



**Leadership and Raft Guide Awards**  
**Canoe Open Water Leader**  
Assessment Guidance

## Canoe Open Water Leader Assessment Guidance

### Introduction

This document provides specific guidance for Providers, Trainers, Assessors, Deployers and Aspirant Guides on the assessment criteria and standards expected. The assessment criteria are summarised in the 'Skills Checklist' and further expanded upon here in the 'Assessment Guidance'. It is the guidance within this document that is used to inform assessment decisions.

This Assessment Guidance should be read in conjunction with:

- British Canoeing Leadership and Raft Guide Course Guide
- British Canoeing Canoe Open Water Leader Skills Checklist
- British Canoeing Leadership and Raft Guide Provider Notes
- British Canoeing Participant Focused Leadership Guidance
- British Canoeing Leadership and Raft Guide Sample Programme

The 'Leadership and Raft Guide Course Guide' provides details of the award and its general requirements. The 'Leadership and Raft Guide Provider Notes' expand on the organisational matters relating to training and assessment. The accompanying 'Participant Focused Leadership Guidance' provides clarity on the expected leadership principles and approaches. The 'Leadership and Raft Guide Sample Programme' provides examples of a 1 day and 2 day assessment outlines, as well as a 2 day Leadership training course programme.

### Assessment Format

Assessments must include the leading of a suitably sized group (minimum of 3). The British Canoeing Canoe Open Water Leader qualification is appropriate for leading others on journeys in large areas of open water that exceed the sheltered water definition, where the paddlers are no more than 500 metres off shore and in wind strengths that do not exceed Beaufort force 4. The group of students organised for

assessment should reflect this demand, whilst remaining within the Assessor's own risk management requirements.

Assessment venues chosen by course organisers must include a reasonable range of options for the Leader to choose from.

The Canoe Open Water Leader Assessment will normally run over 1-2 days. This will depend on the course ratios, and logistics relating to access of suitable environments. The Leader will be working from their suitably chosen canoe craft and will be assessed leading a group of 3 to 6 paddlers, in a maximum of 4 craft which may include tandem canoe crews (not including themselves).

Any equipment borrowed for the purpose at the time of assessment will be treated as the Leader's own.

### **Assessment Methods**

Each Leader must be seen **leading a group (minimum of 3)** in conditions at the top end of the environment.

Observation of practical Leadership will be supplemented with questioning, discussion and specific tasks as required. Assessors need to gather sufficient evidence of competence in a range of scenarios relating to leading sessions in the open water environment, not just those experienced during the practical assessment.

### **Assessment Criteria**

#### **A. Participant Focused Leadership Skills**

Leaders should understand and skilfully apply the [British Canoeing Leadership Model Principles](#) within the context of the award and environment that they operate. For further guidance and examples, refer to the 'British Canoeing Participant Focused Leadership Guidance' document.

## **Judgement and Decision making**

A competent Leader uses effective judgement and decision making. Decision making is an essential skill for Leaders. Both slow-time decisions and in-the-moment real-time and potentially pressured decisions will have a significant impact on the safety, enjoyment and performance of the group.

## **Venue Selection**

The Leader is required to select venues based on the needs of their participants. It is expected that their repertoire should include all environments stated in the environmental definitions.

Assessment locations chosen by Leadership Providers must include a reasonable range of options for the Leader to choose from.

## **Safety**

The Leader designs and implements effective safety frameworks by undertaking sound risk assessments throughout, hazard awareness, pitching activities to suit both the group's aspirations and challenge. The Leader positions themselves within the group to cover safety and allow freedom. They will implement an effective communication strategy that will involve and engage their group to enable a safe and enjoyable day that meets the group's aims and objectives.

## **Vision**

The Leader is a positive role model and aims to inspire others, showing both passion and enthusiasm for paddlesport consistent with the British Canoeing core values (e.g. access, environment, educational philosophy, equality).

## **Support and Challenge**

The Leader provides empathetic social support in a positive atmosphere, recognising individual needs, differences, strengths and abilities. The Leader creates a supportive climate to encourage teamwork. At times, the Leader supports appropriately challenging experiences, aligning the level inherent in the activity to

motivate individuals, agreeing goals and helping others to set appropriate levels of challenge throughout.

### **Leadership Style and Behaviours**

The leadership style and behaviours applied will meet the needs of participants, the task and the environment. The Leader will empower their group when appropriate but may also need to be more controlling at times to ensure safety.

### **Equipment**

The Leader ensures that personal, group and safety equipment is suitable for the planned journey including craft choice and outfitting, clothing and supplementary resources to provide a safe and enjoyable trip.

### **Environmental Impact**

The Leader manages themselves and the group to reduce any negative impact on the environment, local communities and other water users.

