in the area which are used by the Unit for fieldwork activities or which may be accessible to students and visitors from the Unit's premises, then a written statement to this effect **must** be drawn up and distributed to all appropriate staff.
  - 2.2. **Guidance Note** : For the sake of clarity,
    - a. It is accepted that a student or visitor may accidentally fall into water during an activity and that the person will have to swim in order to get out of the water e.g. a person, collecting freshwater animals, may slip off the river bank into the river. Since this would not be an intended part of the activity, the procedures and practices given below do not apply. In particular, it means that it is not necessary for an FSC employee to have appropriate 'life saving qualifications' in order to undertake a fieldwork activity merely because that activity takes place near to water.
    - b. It is **expressly forbidden** for swimming to be allowed as an intended part of a fieldwork activity whose purpose can be achieved by other methods which do not involve swimming e.g. in carrying out a river study, obtaining measurements of channel width by asking students to swim across the river with a tape measure is **totally unacceptable**.
    - c. There are circumstances in which, as an integral part of the activity, it will be necessary for a student or visitor to intentionally enter water and swim e.g. in order to enable a person to use a canoe safely, it may

be necessary to ensure that they receive appropriate instruction and training in 'capsize drill'. Such training will involve the person deliberately capsizing a canoe [in controlled conditions], entering the water and therefore having to swim.

'Swimming' in such circumstances is not determined by the procedures and practices given below. Such activities will have been separately approved by the CEO subject to appropriate and documented safety procedures and practices, related specifically to the activities concerned, being submitted by the UM to the CEO.

- d. The procedures and practices described below therefore relate specifically to swimming being permitted as a recreational activity.

- 2.3. In circumstances where swimming is permitted during a recreational period which occurs at the time of a fieldwork activity session:
  - a. There is a written statement, distributed to all appropriate staff, that swimming by students and visitors is **not** permitted at any time in estuaries.
  - b. There is a written statement, distributed to all appropriate staff, as to other identified sites in the area used by the Unit where swimming by students and visitors is **not** permitted at any time because of specific problems related to a site e.g. rip currents at Freshwater West, Pembrokeshire.
  - c. There is a written statement, distributed to all appropriate staff, as to identified sites in the area used by the Unit where swimming by students and visitors **is** permitted. The sites so identified will be included amongst the so-called 'Recognised Sites' of the Unit [see section 3 of this FSC OCoP].
  - d. When students and visitors are swimming, the activity will be under the direct, overall supervision of an FSC staff member who holds a valid RLSS Aquatic Rescue Award [see section 3 of this FSC OCoP].
- 2.4. The UM **must** decide upon a Unit policy with regard to swimming by students and visitors during recreational time when such people would not be under the direct supervision of any FSC or accompanying staff. This policy **must** be documented and distributed to all appropriate staff.
- 2.5. Students and visitors **must** be informed of the Unit's policies with regard to swimming as part of the formal introduction to the Unit.
- 2.6. Leaders of self taught groups **must** be advised of the Unit's policies on swimming, as defined under sections 2.1., 2.2., 2.3. and 2.4. above, and be requested to advise their students that compliance with these policies is part of the group's own standards / codes of permitted behaviour / practice.

- 2.7. There may be occasions when it is obvious that the Unit's policies on swimming are not being observed by self taught groups and more particularly that the leaders of such groups are not prepared to follow the Unit's request to advise their students as detailed in section 2.6. above. It **must** be recognised that, in the event of any incident, the Unit staff may be held liable if it were established that they took no action knowing that the Unit's policies were not being adhered to.

**Guidance Note :** Whilst mindful of customer relations, it is recommended that the UM provides the group with copies of the Unit's policies on swimming and asks the group leader to complete and sign a proforma which states that :

- a. They have received copies of the Unit's policies on swimming.
- b. Their students have been informed of these policies by FSC staff.
- c. They [the group leader] are not prepared to comply with these policies in respect to informing their students that compliance is a requirement of the group's own standards.

