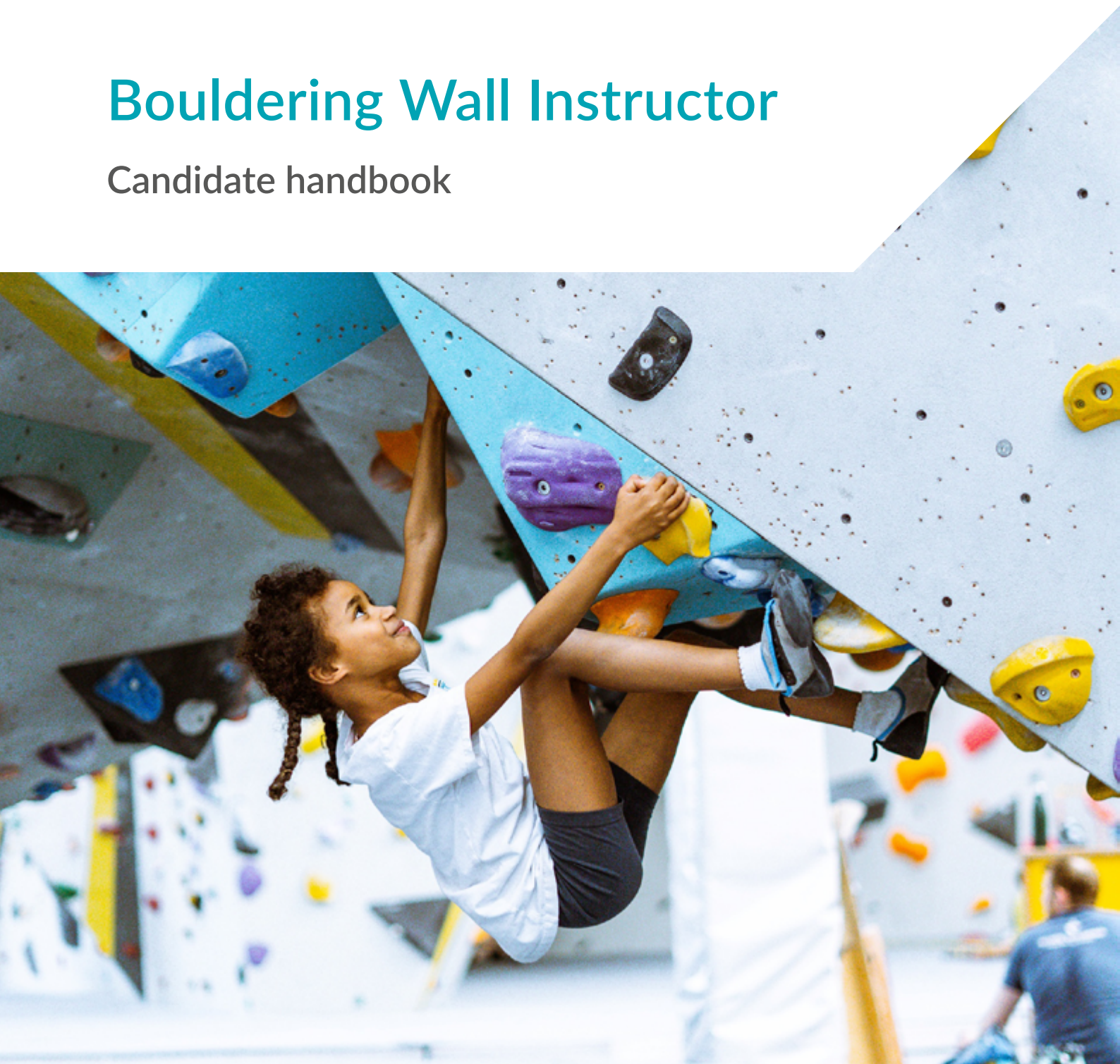




**Mountain  
Training**

# Bouldering Wall Instructor

Candidate handbook





# Preface

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This handbook has been designed to support candidates through Mountain Training's Bouldering Wall Instructor qualification. It contains useful information about the various stages in the scheme as well as the syllabus and guidance notes.

## Participation statement

Mountain Training recognises that walking, climbing, and mountaineering are activities that have associated risks. Mountain Training provides training and assessment courses and guidance to help instructors develop the skills to manage the risks associated with the environment in which they operate and to enable new participants to have positive experiences.

All instructors owe a heightened duty of care to the people they instruct, their colleagues, and the wider public who may be impacted by the instructor's actions.

Mountain Training qualified instructors will act in the best interests of their group, individual group members and others, and they will always act within their competence to prevent harm to them.

## Acknowledgements

Mountain Training would like to thank all the staff members and volunteers involved in the Bouldering Wall Instructor Working Group.