## **B. Personal Paddling Skills**

Leaders need efficient and effective personal skills to facilitate safe, quality, enjoyable sessions in an open water environment. They will need to show the application of technical and tactical skills, the underpinning physiological attributes, psychological skills and the judgement and decision making to perform safely and in control, within the stated environments.

### **Applied Technical and Tactical Skills**

The emphasis is on the ability to effectively and efficiently control their canoe in real situations, with consistency, in the open water environment. Skills should be assessed holistically throughout the duration of the assessment; with manoeuvres and actions applied tactically in the given environment and framed within the context of being able to fulfil the given leading responsibilities.

Leaders need to show consistency in their ability to achieve a desired outcome. It is expected that they can control/manoeuvre their canoe without having to think too much about it, by using effective and efficient actions to achieve the outcome. While technical correctness is not emphasised, poor practice that puts the body at risk of injury is not acceptable.

Throughout the duration of assessment, Leaders should demonstrate the following personal skills:

- The Leader must demonstrate an understanding of the environment and plan to use external forces to their best advantage.
- The Leader shows the ability to launch and land effectively and efficiently in a variety of situations and conditions.
- The Leader understands, can select from and has the ability to demonstrate a full range of paddling skills that allow them to effectively and efficiently manoeuvre their canoe whilst on the lake or loch. This will include a range of paddle strokes, sailing techniques, rafting techniques, and other methods to be efficient and effective in the given environment.
- The Leader will show boat control to include the ability to accelerate and decelerate efficiently, as required by the environment, choosing tactics in response to the nature of the wind and waves.
- The Leader will change tactics appropriately throughout the journey and relevant to the nature of the conditions experienced.

## **Physical and Mental Awareness and Wellbeing**

The Leader demonstrates the ability to respond to, and manage, the physical demands associated with leading a session. For example, the Leader is aware of their individual capabilities and can apply techniques and tactics to fulfil their leading responsibilities within their physical limitations.

The Leader demonstrates the ability to respond to, and manage, the psychological demands associated with leading a session. For example, the Leader is able to perceive, understand and manage their emotions and arousal levels appropriately.

The Leader can manage themselves within appropriate safety frameworks. For example, an appropriate attitude to risk and personal hydration, nutrition and warmth.

## **C. Rescue Skills**

To ensure the Leader's own safety and the safety of others, the Leader needs to show they can deal with a range of rescue situations relevant to the canoe and the open water environment.

The emphasis for the Leader is that they have accurate judgement of personal skills and can be an effective Leader, so they can look after themselves and others while canoeing at the venue.

Assessment session/s must be planned for the Leaders to perform the necessary rescues. Realistic scenarios should be set-up to show the Leader's ability to assess the situation, make appropriate decisions throughout the rescue, and maintain their responsibilities. It is likely that the assessment of criteria are blended together through a range of practical scenarios and questioning.

**Scenarios:** It is the Leader's safety management and leadership skills that are the main priority to ensure that life threatening scenarios are not at all likely. Scenarios should reflect the typical incidents that the Leader is likely to have to deal with, whilst operating within the scope of their remit.

The Leader must demonstrate application of appropriate underpinning principles, knowledge and understanding, to inform effective actions during a rescue scenario; this includes:

- accurate assessment of the situation
- appropriate choice of rescue, appropriate tactics used
- effective execution of rescue (including safe, management of equipment/people and recovery of the swimmer)
- effective recovery of casualty (and equipment) to a stable environment
- application of shout-reach-throw-row-go principles
- application of self-team-victim-equipment protocol
- appropriate selection/use of rescue equipment
- avoidance of hypothermia
- appropriate first-aid response
- understanding of open water features and hazards
- understanding the effect of weather conditions
- appropriate personal safety precautions taken (including safe moving and handling)
- appropriate manner (calm and in control)
- appropriate support for the person being rescued and the other group members
- maintaining group management responsibilities.

The Leader can carry out emergency procedures when necessary, this will include, for example:

- following organisational procedures
- assess – consider options – raise alarm – stabilise – execute plan

- being able to evacuate from the water
- knowing when to take an individual out of a session
- having knowledge of nearest phone, help, vehicle
- calling for qualified assistance where required; understand who to call and with what information they may need
- giving accurate information when calling for qualified assistance

The Leader should be prepared to demonstrate rescue skills in open water at the top end of the remit for the award. Leaders are required to demonstrate the management of effective rescues of open canoes, paddled both solo and tandem. These should be informed by an effective decision-making process.

The emphasis is for the Leader to be an effective leader of a team. This would include the ability to look after themselves and others while paddling in open water environments of different characteristics, i.e. long or short fetch winds and associated waves and conditions, as well as different aspects of the wind, i.e. into, across and down wind.

### **Open Water:**

Throughout all the rescues, the Leader should be able to retain all of their own equipment and be able to formulate a plan of what to do next.