When other groups are also present at the Unit in these circumstances, the other groups **must** be informed that :

- a. The Unit's policies on swimming are in force.
- b. The actions, such as those detailed in the above recommendations, have been taken.

- 2.8. The Unit's policies on swimming apply to students and visitors throughout their stay at the Unit. All FSC staff **must** be mindful of this position with regard to their own behaviour and practices in relation to swimming and the UM should advise their own staff to exercise suitable discretion and sensitivity.

### **3. RLSS Aquatic Rescue Test for Outdoor Activity Supervisors Award**

- 3.1. **Guidance Note :** This award is given in recognition that a person has undergone appropriate training and assessment, and that they have successfully completed a test of competence in accident prevention, water rescue and life support for those supervising others at a recognised site used for activities on, in or near open water.

The test conforms to the provisions contained in Outdoor Adventure Activity Providers : Code of Practice which was drawn up by the United Kingdom Activity Centre Advisory Committee and published in April 1994.

[It is recognised that strictly speaking this Code of Practice applies only to those Units which fall within the scope of the Adventure Activities [Young Person's] Safety Act 1995.]

Each award is specific to the site where the holder was assessed.

Further details as to the award may be obtained from :

RLSS UK,	Tel	: 01789 773994
River House	Fax	: 01789 773995
High Street	Email	: mail@rlss.org.uk
Broom		
Warwickshire		
B50 4HN		

- 3.2. The FSC therefore considers this award as an appropriate qualification for staff who will be supervising students and visitors whilst they are engaged in designated swimming activities.
- 3.3. Given section 3.1. and that the award can only be made in respect to Recognised Sites for which specific documentation exists, the UM **must** ensure that :
- a. A separate USO exists for each Recognised Site.
  - b. Each such USO conforms with the RLSS requirements as to Normal Operating Procedures and Emergency Action Plans in respect to Recognised Sites.
  - c. Copies of all such USO's are distributed to all appropriate staff.
- 3.3. The UM **must** ensure that the following are maintained and readily available :
- a. List of all Unit staff who currently hold valid RLSS awards.
  - b. List of all Recognised Sites used by the Unit which clearly indicates the activities [including swimming by students and visitors] permitted at each site.

Further, copies of any certification which applies either to the Unit or to individual staff are to be held in the Unit's records as appropriate. Second copies of such certification must be sent to FSC Head Office.

#### 4. SAFETY PRINCIPLES

In addition to anything above, the following safety principles **must** be observed:

- a. Conditions **must** be suitable, the leader **must** be capable of professional judgment as regards the prevailing weather and water conditions, and as to the suitability of a site for work and / or recreation.
- b. The leader **must** be satisfied that the participants have the level of water confidence necessary to participate in the swimming activity.
- c. Appropriate instruction in water safety prior to participation in water related activities is essential. Appreciation, by those taking part, of the difference between indoor and outdoor swimming environments is necessary, as is awareness of the ability range which exists amongst the participants.
- d. There **must** be a ratio of one supervising adult per fifteen students irrespective of whether those students are engaged in the swimming activity or not. There **must** be no more than fifteen students in the water at any one time. The RLSS qualified FSC staff member **must** actually be in the water with those students who are swimming.
- e. Any danger signal (e.g. Red Flag flying) **must** always be acted upon, as **must** the instructions of any official lifeguard at the site.
- f. A student **must** not swim within a period of thirty minutes after a normal meal.
- g. If in doubt about the suitability of a student for swimming, especially if the Unit has been informed of a student having epilepsy, the UM **must** have consulted a doctor and instructed the supervising leader accordingly.

If a student has actually suffered an epileptic episode whilst at the Unit, that student **must not** be allowed to swim.

- h. A signal system **must** be adopted and all swimmers **must** be made aware of the system before entering the water.
- i. Indiscipline **must not** be tolerated at any time, in or out of the water.
- j. Diving into water can be dangerous and **must not** therefore be permitted.