Thanks also to the following individuals and organisations whose photographs bring the handbook to life: The Climbing Hangar climbing centers, Boulderhut climbing centers, The Boardroom Climbing Ltd, and Nick Brown.



## Rock Climbing

Throughout this handbook there are references to Rock Climbing by Libby Peter which we publish to support developing rock climbers and instructors. It is packed with essential information and techniques and we have listed the relevant chapter(s) for each syllabus area.



# 1. Qualification pathway

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## 1.1 Introduction

The Bouldering Wall Instructor qualification enables experienced boulderers to instruct bouldering on purpose built artificial bouldering structures in the UK and Ireland.

## 1.2 Scope of the qualification

A qualified Bouldering Wall Instructor can:

- Teach bouldering skills.
- Manage groups safely in these activities.

### 1.2.1 Terrain

A qualified Bouldering Wall Instructor can operate on:

- Indoor and outdoor artificial bouldering structures.

### 1.2.2 Exclusions

The qualification does not cover:

- The bouldering skills needed to climb and/or supervise others on natural boulders (these are covered in the Rock Climbing Instructor qualification).
- The teaching or supervision of roped climbing.
- The rock climbing skills needed to climb and/or supervise others on natural crags and quarries (these are covered in the Rock Climbing Instructor qualification).

## 1.3 Stages in the qualification

### 1.3.1 Registration prerequisites

- You must be at least 16 years old (18 at assessment).
- You should have at least 3 months of experience of using indoor/artificial bouldering



walls, including a major public bouldering centre.

- You should have an interest in bouldering and in supervising groups bouldering.
- You must be a member of a mountaineering council (British Mountaineering Council, Mountaineering Ireland, Mountaineering Scotland).

### 1.3.2 Training prerequisites

- You must be registered on the qualification.
- You must have an up-to-date logbook (preferably DLOG) with evidence of the following:
  - Visits to 3 different indoor/artificial bouldering walls on at least 15 different occasions; this must include at least one major public bouldering centre.
  - Personal bouldering at V2 or above.

### 1.3.3 Consolidation period

Boulder at a wide range of venues, both as an individual and when assisting with the supervision of others.

All but the most experienced candidates should allow a minimum of three months between training and assessment.

There is currently no time limit on the validity of a training course and some candidates may take several years to complete the qualification.



Our association can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications. We are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.



### 1.3.4 Assessment prerequisites

- You must be at least 18 years old to attend the assessment.
- You must have completed a Bouldering Wall Instructor training course or been granted exemption from training.
- You must be familiar with the syllabus.
- You must have logged a minimum of 30 personal climbing visits to at least three different indoor/artificial bouldering venues.
- You must boulder proficiently at V2.
- You must have assisted in the supervision of at least 10 instructed sessions on at least two different indoor/artificial bouldering venues, including a large public facility. A session is a minimum of an hour. At least five of these sessions must have personal reflective comments recorded on DLOG.
- You must have observed an additional two sessions run by different instructors.
- You must have physically attended and completed (i.e. not online) a first aid course which involved at least one full day or 8 hours of instruction and included an element of assessment.

## 2. Course structure

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### 2.1 Training

Training will involve a minimum of 7 hours contact time delivered over one day or two or three sessions. You are also encouraged to complete the online learning resources on:

- Pathway to effective leadership
- Instructor responsibilities

Results: Completed, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show, Exemption.



## 2.2 Assessment

Assessment will involve a minimum of 3 hours contact time involving a group.

Results: Pass, Defer, Fail, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show. There is no exemption from any element of the assessment.

In the case of a 'Defer' result candidates will be given an action plan and guidance on further training and experience. The candidate may be required to attend a subsequent one-to-one demonstration of competence. Candidates are strongly encouraged to return to the original provider for re-assessment but can be seen by any approved provider. All reassessments must be completed within five years.

In the event of a 'Fail' result, candidates must subsequently attend a full assessment.

## 3. Course delivery

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### 3.1 Training

Course directors must hold the Bouldering Wall Instructor/Climbing Wall Instructor/Rock Climbing Instructor AND hold Development Coach/Level 1 Climbing Coach or higher, plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Additional staff must be Bouldering Wall Instructor/Climbing Wall Instructor/Rock Climbing Instructor AND hold Foundation Coach or higher.

Min course size: 2, max course size: 12, max ratio: 1:6.

### 3.2 Assessment

Course directors must hold the Bouldering Wall Instructor/Climbing Wall Instructor/Rock Climbing Instructor AND have Development Coach/Level 1 Climbing Coach or higher, plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Additional staff must Climbing Wall Instructor AND Foundation Coach or higher.

Min course size: 2, max course size: 8, max ratio: 1:4.



