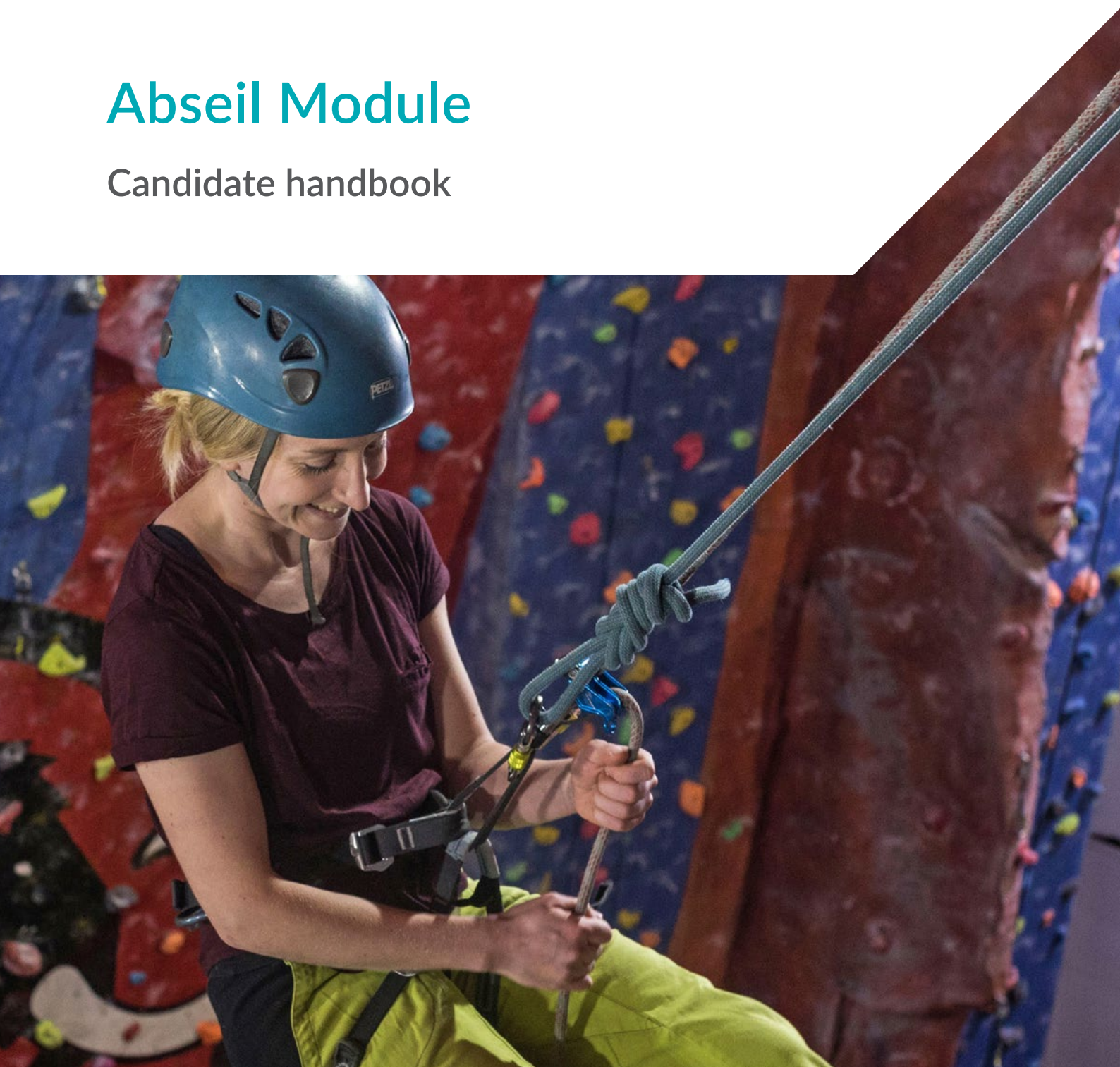




Mountain Training

Abseil Module

Candidate handbook





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Preface

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

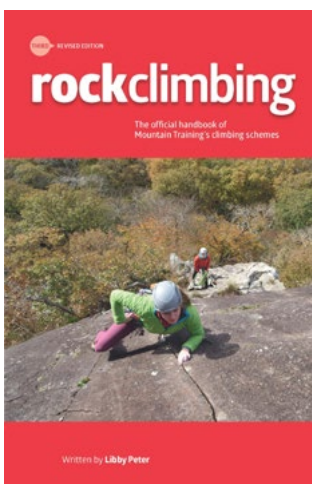
Participation statement

Mountain Training recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions. Mountain Training has developed a range of training and assessment schemes and associated supporting literature to help instructors manage these risks and to enable new participants to have positive experiences while learning about their responsibilities.

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the preparation of the contents of this handbook, by attending Mountain Training working party meetings and by making detailed and constructive comments on the draft. Grateful thanks are due to volunteers and staff from the Climbing Awards Review Working Group, National Mountain Training organisation council members, course providers, staff of the mountaineering councils, members of the Association of Mountaineering Instructors, Mountain Training Association, staff from the National Mountain Centres and members of The Association of British Climbing Walls for their help and support.

Thanks also to the following individuals and organisations whose photographs bring the handbook to life: Jessie Leong, Karl Midlane, NICAS, Rick Singh, Rob Greenwood and The Adventure Brand.



