



ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Item: 10

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 12 November 2025.

Inspection of Outdoor Education.

Report by Director of Education, Communities and Housing.

1. Overview

- 1.1. Outdoor Education is a well-established service delivering high-quality outdoor adventure activities and learning opportunities across the Orkney community, including the core Outdoor Education school programme.
- 1.2. Since 1996, the service has undergone inspections by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority to obtain a licence in accordance with the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 2004 and the Adventure Activities Licensing (Amendment) Regulations 2007.
- 1.3. The licence is a legal requirement that enables the Outdoor Education service to deliver licensable activities. It is also essential for delivering Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions through the Community Learning Development and Employability service.
- 1.4. In April 2025, the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority undertook a comprehensive inspection of the Outdoor Education service through:
 - A core inspection on 1 April 2025.
 - A site visit on 9 May 2025.
 - A follow up with an Officer from the Community Learning, Development and Employability service on 15 May 2025.
- 1.5. Following the inspection, the report, attached at Appendix 1, confirmed that the Outdoor Education service had demonstrated full compliance with the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations (2004) and subsequently issued a two-year licence with no remedial actions or conditions.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:

- i. Note the inspection report in respect of Outdoor Education, attached as Appendix 1 to this report, issued by Adventure Activities Licensing Authority in May 2025.

For Further Information please contact:

Katell Roche, Team Manager (Sport and Leisure), Extension 2430, email:

Katell.roche@orkney.gov.uk

Implications of Report

1. **Financial** – Any actions arising from this inspection are to be met from within existing approved budgets.
2. **Legal** – The Adventure Activities Licensing Authority (AALA) operates a statutory licensing scheme for organisations that offer certain adventure activities to young people under the age of 18. These organisations must hold a licence issued under the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 2004 and the Adventure Activities Licensing (Amendment) Regulations 2007. The scheme is overseen by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and ensures that providers meet required safety standards to protect participants from avoidable risks.
3. **Corporate Governance** – Not applicable.
4. **Human Resources** – Not applicable.
5. **Equalities** – An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for performance reporting.
6. **Island Communities Impact** – An Island Communities Impact Assessment is not required for performance reporting.
7. **Links to Council Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
 - ☐ Growing our economy.
 - ☒ Strengthening our Communities.
 - ☐ Developing our Infrastructure.
 - ☐ Transforming our Council.

- 8. Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
- ☐ Cost of Living.
 - ☒ Sustainable Development.
 - ☐ Local Equality.
 - ☐ Improving Population Health.
- 9. Environmental and Climate Risk** – Not applicable.
- 10. Risk** – Not applicable.
- 11. Procurement** – Not applicable.
- 12. Health and Safety** – Not applicable.
- 13. Property and Assets** – Not applicable.
- 14. Information Technology** – Not applicable.
- 15. Cost of Living** – Not applicable.

List of Background Papers

None.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – AALA Report Orkney Islands Council.

Preamble

- Adventure RMS have been authorised by the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority to carry out inspections, conduct investigations and make decisions on licence applications. This is in accordance with the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations 2004 and the Adventure Activities Licensing (Amendment) Regulations 2007.
- Adventure RMS inspectors are qualified and experienced outdoor professionals. Their role is to sample the applicant's safety management system and explore management arrangements. They do this to make a judgement about whether these management arrangements are compliant with the adventure activities licensing regulations.
- The inspectors' role is not to audit every aspect of an applicant's safety system or verify every piece of information supplied or item of equipment used by the applicant.
- A successful application review does not:
 - a. confer a judgement on the quality of what is provided; or
 - b. provide a guarantee of health and safety in the operation of the duty holder's arrangements.
- Responsibility for health and safety can only lie with the duty holder.

About this report

- This report contains the findings of the authorised inspector and the final decision on the licence application.
- The report is written for the licensing authority. The applicant may find the report narrative a useful summary of the application review process.
- In all cases the standard conditions of regulation 9(1) apply. In some cases, this report will also set out additional non-standard conditions.
- The management of safety remains the responsibility of the applicant/licence holder, not the licensing authority nor its inspectorate (Adventure RMS).



Report summary

<i>Applicant name</i>	Orkney Islands Council	<i>Ref No:</i>	R1077
<i>Centre name / trading name</i>	Outdoor Education, Orkney Islands Council		
<i>Address of licence holder</i>	<i>Address of centre (if different)</i>		
Education, Leisure & Housing, Outdoor	N/a		
Education, School Place, Kirkwall, KW15 1NY			

<i>Size</i>	Medium (21-50)		
<i>Activity categories</i>			
Trekking	Yes	Caving	No
		Climbing	Yes
		Watersports	Yes

