

**Guidance for
Writing Operating Procedures
as part of a
Safety Management System**

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Foreword: *About this guide*

The following document is designed as a guide to help compile the Operating Procedures section of your Safety Management Systems

The document is by no means an exhaustive list of what needs to be considered. There are many different operations within the network of RYA clubs and centres, with varying roles, responsibilities and duties. This will make certain areas of this document more applicable than others. This guide is designed to be an indication of where to start in constructing operating procedures, will provide an increased understanding of Safety Management and what may or may not need to be considered in your environment.

Introduction

Sound administration is important for the safe and efficient running of any centre or club, and is in place to protect all those involved, including users such as members and students.

Documentation should be robust, succinct, and representative of what '*actually*' happens to ensure that all activity is both safe and enjoyable.

The 'Safety Management System' should have a health and safety policy, detailed operating procedures and a mechanism for reporting and reviewing incidents to help improve procedures and therefore safety.

These documents combined, outline important areas such as the necessary policies and procedures; Training and induction; ratios and monitoring; supervision and reporting.

It should *not* be an exercise which records every detail and creates an unworkable and burdensome volume of paperwork that nobody can understand - it is essential that everyone understands their role in the safe management of their centre/club.

The documentation needed for the safe management of risk should be kept in one location and be easily accessible. These documents should include:

1. [Risk Assessments](#)
2. Standard Operating Procedures
 - a. Health and Safety policy
 - b. Emergency Action Plan
 - c. [Safeguarding Policies](#)
 - d. [Equality, diversity and inclusion policy](#)
 - e. Incident and Accident report book
3. Staff and volunteer qualifications (basic record only; Name, DofB or RYA number & qualification with any endorsements, expiry date)

Appendices are a good idea to add reference documentation such as: daily check sheets, including sample course programmes, safety officer or instructor briefing notes, maps/charts of operating areas, risk assessments, copies of the booking and course feedback forms.

Centres and clubs which are part of an RYA Programme should ensure they operate in accordance with any specified conditions. For example, RYA Recognised Training Centres (RTCs) are required to operate in accordance with the Guidance Notes for Training Centres, which are outlined on the [RYA Training Support Site](#).

For further support please speak to the relevant RYA Programme manager or direct RYA Department contact. For example, as a Recognised Training Centres you can seek advice from RYA Training, your Regional Development Officer and the Inspector carrying out your centre annual inspection, for Affiliated Clubs, this may be Sports Development or the Racing Department, and for the Sailability Programme, RYA Sailability direct.

Information and resources are available on the [RYA Website](#), and the [Centre and Club Support Site](#) including guides on Health & Safety, Risk Assessments, Emergency Action Plans, Safeguarding and Equality Policies.

Writing Operating Procedures

Standard operating procedures (SOP) form a very important part of a centre/club's supporting documentation. They should map out the key elements of operation at the venue.

Having carried out the necessary risk assessments, the outcomes play an important part of the formulation of the SOP. These original assessments should be easily accessible for cross referencing and updating.

The SOP document should be thought of as a 'user guide' for instructors, volunteers and anyone involved in delivering club/centre activity, containing the *minimum necessary information* required, ensure the document is not excessive.

A continual reviewing system should be in place to ensure documents held within the safety management system are 'live' documents, reviewed at regular intervals and documented, evolving and taking into account items such as "lessons learnt" from accidents and near misses. For Recognised Training Centres this document is a requirement for running RYA Training.

The Principal or Commodore of a centre/club should take ultimate responsibility for the documents but may choose to delegate sections to people such as the Chief Instructors/Flag Officers, who will be seen as the discipline experts.

Keep the SOP document as simple as possible, the bulk of information remaining generic, but with references to specific disciplines or courses where appropriate. At a multi-discipline club/centre, separate the discipline specific guidance into sections to avoid instructors having to read and understand information not relevant to their discipline and qualification.

Finally, include a signing sheet - once staff and volunteers have received training in the operating procedures and/or subsequent training areas, they should sign to say they have read and understood the procedures and will work in accordance with them. This should be repeated each season/annually or on any revision, ensuring that staff and volunteers are up to-date with any amendments to the club/centre's operations.

Forming the Operating Procedures

Part 1) An Overview

- Start by giving an overview of the centre/club; what is your mission, who are the members, volunteers and people receiving the tuition or participating in activities and when/where does it operate. Ensure procedures consider expectations and responsibilities for each activity, such as suitable equipment for students as well as conditions, necessary medical information and safety briefings etc.

Part 2) Structure and Content

Here are some key areas to include:

- **Roles and Responsibilities:**
 - This area can be used to outline responsibilities of the Principal/Commodore/Training Manager, qualified instructors and volunteers.
 - Outline additional responsibilities specific to the centre/club (assistant instructors, support staff and volunteers, boatswain, administrators etc.)
 - Scope of authority and responsibilities within the centre/club's staffing structure, including 'Who reports to who', and who is responsible for the governance of the organisation.
 - Who is the management, is it Local Authority, club or private enterprise, outline the reporting structure and management team.
 - Who is responsible and makes necessary decisions, for example whether to go afloat in certain conditions.

