

# Outdoor First Aid Training By Outdoor Practitioners

by Andy Robinson, IOL CEO



The UK Outdoor Sector is one of the very few workplaces worldwide that requires the majority of those that work in it to hold a valid first aid qualification. In most sectors in the UK employers only need a small proportion of their employees to be trained in First Aid to meet HSE requirements and many professional bodies do not require their practitioners to hold such a qualification.

Outdoor First Aid training provision has grown over the past few decades in line with the expansion of outdoor activity provision. It is probably the most commonly attended compulsory CPD in the sector, as a current First Aid qualification is required both by NGBs and by AALA. The system has grown to meet demand and the quality and specific content of courses can vary considerably. To date there has been limited work to ensure that the courses being offered are really meeting the needs of outdoor employers and practitioners, although NGBs have drawn up guidance for people holding their particular awards, the demands of NGBs vary and often rely on the First Aid provider having HSE approval to ensure the course is assessed and moderated. Last year's announcement by the HSE that it was withdrawing its approval of First Aid training providers focused a few minds on standards in Outdoor First Aid (OFA) training provision and assessment.

So what's the current position?: The HSE guidance on the content of generic First Aid qualifications such as 'Emergency First Aid at Work' and 'First Aid at Work' does little to cater for the needs of outdoor practitioners, though it does satisfy the HSE's basic requirement of an employer. Some of the National Governing Bodies of sport (NGB's) provide further guidance on the content of First Aid training required to meet the needs of their own awards, though some leave this to the discretion of the practitioner. Encouragingly many providers of Outdoor First Aid training have developed high quality courses and continue to refine their content and associated quality assurance and compliance regimes. Inevitably in a market with such high demand there is a pressure to deliver courses as quickly as possible and with no agreed minimum standards in Outdoor First Aid there is the potential for both the content and quality of delivery to slip and limited pressure for them to be developed.

It is this dual need of supporting outdoor employers in showing 'due diligence' (as cited in the new HSE regulations) and ensuring individuals can find an appropriate First Aid course to validate all their individual certificates of competence (National Governing Body awards) that has involved IOL. This has led to the formation of a working party to look into the possibility of providing advice and guidance for outdoor employers, practitioners and NGBs on what are appropriate First Aid skills and knowledge for different outdoor learning situations and generic outdoor practice.

The Institute has consulted with a range of Outdoor First Aid stakeholders to establish current need and to consider what minimum standards for the content and delivery of Outdoor First Aid training and assessment might look like. **It is readily accepted that many of the currently recognised courses delivered by outdoor practitioners for outdoor practitioners contain appropriate content and do so at a variety of levels practice.** There is scope to standardise the minimum content of these programmes to make the position clearer for employers and practitioners alike. This would also allow clearer

progression in competence for the practitioner as they seek appropriate Continuous Professional Development.

There is less certainty around the standards of training delivery and assessment associated with the full range of First Aid courses available to outdoor practitioners. The extent to which courses develop appropriate levels of skill as well as knowledge, appears to be very varied and this is reflected in the differing levels of scenario based training and assessment methods used. There is also some doubt about the extent to which appropriate environments are used to help learners to develop skills and knowledge that is readily applicable in the places that they work. The need to handle casualties on un-even and sloping ground is an oft cited example of something that is not always incorporated into all First Aid courses offered to outdoor practitioners. Similarly the use of indoor venues like colleges, leisure centres and climbing walls to deliver courses is not uncommon and does not necessarily prepare people for managing a casualty in the outdoor situation .

The HSE give guidance on the minimum level of trainer competence required to deliver HSE approved First Aid training and this provides a good starting point for use in Outdoor First Aid training. Inevitably this guidance does not reflect the specific outdoor competence required to understand the needs of outdoor and remote environments. There is a need to ensure that Outdoor First Aid trainers can, and do, access appropriate first aid related CPD and that this should reflect the latest developments in generic First Aid provision as well as developments in knowledge, techniques, equipment, legislation...etc, specific to the Outdoor sector. Again many Outdoor First Aid training providers seek to provide this for their trainers to maintain the relevance of their course content. This initiative is looking to improve the sharing of the latest best practice.

To support this best practice and help employers navigate the plethora of first aid courses that will be available we identified that outdoor practitioners are better placed than HSE to assess the specific training needs of our sector. The Institute's initial consultations have led to a proposed framework for Outdoor First Aid (OFA) and we are now seeking wider feedback on the proposal in Fig 1. The framework is designed to support maintenance and development of standards in OFA provision

and to provide reassurance to employers looking to fulfil their due diligence obligations. To this end, representatives of AALA, NGBs, LEAs, OEAP, other outdoor employers and the HSE are included in the consultation.