## 4. Awarding organisations

- Mountain Training Board Ireland
- Mountain Training Cymru
- Mountain Training England
- Mountain Training Scotland



# Syllabus and guidance notes

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## Technical competence

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Bouldering Wall Instructors will have a broad knowledge of bouldering. They will be able to identify and evaluate appropriate artificial bouldering venues and demonstrate their use to individuals during a bouldering session. They will be personally competent in a range of bouldering techniques and be able to provide clear demonstration and effective tuition to novice climbers. Bouldering Wall Instructors will be able to provide effective supervision and safe management of bouldering participants. They will be able to:

### 1. Personal bouldering skills

- 1.1 Choose, practice, climb and descend problems suited to personal ability, proficiently (minimum V2).
- 1.2 Demonstrate a good understanding of bouldering safety.
- 1.3 Understand how to read simple boulder problems.
- 1.4 Move with confidence on appropriate boulder problems.





## Guidance

Being a good role model is an essential part of being a Bouldering Wall Instructor. When you are climbing, regardless of the grade on which you are operating, you should look skilful and deliberate. Demonstrating appropriate movement skills with confidence, effectiveness and efficiency is key. Candidates need to be able to select a problem graded at V2 or above, practice it, and then climb it smoothly and with precision.



### Chapter 7.1: Bouldering

## Key practice points

When demonstrating a problem remember you are a role model, and this goes beyond climbing well, and may include:

- Brushing holds before and after climbing.
- Route reading.
- Checking for other climbers and clearing trip hazards on the mat.
- Climbing with accuracy and efficiency.
- Climbing back down.





## 2. Background knowledge

- 2.1 Describe the context of bouldering within the history, traditions and ethics of climbing in the UK and Ireland.
- 2.2 Describe the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its qualifications, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and the NICAS schemes.
- 2.3 Describe the structure of competition bouldering.
- 2.4 Describe the bouldering grading systems used in the UK and Ireland.

## Guidance

A Bouldering Wall Instructor is an ambassador for the sport and you should understand something of the history of climbing walls and how they fit into the wider world of competition climbing, outdoor climbing and mountaineering. You should be able to signpost participants to these activities where relevant. In your role as a Bouldering Wall Instructor you should be prepared to operate on walls of any style or age, using whatever grading system is in operation. You should also have knowledge of how Mountain Training works and the qualifications and training they offer. You can then advise others for whom a Mountain Training qualification or skills training course will support their own personal development

Candidates registering on the Bouldering Wall Instructor qualification will be a member of their mountaineering council, and so join a large community of climbers, walkers and mountaineers. Mountaineering Scotland, Mountaineering Ireland and the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) publish good practice resources, deliver training events, manage competitions and the GB Team, as well as campaign to protect the freedoms of the wider climbing, walking and mountaineering community, and so their work supports Mountain Training candidates. Membership also provides personal accident and liability insurance cover for candidates when volunteering as an instructor in their consolidation period. You could consider volunteering your time to support your mountaineering council to learn more about their work.



Chapter 2: A brief history of UK and Irish climbing

Chapter 6.2: Climbing grades



## Mountain Training

The network of awarding organisations who administer skills courses and leadership qualifications. Approved providers deliver the courses.

## Mountaineering councils

The councils protect the interests of walkers, climbers and mountaineers and the cliffs, hills and mountains they enjoy.



## Mountain Training Association

Mountain Training's membership association providing support and development opportunities for trainee and qualified candidates.



## Key practice points

- Consider watching or taking part in a competition or volunteering for a bouldering competition during your consolidation period.
- Try and climb at walls that use different grading systems.
- Explore Mountain Training's and your mountaineering council's website to gain a greater understanding of their roles and the work they do.
- Familiarise yourself with NICAS.



## Management and decision making

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Bouldering Wall Instructors should be able to independently organise, plan, manage and deliver sessions to a wide range of participants, from novices to improving climbers, often with support from an assistant. They should be able to:

### 3. Instructor responsibilities

- 3.1 Explain their general responsibilities to the group and, where appropriate, to parents/guardians, the organising authority, manager of the activity, other participants and the general public.



- 3.2 Explain their specific responsibilities to choose appropriate aims and objectives, to plan the session and to ensure that the group is adequately prepared and briefed for the activity.
- 3.3 Demonstrate an understanding of current legislation and the legal responsibilities that relate to the duty of care to individuals and groups under their charge, including safeguarding issues specific to supervising young people and vulnerable adults.
- 3.4 Demonstrate an awareness of the variety of barriers to participation, including mental and physical disability, ethnicity, fitness/health and be aware of the impact of various medical conditions.
- 3.5 Be able to signpost individuals towards further participation.

## Guidance

As a Bouldering Wall Instructor you have a clear duty of care to your groups, the level of which will vary according to the group members' age and experience. You owe a greater duty of care when you are acting in loco parentis with people under 18 years of age. The indoor climbing environment presents hazards that may not be apparent to novice climbers, so participants and parents of children participating in this activity should be made aware of and accept these risks.