- The Leader demonstrates efficient and effective self-rescue techniques in open water environments.
- Deep water rescue: Leaders should have the ability to recover a variety of canoes and put the casualty/casualties back in their canoe, ready to continue.
- Swamped raft: The Leader needs to show that they are aware of the issues and have an appreciation of the potential dangers involved. Through practical application, Leaders are required to show that they can recover a swamped canoe.
- Man over board while sailing: Leaders have solutions to deal with man-over-board while sailing. Through practical application, Leaders are required to show that they can deal with a person who has fallen overboard while sailing.

- Assisting another paddler: Leaders are required to demonstrate effective mechanisms for assisting another paddler. This will include towing systems.
- Dealing with a separated paddler and boat: Leaders are required to demonstrate an effective rescue of a paddler separated from their canoe.
- Rescue an unconscious paddler: The Leader is required to rescue and stabilise an unconscious paddler and have an open airway. The Leader is required to explain appropriate further actions after initial stabilisation.

### **Incident Management:**

Leaders to show that they have the competence to lead a team of paddlers during rescues and incidents. Scenarios will include incidents that involve people, equipment and/or rescues, for example:

- The process of maintaining an overview of the situation so that the safety and wellbeing of the whole group is never forgotten.
- Various strategies for group control, leadership styles and positioning.
- Moving groups in more challenging situations.
- Ability to judge the conditions and the standard of the group and make appropriate decisions about the planned route, along with the need to modify plans as required.
- Incidents that involve people, e.g. medical conditions such as allergic reaction, hypothermia and physical injuries to group members, etc.
- Incidents that involve equipment, e.g. boat repair, paddle repair, etc.
- The necessity of carrying, and having easily accessible, a suitable means of summoning help in an emergency and a first aid kit. Along with familiarity with the use of the first aid kit contents.

### **D. Underpinning Background Knowledge, Understanding and Experience**

An appropriate range of background knowledge, understanding and experience is required to fulfil the Leader's responsibilities and to inform the Leader's judgements

and decision-making. The assessment of this will be blended throughout the assessment programme, with questioning, discussion, specific tasks and evidenced by the actions taken.

Practical leadership, personal paddling and rescue skills are underpinned by:

- the ability to explain and justify decisions
- an appropriate base of background knowledge and understanding
- relevant and adequate experience to support the decision making process
- understanding of deployment matters and guiding responsibilities
- commitment to reflective practice and the ability to learn from experience.

Leaders should demonstrate that they are aware of potential risks, safety precautions and safety thresholds pertinent to leading groups on moderate open water. This will including winds up to and including force 4.

### **Equipment**

- Leaders will demonstrate knowledge and experience of using a range of equipment, both personal and group safety.
- Leaders will know how to evaluate any equipment they use and the importance of how it should be maintained and carried, or worn when in use.

### **Safety**

- Leaders will be able to show they are aware of the risks and potential dangers associated with paddling on open water.
- Leaders will show they have an understanding of simple solutions to common problems that they may encounter whilst paddling on moving water.
- Leaders should demonstrate dynamic risk assessments for themselves and the group.

### **Weather, Planning and Navigation**

- Leaders should demonstrate an awareness of any likely effect and interaction of current, wind and fetch.

- Leaders can access a variety of sources of weather forecast, be able to interpret such weather forecasts and be mindful of actual conditions.
- Leaders can plan an appropriate safe journey based on the group's aspirations and ability.
- The Leader will navigate effectively and should be able to locate their current position on a map or via a suitable navigational device.
- The Leader should be able to work out an appropriate escape route using a map.

### **Access and Environment**

- Leaders can demonstrate that they are aware of the range of access issues that exist and where they can find additional information.
- Leaders demonstrate an appreciation of the environment they paddle and an awareness of how to protect it.
- Leaders have a familiarity with typical flora, fauna and historical aspects expected to be found in the trip environments.
- Leaders should promote a positive image for paddlesport with other water users and local residents.

### **Experience**

Quality experience is critical to underpin sound leadership decisions. Assessors must be confident that the Leader has a relevant and adequate experience base to draw upon and support their decision making process. Examples of evidence could include a logbook, practical assessment, and thorough discussion and questioning.

It is expected that the Leader's base of experience supports:

- leading at a variety of open water venues
- rescues in a range of situations
- being able to deal with a range of problems
- working with a range of different clients; for example, known and unknown participants with different needs and aspirations.

This experience may be gained through a variety of different roles within paddlesport and can be supplemented with relevant experience outside of the paddlesport environment.

### **Deployment Matters and Leadership Responsibilities**

The Leader demonstrates an understanding of deployment matters and their responsibilities. For example:

- First Aid training
- Keeping up-to-date with current best practice
- Safeguarding training and disclosure
- Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- Equality
- Medical declaration, working with injuries, physical competence
- Duty of Care
- Code of Conduct
- Incident reporting
- Injury prevention and manual handling
- Insurance
- Deployer's risk assessment and operating procedures.