<i>Inspector</i>	Roger Ward		
<i>Consulting inspector</i>	Jan Bailey		
<i>Core inspection completed on</i>	04/04/25		
<i>Contact person</i>	Chris Jex	<i>Position</i>	Outdoor Education Advisor
<i>Further inspection?</i>	Yes	<i>Date</i>	08/05/25
<i>Contact person</i>	Chris Jex	<i>Position</i>	Outdoor Education Advisor
	Denny Moulds		Senior Instructor
	Pete Whyley		Freelance instructor
	Zoe Thrower		Freelance instructor

<i>Consulting inspector comments</i>	
Report agreed	Date 18/05/25

<i>Adventure RMS endorsement given by</i>	Tim Morton	<i>Date</i>	29/05/25
<i>Comments</i>	This licence duration has been calculated using the AALA's arrangements, for licences starting on, or after, 01/04/25.		
<i>Final decision</i>	Licence is granted		
<i>Duration</i>	2 years	<i>From</i>	11/07/25
		<i>To</i>	10/07/27

<i>Relevant action to be taken by the licensing authority (Regulation 14)</i>
None
<i>Reason(s) for any relevant action</i>
None
<i>Remedial action to be taken by the applicant</i>
None

List of activities

Activities to appear on the licence

Trekking category Hill & mountain walking Orienteering	Caving category
Climbing category Rock climbing Abseiling Coasteering Gorge scrambling Tyrolean traverses	Watersports category Kayaking Canoeing Stand Up Paddleboarding (not including foiling) Mega/Giant SUP Improvised rafting

Out of scope activities (not on the licence)

Activities at height	Mobile climbing wall
Water activities	None
Other	Road cycling, bushcraft, archery, problem solving, camping, environmental activities

Report narrative

1. About this applicant

- 1.1 Orkney Islands Council (OIC) offer outdoor activity programmes to all schools on the Orkney Islands through the Sport and Leisure department. Katell Roche (Team Manager) has oversight of activities. Chris Jex (Outdoor Education Advisor) is responsible for the day to day management of adventurous activities.
- 1.2 From April to July activities are delivered from the 32 bed Hoy Outdoor Centre (HOC) on the north end of the island of Hoy for Orkney based P7 and S2 students. From mid-August to mid-October activities are delivered to P6 students at the various Orkney schools or on a peripatetic basis on the islands. From mid-October to April there is currently only occasional activity delivery, although there are plans to increase the amount in 2025/26. Well established venues throughout the whole of the Orkney islands are used. OIC work with up to 24 participants at any one time and during April to July most will be undertaking licensable activities. At other times many of the activities delivered are not licensable. The OIC Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Expedition Advisor (Richard Smith) and two colleagues have oversight of DofE award expeditions delivered both on the islands and the mainland. Gold expeditions are delivered off the islands by a third party who have their own AALA licence.
- 1.3 Chris is involved in much of the activity delivery. Since April 2025 there is a full time senior instructor employed by OIC. During the main operating season OIC have a contract with Adelong Outdoor Education (Adelong) (AALA licence R1808) to supply up to two seasonal instructors to deliver activities as directed by Chris. OIC do not employ any freelance instructors.
- 1.4 OIC is a Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) licensed organisation.

2. Core inspection

2.1 Evidence considered

<u>Evidence</u>	<u>Y/N</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Application form	Yes	Detailed information on staff induction and training, staff monitoring, review and monitoring of safety, equipment maintenance and emergency procedures, including first aid.
Previous reports	Yes	Viewed reports from 26/08/22 and 06/05/24.
RIDDOR notifications	None	Confirmed with provider during Teams video call
Any visits by EHO/HSE	None	Confirmed with provider during Teams video call
Operating procedures / risk assessments	Yes	Sampled risk assessments and operating procedures for licensable activities from each category.
Staff competency information	Yes	Viewed staff competency matrix

Researched the applicant on-line	Yes	On 01/04/25 the inspector viewed the Orkney Council website which had minimal information on outdoor activities.
Communication with applicant (management interview)	Yes	During a Teams video call with Chris on 04/04/25, the inspector explored and discussed the following: a. whether there had been any changes to activities or venues used since the last application review. Chris confirmed that off road cycling was not to be considered as part of this application review; b. the appointment of the new senior instructor, including his role, experience, induction and ongoing training; c. the use of seasonal staff at the Hoy Centre and how they were inducted at the start of each season; d. the frequency that instructors were observed delivering sessions; e. the daily sign out/in arrangements and how this worked if Chris was not available; f. how instructors were made aware of group medical/additional information; g. how any changes to procedures were shared with instructors; h. minimum first aid requirements of instructors and access to first aid kits; i. the late back and emergency arrangements with particular reference to coasteering and gorge scrambling, including incapacitated instructor and access to electronic aids for summoning assistance; j. changes to coasteering operating procedures in light of previous industry accidents and incidents.