Many of your responsibilities as an instructor will be identified through preparation and planning and will likely include: parental consent (if participants are under 18), authority clearance (if required), personal and medical information, finances, insurance and transport. Employing/deploying organisations such as schools, Scouts, Girlguiding and local education authorities will have their own procedures in place to ensure that appropriate preparation has been undertaken. Your understanding of and ability to adapt to these procedures and underlying principles will enable you to independently prepare appropriate climbing activities.



### Chapter 20: The law and risk management

#### Preparation:

Before any session ensure that you have all the necessary paperwork completed (e.g. consent forms, medical details, emergency contacts, acknowledgement of risk, etc.), as well as an understanding of the experience of the group, and layout of the venue, including types of route setting, angles, blind spots, collision areas and difficulties of problems available as well as the ease of descent.



An appropriate safety briefing to prepare the group for a session should include the following points:

- Ensure participants are wearing appropriate clothing, with empty pockets and jewellery removed or made safe.
- Check the fit and appropriateness of footwear. Well-fitting climbing shoes will help participants have better control while climbing, but may cause some to feel less steady walking around.
- Helmets may be appropriate for novice groups on low level traverses with little safety matting.
- Housekeeping; the location of toilets, storage facilities and what to do in the event of an alarm.
- Group management issues such as requiring the group to remain together and to ask you if someone needs to leave the group for any reason.
- How many people can be bouldering at any given time.
- Find out whether anyone has had a recent injury or has restricted movement.



Chapter 1.12 Style and structure of activity & Group size and choice of venue

Chapter 7.1: Bouldering and Bouldering group management

For beginners and groups new to an instructor consider including:

- An explanation of the level of the risks involved.
- An explicit statement that the matting does not remove the risk of injury.
- A warning not to walk or climb underneath or close behind other climbers.
- A warning not to top-out (except where topping out is permitted).
- A warning that holds may spin or break.
- Identification of specific hazards such as arêtes and archways and how to deal with them.
- A warning that the descent may often be the hardest part of the climb and that participants should not just jump off without first practising climbing down and jumping off safely.



The ability to prepare for any group prior to the activity is important and you should seek opportunities to assess the participants' needs and abilities before the session starts.

Each and every bouldering wall will have its own operating procedures. These do have much commonality, but you should look out for any special conditions which apply to each venue.

Safeguarding should run through everything you do; it is not an afterthought. Your planning and execution of sessions should incorporate policies and practices that create a safe space for all, so that everyone can participate equally and confidently. You should overtly set an inclusive tone at the beginning of the session and challenge any discriminatory behaviour. Good safeguarding practice will protect you as well as the participants. All instructors and coaches should receive safeguarding training so that they can detect the signs and know what to do in the case of suspected abuse. This is everyone's responsibility.

24% of the UK population have some form of physical or mental disability. Take the time to find out what any participants can do and always treat them with the same respect as you would any other. Disabilities are often not visible and you should always ask at the beginning of a session if anyone wishes to declare any limitations or who prefers a particular means of communication. Do not expect full disclosure and be alert for any difficulties.

Your position of responsibility extends beyond the activity itself and participants may look to you for guidance on how to continue climbing independently or to develop their skills further. A rounded knowledge of suitable opportunities is therefore very useful.



## Chapter 13: Coaching disabled climbers

### Key practice points

- Explore what different organisations or employers expect from you as an instructor with regards to your responsibilities.
- Make yourself familiar with the responsibilities of taking people climbing, in particular with under those under the age of 18. Mountain Training has an e-module to support you with this.



- Make sure that you have completed an appropriate safeguarding in sport course before working with any groups. This should involve at least 3 hours of training face to face online or in-person. The BMC and Sport Scotland deliver free courses. Others are delivered online by UK Coaching and the NSPCC.
- Undertake additional training for working with participants with physical or mental disabilities and additional needs (such as Access Sport and Climbing for All courses).



## 4. Leadership and decision-making

4.1 The instructor demonstrates adaptable behaviours and decision-making. They should be able to:

4.1.1 Monitor the group, environmental conditions (including when operating on outdoor artificial structures) and activity, and adapt their behaviours and decisions to meet ongoing safety, group and task requirements.

4.1.2 Be consistent and confident in their decision making to achieve positive outcomes and communicate these clearly to the group.

4.2 **VISION** – The leader is a positive role model and aims to inspire others.

4.2.1 Articulate clear and agreed values for their group; lead by example; and behave how they want the group to behave.





### **4.3 SUPPORT – The leader creates a positive and supportive environment for the group.**

- 4.3.1 Recognise, respect and adapt to individual needs, differences, strengths and abilities.
- 4.3.2 Encourage independent learning; establish an environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities and provide clear and positive feedback to support this.