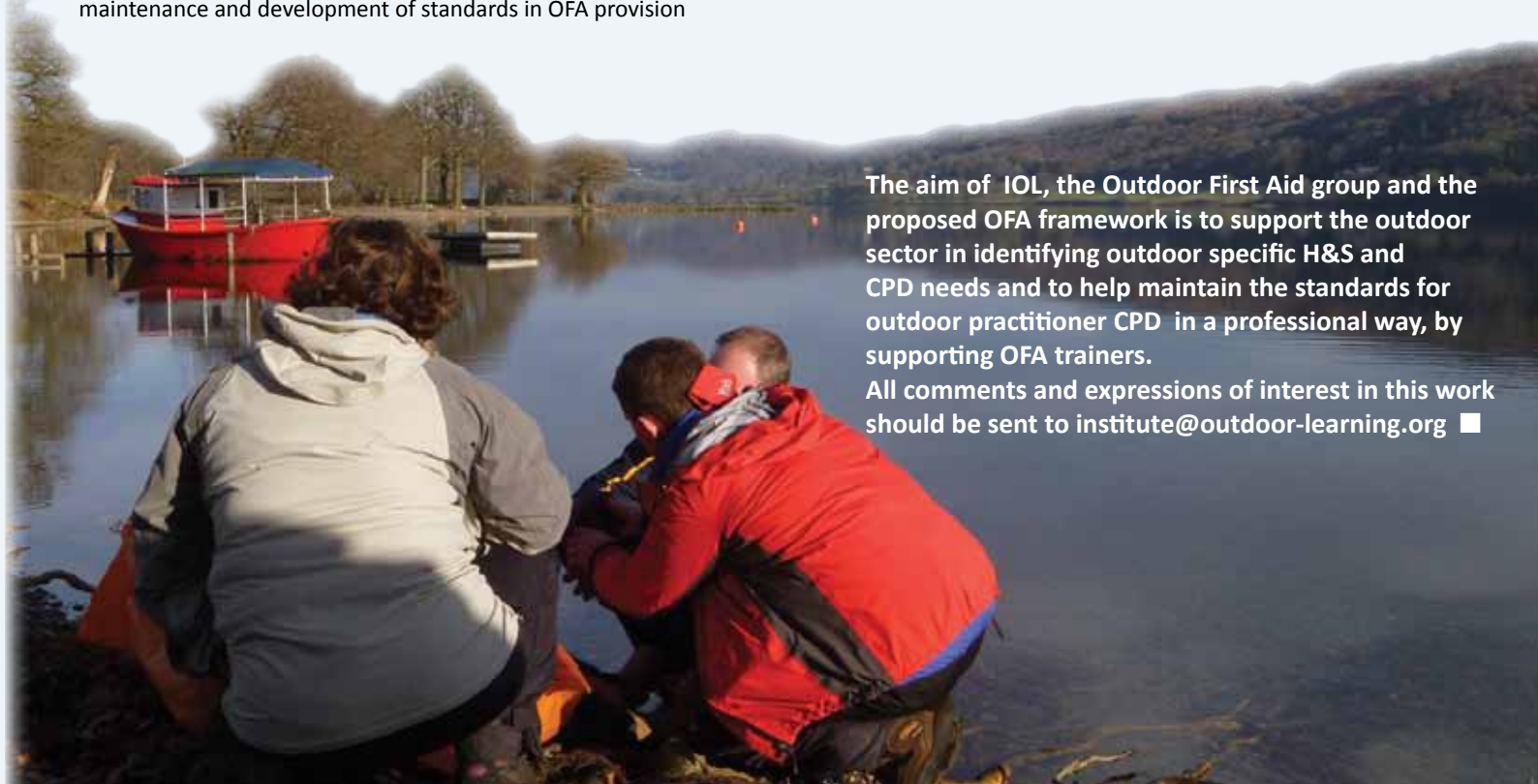
The framework (on following page) lays out 3 basic standards of Outdoor First Aid training course and adds a fourth standard which allows for advancement and courses for more complex needs. Though courses do exist above Standard 4, they are beyond the scope of this framework at this time and constitute a small and specialist provision. The framework seeks to reflect current provision in the final column whilst seeking to set out minimum standards in content, delivery, assessment and trainer competence.

The Institute proposes to establish a group to regularly review the content of this framework. It is also proposed that OFA training providers who have previously met HSE's approval criteria should seek to measure their courses and their delivery against the framework to enable them to declare compliance. To enable the Institute to set-up and run the above group and continue to support the development of OFA standards a small fee will need to be charged for those wishing to declare compliance.

In summary here are your options to pick up this opportunity to help develop the standards in Outdoor First Aid training.

If you are.....	Participation option
First Aid provider currently approved by the HSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the framework and give feedback</li> <li>• Join the OFA group</li> </ul>
First Aid trainer delivering courses via a large first aid training organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the framework and give feedback</li> <li>• Join the OFA group</li> </ul>
An employer of outdoor practitioners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the framework and give feedback</li> </ul>
An outdoor practitioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the framework and give feedback</li> </ul>
Representative of an NGB or similar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check the framework is correct and meets your needs</li> <li>• Give feedback</li> <li>• Refer to the OFA framework</li> <li>• Join the OFA group</li> </ul>

**The Framework is overleaf.....**



**The aim of IOL, the Outdoor First Aid group and the proposed OFA framework is to support the outdoor sector in identifying outdoor specific H&S and CPD needs and to help maintain the standards for outdoor practitioner CPD in a professional way, by supporting OFA trainers.**  
**All comments and expressions of interest in this work should be sent to [institute@outdoor-learning.org](mailto:institute@outdoor-learning.org) ■**

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## Outdoor First Aid Training Framework