2.2 Having completed the core inspection and considered the evidence outlined in 2.1 above, the inspector is satisfied that the applicant has:

a. made a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks involved in their licensable activities;	Satisfied
b. identified control measures to manage these risks;	Satisfied
c. appointed competent person/s to advise on safety;	Satisfied
d. appropriate arrangements for effectively implementing, controlling, monitoring and reviewing the safety management of their activities.	Not yet satisfied

2.3 The inspector is also satisfied that the applicant has suitable and sufficient arrangements for:

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| a. appointing sufficient number of competent instructors; | Satisfied |
| b. giving safety information to instructors and participants; | Satisfied |
| c. providing sufficient equipment to deliver activities safely and for maintaining this; | Satisfied |
| d. providing first aid; | Satisfied |
| e. calling medical and rescue services and dealing with emergencies. | Satisfied |

2.4 Where sections 2.2 or 2.3 above indicate that the inspector is not yet satisfied a further inspection will be carried out, and outlined in section 3 of this report, before a final decision is reached (see section 4).

2.5 Date of application consultation meeting	10/04/25
2.6 Further inspection required?	Yes
Rationale	To corroborate the practical application of the safety management arrangements

3. Further inspection

Description and evidence considered

3.1 The further inspection consisted of a site visit on 09/05/25 and a Teams video call with Richard Smith on 15/05/25.

3.2 During the site visit to the Hoy Outdoor Centre, the inspector:

- joined the morning staff meeting;
- observed an activity session;
- interviewed two instructors;
- interviewed Chris.

3.3 During the morning staff meeting the inspector listened as Chris, Denney, Zoe and Pete discussed the weather forecast, each of their plans for the day, any information on the participants from the previous day, any damaged equipment or incidents from the previous day. The inspector observed Chris complete the daily log and then each of the instructors complete their daily sign out sheet.

3.4 The inspector joined Zoe for her briefing of her group prior to a gorge scrambling activity.

The inspector then joined Pete for a tyrolean activity with seven primary school children, during which the inspector:

- observed Pete and Chris set up and check the tyrolean traverse across a large coastal zawn;
- observed Pete equip the children with harnesses and helmets, check them and give them a safety brief about the activity and go/no go zones;
- observed two children undertake the tyrolean traverse.

3.5 During an interview with Denny, the inspector questioned him about:

- a. the induction and training he had received so far in the role of senior instructor;
- b. future training still required and the timetable to complete this training;
- c. his current roles and responsibilities in light of his limited time in the senior instructor role;
- d. how the daily sign out/in arrangements work in practice;
- e. his understanding of the arrangements for running activities if Chris is not available due to illness.

3.6 During an interview with Zoe, the inspector questioned her about:

- a. her experience and background;
- b. the number of seasons she has worked for OIC, noting this was her fourth season;
- c. the induction and training she received at the start of each season;
- d. the process of confirming her competence to run coasteering sessions;
- e. the daily sign out/in arrangements and her understanding of what would happen if a group were late back;
- f. the frequency with she has been observed delivering activity sessions.

3.7 During an interview with Chris, the inspector questioned him about:

- a. the arrangements in place if he was unable to be involved in the daily staff meeting. Chris described how currently, whilst Donny was still being trained, this would fall to his line manager and any adventurous activities would most likely be cancelled;
- b. the current responsibilities Donny could undertake;
- c. the planned training to bring him fully up to the senior instructor role.

3.8 During a Teams interview with Richard and Cheryl Rafferty (DofE Manager), the inspector questioned them about:

- a. their respective roles;
- b. the nature of DofE expeditions delivered by the two high schools and the Sanday group. Both confirmed that the high schools only ran bronze and silver expeditions for their own pupils on Orkney and did not use licensable terrain, and that the Sanday group used a third party AALA licence holder on the mainland for their gold expeditions;
- c. the arrangements for checking DofE expedition risk assessments and route cards, noting they (and another colleague) had initial oversight of expeditions and Chris Jeffs made the final check.

4. Outcome

The core inspection and, where necessary, the further inspection have satisfied the inspector that the applicant has demonstrated their compliance with the requirements of the Adventure Activities Licensing Regulations (2004). Yes

Inspector recommended decision Licence is granted

This licence duration will be calculated using the AALA's new arrangements for licence duration, for licences starting on, or after, 01/04/25.

Date report submitted by inspector 15/05/25

The following sections of this report are only relevant where the inspector has identified guidance for the applicant (section 7) or where the licensing authority is recommended to take action.

5. Relevant action for the licensing authority

Adventure RMS recommends that the licensing authority takes the following action.

None

6. Remedial actions for the applicant

Remedial actions are identified when the inspector is unable to recommend granting a licence or recommends imposing a non-standard condition or variation to a licence. These explain the issues and remedial action(s) that the licensing authority believe the applicant/licence holder should make to their operation.

None

7. Guidance for the licence holder

Guidance is only included where the inspector wishes to draw the attention of the applicant, and the AALA, to issues not directly pertinent to the recommendation of this report.

None