Risk Assessments

- Risk assessments must be carried out and will form the framework for much of the SOP document and the safe operation of the centre/club.
 - It is crucial any control measures identified in risk assessments are then captured and located within the SOPs, as part of working practices.
 - In a written risk assessment, the main areas that must be clearly identified are the risk, the likelihood of that risk and the control measure put in place to reduce the risk. Consider also adding who may be affected, severity of risk etc.
 - Risk assessment should be continually updated, helping to shape the operating procedure.
 - Advice for writing risk assessments can be found in the RYA Guide to Risk Assessments (insert new link)
 - Risk assessments are part of the session-by-session decision on whether to go afloat, and the dynamic assessment of risk while activity is happening.
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- **Staffing:**
 - Necessary staffing for the delivery of different on water activities, such as sessions, courses, training or club racing.
 - What are the teaching ratios; instructor/coach arrival times; arrangements in place for staff/volunteer briefings, and the content of the daily briefing?

- What are the appropriate qualification levels for instructors or volunteers working on the different on water activities, courses, sessions or events?
 - As a Recognised Training centre there are requirements such as a Senior Instructor must lead 'day sailing' courses, a YMI to teach a Yachtmaster preparation course.
- An accurate record of training and qualifications should be held which includes expiry/issue dates of any supporting qualifications such as First Aid.
- Keep current and accurate logs of staff/volunteer training provided, including skills refresher training and additional qualifications taken.
- Certificates must be sighted, but retention of copies by the club/centre is not required.
- **Participants/Students:**

When providing tuition or offering activities, the following areas should be considered:

 - Briefings, covering areas such as a welcome, site orientation/familiarisation, timings, discipline specific information and meeting points or teaching areas, launch/landing procedures, pontoon etiquette, safety equipment to be worn, sailing areas, signals, (inc. safety signals).
 - An outline of important information relating to what data will need to be gathered before, during and after a student, member or visitor takes training/attends the club/centre, including any necessary consent forms.
 - Resources can be added to the appendices, such as booking forms, emergency contact, health declarations, feedback form etc.
 - Booking forms should be completed prior to a course, and outline of any specific information such as:
 - Under 18s to be completed by a parent/guardian,
 - Need for emergency contact and medical information
 - Any additional requirements such as appropriate clothing to be worn should be included in joining instructions or information sent to candidates prior to their course.
 - Consider and outline how pertinent student and member health information is shared with key staff (e.g. lead instructor) or flag officers, where health declarations are held in case of an incident.
- **Safeguarding:**
 - Explain policies for staff and volunteers who work with children or adults at risk, references taken, and any training provided etc.
 - Safeguarding policies should be located in the SOP, with records of any references/self-disclosure/ DBS forms kept in a secure location.
- **Safety:**
 - Safety is paramount; therefore centres/clubs must do all they can to avoid unnecessary risk.
 - Clearly defined process and mechanism for the reporting and logging of incidents and accidents, as well as the reviewing lessons learnt, which is part of the Safety Management administration
 - The RYA website contains Safety Management advice as well as a log to report to the RYA the occurrence of an incidence which take place at an RYA Club or Centre: [RYA Accident and Incident Reporting](#)

- **Emergency Action plan:** An outline of the immediate actions to be taken by all personnel in the event of an incident:
 - It should include a communications list with a 'flow chart' and all relevant contact numbers that may be required.
 - A copy should be kept and referred to within the SOPs, with an additional copy on display in the centre/club and on board each of the safety boats or on board the vessel if there is no safety boat.
 - For all serious incidents it is essential that the RYA is notified via the phone number on the RYA website for Incident and Accident reporting: [Triggers for reporting incidents](#).
- **Communication policy:** explains the means of communication between instructors, volunteers and crew afloat, with each other and the shore, such as VHF.
- **Guidance on the launch/recovery and equipment stowage:**
 - Procedures for specific areas such as the safety boat area and how they are to be left at the end of the session.
 - Launch/recovery of craft (dinghies/windsurfers), including how they should be left when not being used.
- **Operating Area:**
 - Define the club/centre's operating area, including areas which are used in specific conditions or designated for specific purposes such as club racing. Include visuals such as a map or a chart.
 - Identify any hazards, listing the procedures to suitably mitigate them.
 - This section should also include any additional operating areas, those outside the normal operating areas, such as: day sailing venues, intermediate/ advanced powerboat passages, open events etc.
 - Emergency access and egress points should also be identified in the case that assistance is required, and the primary launching/landing areas cannot be reached or are further away/less practical.
 - Diagrams and charts/chart extracts are a good way to define the sailing area, operating area limits which are easily identified, and any potential hazards clearly marked - descriptions alone can be confusing.
 - Operating restrictions: Instructors and volunteers need to be aware when club activity, courses, training or events need to be delivered in particular areas, and how operating areas are managed:
 - For example, who makes necessary decisions, Chief/Senior instructor or Club Training Manager in charge on the day.
 - Is there a need to adjust elements of delivery due to specific aims or objectives of the course, training or events being offered, ability of the students/members, environment, conditions and other water users.
 - Determine the outer limits of the operating area. If you are a Training Centre you should refer to the RYA Recognition Guidance Notes for information on operating area limits, for instance for powerboating, dinghy/keelboat/multihull, windsurfing and personal watercraft this would generally be 3 NM from the launch point or home marina.
- **On Water Activity (courses/training)**
 - Use this section to detail on the water activities, scope of the activities, and considerations for safety delivery and supervision.