### **4.4 CHALLENGE – The leader provides relevant and appropriately challenging experiences.**

- 4.4.1 Agree group goals and calibrate the level of challenge to individual abilities and motivations.
- 4.4.2 Encourage and support the group and individuals to be part of the decision-making process and encourage them to solve their own problems.

### **4.5 The leader understands the Mountain Training ethos of leadership and has developed their own. They should be able to:**

- 4.5.1 Articulate their own leadership ethos and beliefs along with those of Mountain Training.
- 4.5.2 Acknowledge and describe a range of leadership approaches, models and associated ethos.

## **Guidance**

A Bouldering Wall Instructor needs to demonstrate the basic skills and decision-making of adaptive leadership. They should have a well-researched plan for their group which incorporates factors such as the groups' abilities and needs, as well as the climbing venue and intended climbs. What is most important is to match their leadership choices with the desired outcomes for the group.

In spite of the best made plans, things can and do change – be it the booking, the group, how busy the venue is or whatever. A good instructor will notice, and be on the lookout for, these changes before a problem arises and adapt their approach accordingly. For example, if a section of the climbing wall is busy then it may be better to undertake an alternative activity in another area.



There are seven components of leadership that contribute to the effectiveness of the instructor:

1. Instructor style: controlling versus non-controlling.
2. Decision making: what informs this and how to make them.
3. Instructor observations: what they should be and how to make them.
4. Instructor communication skills: verbal and non-verbal, listening.
5. Experience and ability: how this influences decision making.
6. Emotional intelligence: to support individuals
7. Group management: techniques, style and influences

Candidates should reflect on these when instructing groups and seek to develop them over their career.

Underpinning the role of an instructor are the values, beliefs, and ethos that shape every individual's view of what leadership should be. All instructors tend to have preferred behaviours (leadership styles) that are heavily influenced by these and their personality traits. Instructors will need to adapt their preferred behaviour to an appropriate set of actions required to balance the needs of both the situation and the group.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' model of transformational leadership provides a framework that instructors can use to plan, execute and review their leadership behaviours. In this way, groups who receive the right balance of the three categories can be encouraged to perform beyond their own expectations. Transformational leadership is a model of positive behaviours (known by the mnemonic INSPIRE) that instructors can use to promote the best outcomes for their groups:

**I**nspire and motivate your followers with a unified vision.

**N**urture an environment of team-focused goals

**S**et the example you want to see in your followers.

**P**raise and give constructive feedback to help your followers develop.

**I**nsist on setting high standards, relative to each individual.

**R**ecognise and respond to each individual's needs.

**E**ncourage followers to create and implement their own solutions.



Instructors need to develop trust amongst their group. This requires an appropriate balance of consultation, empathy and instruction to engineer success. Effective instructors will, for example, adapt the way they communicate to best suit their group and will give different degrees of responsibility to groups of varying ability and experience.



## Chapter 13: Inspiring others

### Key practice points

- Observe other instructors planning and delivering a session and review the decisions they made along the way. Why did they make those decisions? What would you have done?
- Make sure your group is ready to receive instruction when you need to give it – gather them together and make sure they are all looking at you before you speak.
- Challenge by choice. Calibrate and establish goals; too low and they will become disengaged, too high and you will lose their trust.





## 5. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

- 5.1 Plan a structured and engaging bouldering session for a range of participants.
- 5.2 Introduce and demonstrate a range of bouldering activities, using appropriate games and activities, including setting appropriate boulder problems.
- 5.3 Teach and demonstrate basic bouldering movement skills:
  - 5.3.1 Awareness of the concept of their centre of gravity.
  - 5.3.2 Balanced movement, with accurate use of the feet.
  - 5.3.3 Efficient use of the skeleton to support the body's weight.
  - 5.3.4 Appropriate contact with holds and features.
  - 5.3.5 Safe falling and landing.
  - 5.3.6 Safe topping out where necessary.

### Guidance

Bouldering Wall Instructors run safe, engaging and developmental climbing sessions for their participants. You should be able to assess individuals' abilities and needs and calibrate activities accordingly. All sessions should have a structure with a (creative) warm up, teaching input, an opportunity to practice and to receive feedback. Mountain Training's guidance on session delivery gives more detail here:

<https://www.mountain-training.org/media/npvf1vux/bouldering-guidance-on-session-delivery-and-supervision.pdf>

Teaching movement skills requires a combination of clear demonstration, explanation of technique, safely calibrated and managed practice, observation and feedback skills.

Candidates should be taught to move in an efficient manner that reduces the likelihood of injury. Understanding how to use the skeleton and move one's centre of gravity in control and with precision is key to this. Route and hold reading is also an essential skill that can be taught from the basics upwards. Mountain Training's Coaching qualifications will extend your development in these skills.