- Detail procedures/lines of communication for decisions made in specific situations such as strong winds or deteriorating weather conditions,
- Provide course, training and event information, teaching ratios, common practise, e.g. “All courses are run by appropriately qualified instructors’, racing is supervised by an approved club race officer or safety officer.”
- Consider adding any centre/club specific operating information alongside, and as an explanation of required practise.
- All activities delivered should be included in this section, including those run outside of RYA training courses, making clear the differentiation.
- Produce course programmes for each course, demonstrating how courses will be delivered, taking into consideration the required syllabus, operation area, timings and any environment restrictions. For example, if you are recognised to deliver the RYA Powerboat Level 2 course and choose to deliver the course over 4 half day sessions, your course plan should outline this.
- If you are a centre recognised by the RYA, your recognition will determine what training courses you may offer depending on equipment, craft, qualifications of instructors, facilities and operating area.

- **Non-Training activity:** This area of the operating procedures can include and outline the scope of activities that are available at the centre/club which are not part of the RYA Programme you are affiliated to, or as an RYA Training Centre.

This section may include non-RYA sports such as kayaking, open water swimming etc. or activities related to the boating offered, such as club racing.

- The SOP file should outline any safety measures that are in place such as any competency checks for participants or equipment checks expected by the venue. Use the appendices to capture any supporting documentation.
- Considerations for the safe delivery and supervision, such as training safety boat personnel in responding to incidences involving these activities and this should be documented. Any requirement for skippers to log daily movement/location/intended passage.

- **Boats and Equipment:**

- This section can be used to outline equipment rigging and set up, detailing any specific elements such as safety mechanisms or rigging for a particular craft, entrapment and use of mast head flotation or conditions.
- Detail any equipment restrictions and/or considerations relevant to weather conditions, wind strengths or student usage.
- The introduction of new equipment/boats requires appropriate risk assessment, with procedures and staff/volunteers updated and to ensure familiarisation with their operation and characteristics.
- Reference necessary areas such as: maintenance logs, boat check procedures, use of boats and equipment to be carried on a boat.
- Fuel storage, procedures should be in place for storage, capacity, security, ventilation, and suitable re-fill areas, with relevant signage in place,

Some examples of policies relating to boats that may form part of the SOP appendices:

- Craft are checked by instructors/volunteers prior to going afloat,
- Craft must carry the necessary equipment as per the Recognised Training Centre Guidance notes (A list of the equipment that boats carry should be held in the appendix)

- Powerboats must have their kill cords checked prior to and (if possible) during sessions,
- Dinghies must use mast head flotation on beginners' courses,
- Safety equipment is carried, serviceable, accessible, and deployable.
- At the end of each session, any damage is logged and reported.
- If you are an RYA Training Centre or club, all boats/equipment used for RYA Training must comply with the Recognition Guidance Notes and any relevant local legislation.

Summary

Remember, the SOP's need to be easily read and understood by instructors and volunteers including those completing club duties. Organise them into a logical order, with a contents page at the beginning and subsequent pages labelled clearly.

- Ensure all necessary supporting paperwork such as booking forms and feedback forms are clearly marked in the appendices.
- Complete an induction programme to train staff/volunteers in the operation of the centre/club and their specific roles, adding a 'sign sheet' at the beginning of the file to confirm the relevant sections have been read and understood by each individual, forming part of a more comprehensive and specific induction process.
Remember, the induction process should be broken down and delivered dependant on the role being performed and level of responsibility, covering all areas that need to be implemented and understood by staff/volunteers.
- Date the document and amend the date and the revision on a separate cover sheet each time the document is reviewed to ensure it stays current.
- The operating procedures are a very important aspect of centre/club set-up, and if written well they will act as a guide to best practise and RYA Standards, ensuring staff and volunteers are up to speed with all the key elements of operation.
- Remember to include all the necessary information to demonstrate that the centre/club is well managed and conforms to the programme you are affiliated to, or guidelines as a Recognised Training Centre. Include any relevant information regarding training and events that are outside of the RYA programme, to ensure that those procedures are also in place.

Resources

Here are some further resources available on the RYA website, and Club and Centre support site:

- [RYA Training Support site](#),
- [RYA Guide to Risk Assessments](#)
- [RYA Safeguarding and Child protection policy](#)
- [RYA Safety Management advice](#)