A critical skill and responsibility of the instructor is to teach participants how to descend or fall and land safely. Done well, this will greatly reduce the chances of climbers injuring themselves over their careers. Done badly, this will likely create injuries under your care! Therefore, such sessions must be introduced progressively and from the ground up to minimise the risk of harming your participants. Some useful guidance is here:

<https://youtu.be/Qc7ZQHE9L9w?si=kzcxsFfDCAS12q9b> (Copyright: Road to V11 on YouTube)



Chapter 3 Warming up and avoiding injuries

Chapter 4: Movement skills

### Key practice points

- The bouldering wall is your pallet. Don't just stick to set problems but make up carefully calibrated ones to benefit your participants. Marker tape, an allen key and a creative mind are all useful – but ask management for permission first.
- When demonstrating and teaching landing skills start with the landing position and floor drills (e.g. backwards roll, standing backwards roll) to achieve this before working from progressively higher points from the wall.
- The FUNdamentals courses are particularly relevant to delivering a quality bouldering session.





## 6. Hazards and emergency procedures

- 6.1 Demonstrate an ability to risk assess the use of bouldering walls and their fixtures, evaluate their condition and ensure appropriate use of:
  - 6.1.1 Floor surfaces, including fixed and mobile matting.
  - 6.1.2 Holds, features and volumes and their fixings.
  - 6.1.3 Bouldering surface angles.
  - 6.1.4 General site use.
- 6.2 Have an awareness of the effects of youth development, pre-existing injuries, body types and poor technique and training on injury potential and be able to signpost to further information on these.
- 6.3 Demonstrate an understanding of warming-up and injury avoidance techniques.
- 6.4 Identify common bouldering hazards and prevent or solve common bouldering problems.
- 6.5 Demonstrate the role of spotting or support and how to provide this if required.
- 6.6 In the case of an incident describe how to treat minor sports injuries and how to call for relevant assistance.
- 6.7 Supervise a group of boulderers safely.

## Guidance

### Warm ups:

Bouldering Wall Instructors should run effective warm-ups that are appropriate for the group and the style of climbing to be undertaken. These may last 20 mins+ depending on the group and environmental conditions. Ensure sessions include lots of technique work. Bouldering 'better' reduces the strain on the upper body and fingers. Avoid repetitive training – mix up the styles of problems used and the angle of the wall and beware of dynamic moves, for example dropping onto holds or swinging between holds. During growth spurts young people are especially prone to injuries, particularly in the fingers.



Chapter 3: Warming up and avoiding injuries

Chapter 4: Movement skills



## Hazards:

A Bouldering Wall Instructor must be aware of hazards and common injuries that may exist in an indoor bouldering environment, and have strategies to manage and minimise them. Hazards include:

- Regular ground fall (which has obvious physical injury consequences).
- Other users walking under or close to your group.
- Gaps in matting, insufficient depth or coverage (causing potential physical injuries).
- Overhanging areas where others can pass underneath.
- Spinning, unpinned holds (causing out of control falls).
- Sharp or small crimp holds (which may result in finger injuries).
- Fall zones near walls or hard objects such as volumes.
- Objects left on matting, in pockets or wearing a harness.
- Blind corners and arêtes (which may cause out of control moves).
- Awkward top outs and difficult descents.
- High problems bearing in mind size/age of participants.

## Descending:

Getting down safely is one of the most important parts of an introductory bouldering session but is often overlooked. The two options are down climbing and jumping off, but few new climbers find either option easy or instinctive. Both methods need explanation, demonstration and lots of practice in a carefully managed setting. Jumping off is a skill best developed from the ground, addressing good landing technique and then progressively adding height.



Chapter 7.1.3: Down climbing

Chapter 7.1.4: Jumping and landing



## Key practice points

- Develop a selection of warm-ups for a variety of groups.
- Ensure that people build up to using small holds over an extended period of time.
- Encourage different ways to hold handholds, including open hand, half crimp as well as full crimp positions.
- Be aware of the dangers of using fingerboards and campus boards for under 18s. See: [www.thebmc.co.uk/campus-boards-guidance-on-use](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/campus-boards-guidance-on-use)
- Be mindful of blind corners and archways where the risk of collisions with other climbers is higher.
- Check which parts of the wall will be free and whether other sessions will be running.

### Spotting:

A Bouldering Wall Instructor will understand that spotting is an advanced skill usually carried out by experienced climbers or instructors. In most cases it is safer to provide proper instruction on how to fall and land safely (see above). The risks associated with peer-to-peer spotting often outweigh the risks of not spotting at all, so it is rarely appropriate for novices to spot each other.

However, as an instructor you should be able to make a judgement about when it may or may not be appropriate to provide additional support or protection through the use of spotting. The purpose of spotting is to reduce the risk of injury, but this cannot be guaranteed. Often the primary role of the spotter in an indoor environment is to provide reassurance to the climber and to ensure the landing area is clear of objects and other climbers.



### Chapter 7.1.5 Spotting





## Key practice points:

- The spotter stands below the climber, with arms raised or at the ready, keeping fingers together to avoid broken fingers.
- If the climber falls, the spotter does not catch the climber, but redirects the climber's fall so that they land safely. The spotter's role is to attempt to guide the climber's fall so that their head and back do not strike the ground directly.
- If the climber jumps down, the spotter can also help prevent stumbles and injuries.



## 7. Managing/supervising other staff

- 7.1 Explain the role and scope of an assistant. Describe the opportunities and liabilities presented by using an assistant in a session.
- 7.2 Manage an assistant.



## Guidance

An assistant is any person who supports an instructor in the delivery of their session but who does not direct or make decisions about the management of the session.

Assistants and unqualified staff can be of enormous benefit to a session provided that they are managed appropriately. They can support the talented, those with individual requirements, their peers, or their own students and children, and can be powerful role models for the participants. However, the judgements as to what activities are to be undertaken, and how they are to be managed, remain with the instructor.

Assistants and other staff come with a wide range of experience and competencies, and you are wholly responsible for assessing these. If in doubt you should not use an assistant and not be compelled to work with them either. By definition an assistant or an unqualified member of staff cannot work independently and you are responsible for the group and the actions of an assistant at all times. All assistant deployment should be risk assessed before each session begins. It is essential that assistants are appropriately supervised by you, the instructor, so that there can be constant communication and guidance given.

It is not possible to give specific guidance on instructor/student ratios with assistants as this will vary with the situation. For example, a disabled climber may benefit from the support of two or more assistants working very closely with an instructor whilst a talented academy group may benefit from an assistant working in sight of the instructor. The qualified instructor remains ultimately responsible for the group and must always be in a position to intervene if necessary.

## Key practice points

- Practise briefing an assistant about their role and remit.
- Practise maintaining a position of maximum effectiveness, keeping assistants within sight and easy communication at all times.
- Get into the habit of discussing your session with an assistant to give and receive feedback.



## Teaching and learning skills

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Bouldering Wall Instructors will frequently need to give tuition and support to a range of boulderers from novices to experienced practitioners in a range of bouldering related techniques. They should be able to:

### 8. Teaching and learning skills

- 8.1 Demonstrate an ability to adapt the teaching style to meet group needs.
- 8.2 Identify and use appropriate tasks to develop effective and safe boulderers.
- 8.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for evaluating a session and success of the outcome.



## Guidance

Bouldering Wall Instructors need to quickly create a positive learning environment, building trust and confidence within their group so that participants feel relaxed and comfortable to tackle new and challenging activities. Age, ability, individual requirements, confidence and energy levels amongst the group will require different approaches to achieve this.

Strong communication skills are key. The ability to create rapport, communicate at an appropriate level, use positive language, provide a variety of demonstration techniques, check for understanding through skilled questioning and give useful feedback and encouragement to individuals are the foundations of effective teaching.

In addition to these communication skills effective teaching requires instructors to be able to observe and assess participants' abilities and confidence levels. They then need to calibrate the appropriate level of challenge and structure a task to stimulate and stretch the climber but not to intimidate or defeat them. Instructors also need to be adaptive in their approach. If a particular technique or activity is not working well they should adapt their approach to better suit the needs of the group.

Remember that assistants can offer a valuable resource to support you with your teaching. Assistants are often connected with the group and will know much about their individual needs and potentially how best to deliver information to them.

All instructional sessions are different due to the nature of the group and the conditions of the day. Instructors should reflect upon the outcome of each session and consider changes of style or content that may improve the outcomes of the next one.

Effective Bouldering Wall Instructors recognise that prior planning and good structuring of sessions commonly results in participants having a safe and enjoyable time. In many ways, preparation is the hallmark of high-quality instruction. As a Bouldering Wall Instructor you may be required to work with a group over a number of sessions. You should be able to plan a series of sessions which might be spread over several weeks. Each session will need clear objectives to achieve the overall aims of the course. Each session should have a clear structure and show progression.

Time management is always a balancing game for instructors; being well prepared before a session is key. The pace of a session at a climbing wall can be relatively fast. You will need to be able to adjust the time allowed for particular activities within a session in order to respond to the needs of your group.



### Chapter 5: Improving your climbing



## Key practice points

- Observe how other instructors plan and structure climbing sessions based around their clients' aims and objectives and how this might change with different circumstances.
- Learn some effective games/activities to engage learners at the beginning of a session and to enable you to observe group dynamics.
- Practise different delivery styles and think about when/with whom you might use them.
- Reduce the threat; create a safe space for learning and failing – 'Have a go'.
- The Foundation Coach qualification will develop your session planning, teaching techniques and observational skills to enhance your delivery to your groups.





# The bouldering wall environment

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Bouldering Wall Instructors should be informed and experienced in the indoor bouldering wall environment, including both small and large scale (commercial) venues. They should be able to:

## 9. Etiquette and ethics

- 9.1 Operate a flexible programme of activities to accommodate other site or facility users.
- 9.2 Describe the site-specific requirements and agreements relating to different climbing walls and artificial structures.

## Guidance

You must manage your group in a manner which shows respect to other users of the space. You will also need to be mindful about where you would like non-participants to locate themselves and the level of interaction you are prepared for them to have with the group. You will need to be very clear with your group about expectations and be prepared to enforce these expectations in a way which supports their learning and does not diminish the experience for anyone else in the same area.

Always abide by the wall's safety rules, and find out their guidelines (if any) with regards to how the problems are designed to be climbed. This may include specific starting holds, matching finishing holds and using (or not) volumes. Venues may have rules about the use of chalk.

Bouldering has some generally accepted practices or etiquette that are worth sharing with new participants, such as:

- Take turns on problems - once you've had a go, step away from the wall to allow others to have a go.
- Ask a climber if they would like advice/guidance/beta before giving it (remember the guidance above about problem solving).
- Do not stand/sit/lie under climbs.
- Brush holds before and after bouldering.
- Ask before spotting.



## Appendix - Additional information

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### Personal reflective comments

Mountain Training presently requires assessment candidates to have reflective comments recorded in DLOG for the Bouldering Wall Instructor, Rock Climbing Instructor, Climbing Wall Instructor and Climbing Wall Development Instructor. Reflecting on experience is an important part of an instructor's development. Although feedback from others can be very useful it is important we can also independently consider our experiences in relation to the desired outcome.

The key aim of undertaking these reflective comments is to identify and reflect on areas of practice from the relevant Mountain Training qualification syllabus, and supporting guidance notes, where there is a desire or perceived need to reflect on one's personal practice to develop fluency. Being able to effectively analyse experience can be challenging but a few critically analysed sessions are of great value in identifying potential improvements for the future. When making these comments candidates should ask themselves the following questions and outline their responses:

- What are the desired aims and objectives of the session?
- What were the actual outcomes of the session?
- What was successful and less successful (reference the relevant Mountain Training syllabus) in your delivery of the session?
- What you would change to improve the outcome?

Your responses can then be added into DLOG in the comments section of the relevant DLOG entry.

### Course delivery

Mountain Training courses are delivered by approved providers throughout the UK and Ireland. Providers of Bouldering Wall Instructor courses will appoint a course director for each course.

Courses can be found by searching on the [Candidate Management System \(tahdah\)](#) or on [our website](#).

Your training and assessment results will be recorded on your account.



## Exemption from training

Experienced boulderers who already have substantial personal climbing experience and experience of supervising groups on indoor/artificial bouldering walls may apply for exemption from training. To qualify for exemption candidates must, at the very least, meet the minimum experience requirements for attendance at an assessment course and demonstrate that they have received relevant training in the management of bouldering groups and assistants.

Further details of the exemption process can be found on the Mountain Training website.

There is no exemption from assessment.

## Further experience

Once you have passed the Bouldering Wall Instructor assessment you are responsible for remaining current and up to date with good practice for as long as you are using your qualification. Mountain Training would like to encourage you to regularly dedicate some time to your development both as a climber and as a Bouldering Wall Instructor.

The Mountain Training Association is a membership association designed to support both trainee and qualified candidates by providing access to developmental workshops, conferences and peer learning events among other member benefits.

The responsibility for ensuring that instructor receive refresher training must lie with the provider of the service, or the individual in the case of self-employed leaders. Bouldering Wall Instructors who wish to operate beyond the scope of their qualification(s) by virtue of their additional experience and/or training, for example a Rock Climbing Instructor taking a group climbing at a sport climbing quarry may be enabled to do so either through in-house training and/or within the context of a site specific scheme.

Mountain Training publishes a digital document called the National Guidelines which provides advice on good practice for anyone with a responsibility for climbing, walking and mountaineering related activities, and encompassing the principles of safety management.





# Mountain Training Association

Our association is a membership organisation that can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications.

As a membership association we are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.

## We can help you with:

- Big savings on clothing and equipment
- A wide range of accredited development workshops, events and opportunities for continuing personal/professional development
- Specialist mentoring for your qualification
- Regional networks and opportunities to build connections with others in the sector
- The Professional Mountaineer magazine offering advice, tips and guidance from experts and peers within the profession
- Specially negotiated rates for liability insurance for qualified members

Anyone can join from the moment they register for a Mountain Training qualification, and can join anytime when working towards a qualification or when qualified.

Join via your account on the Mountain Training Candidate Management System (Tahdah – CMS).

“The workshops I’ve done have been brilliant and have definitely made me a better leader” Alex, Association member.

“The Association offers an excellent range of CPD, which has given me a broader understanding of the role, skills and expertise required to be a great leader. Definitely recommend.” Charlie, Association member.