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

1.1 Introduction

This module is optional and is designed to equip Climbing Wall Instructors with the skills and techniques required for managing top-roping and abseiling groups on purpose-built artificial climbing walls and structures. Awareness of the skills outlined in the main Climbing Wall Instructor syllabus is assumed and not repeated here.

1.2 Scope of the qualification

A qualified Climbing Wall instructor who has gained the Abseil Module can:

- Run top-roping sessions.
- Run abseiling sessions.
- Manage groups safely in these activities.

1.2.1 Terrain

A qualified Climbing Wall Instructor who has gained the Abseil Module can operate on:

- Indoor and outdoor climbing walls which are designed for top-roping or abseiling.

1.2.2 Exclusions

The qualification does not cover:

- Via ferrata courses on artificial walls.

1.3 Stages in the qualification

1.3.1 Registration prerequisites

Registration on the Climbing Wall Instructor Abseil and top roping module is given to candidates automatically when they register on the Climbing Wall Instructor qualification.



1.3.2 Training prerequisites

- You must have completed Climbing Wall Instructor training
- You must have registered for the Abseil Module (this is added automatically when you register for the Climbing Wall Instructor qualification).
- You must have an up-to-date logbook (preferably DLOG) with evidence of the following:
 - Experience of at least 5 abseils from more than one location.

1.3.3 Consolidation period

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

Mountain Training recommends that all but the most experienced candidates 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 module.



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1.3.4 Assessment prerequisites

- You must have completed the Abseil Module training course or have been granted exemption from training.
- You must have passed Climbing Wall Instructor assessment.
- You must have observed or assisted on a minimum of 5 abseil/top-rope sessions.
- You must have physically attended and completed (i.e. not online) a first aid course which involved at least one full day or eight hours of instruction and included an element of assessment.



2. Course structure

2.1 Training

Training will involve a minimum of 4 hours contact time.

Results: Pass, Not Yet Completed, Withdrew, Did Not Show, Exemption

2.2 Assessment

Assessment will involve a minimum of 2 hours contact time.

Results: Pass, Defer or Fail, Not Yet Completed, Withdrew, Did Not Show

Practical reassessments cannot take place within three months of the initial assessment to allow sufficient time for practice and preparation. All deferral reassessments must be completed within five years of the original assessment. Candidates may undertake two short reassessments after a defer result. Subsequently a full assessment must be undertaken.

3. Course delivery

3.1 Training

Course directors must be Climbing Wall Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must be Climbing Wall Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

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

3.2 Assessment

Course directors must be Climbing Wall Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements. Additional staff must be Climbing Wall Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

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

Technical competence



1. Equipment

- 1.1 Select and fit suitable climbing equipment for top-roping and abseiling.
- 1.2 Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of personal abseiling equipment and ensure appropriate use, care and maintenance in line with manufacturers' guidance.
- 1.3 Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of climbing wall equipment and ensure appropriate use of:
 - 1.3.1 In-situ ropes.
 - 1.3.2 Anchors/lower offs and fixed equipment.



2. Belaying

- 2.1 Tie into the rope. Attach group members to the rope with an without a karabiner.
- 2.2 Demonstrate the use of direct and indirect belay systems at the tope of a climbing wall, and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 2.3 Set up top-rope systems and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 2.4 Hold falls and control lowers.
- 2.5 Supervise others belaying.
- 2.6 Attach self and others to the belay system and abseil ropes.

3. Abseiling

- 3.1 Abseil without requiring a back-up safety rope.
- 3.2 Demonstrate methods of safeguarding a novice abseiling.
- 3.3 Utilise belay points for both abseil and safety ropes.
- 3.4 Use common devices for abseiling competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.
- 3.5 Demonstrate techniques for managing the safety of participants at the top of walls.

Guidance

Many of the skills required in this 'bolt-on' module spill over from those required of a Climbing Wall Instructor. The figure of eight descender is still probably the most used specialist abseil device and an awareness of how it should be used correctly and an understanding of typical misuse should be pursued. The prusik loop will only be required as a back-up when abseiling alone without a safety rope.

In the case of managing abseils the instructor will normally be at the top of the abseil. You should be able to manage the abseil using a direct belay system using in-situ anchors. It is common for students to abseil with the abseil rope clipped directly to their harness with a screw gate (or equivalent) karabiner. Take care with long tails on the safety knot or the safety rope twisted around the abseil. If these situations occur you should take the time



to adjust your system accordingly.

You should be comfortable abseiling without a backup rope; as with the climbing elements, you must be able to perform as a good role model. You may choose to abseil with a French prusik back up, but also consider using a specialist abseil protection device like a Shunt. It is important you understand the limitations of using a prusik as a back-up.

When demonstrating how to safeguard a novice there is no better way than with a safety rope from above. You will normally be abseiling from fixed platforms which have built in anchors placed at an ideal height. Some abseil towers have anchors quite close to the edge and this will require management to get the abseiler weighting the rope. You will need to understand the pros and cons of different anchor positions.

You will need to be very clear when managing people at the top of abseils, clear demarcation of areas is essential, clear instruction on how many people should be where and the use of safety ropes and other means of protecting novice abseilers should be applied.



Chapter 6 Technical essentials

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Key practice points

- When transferring people from 'safe' ground to the abseil you should protect them very carefully.
- Keep your hand on the safety rope of the abseiler at all times.
- Keep the anchors, abseiler and the descent all in line to create stability.



Management and decision making



4. Planning and structure of sessions

- 4.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of weather when abseiling on artificial structures.

5. Management of participants

- 5.1 Select appropriate management techniques to safeguard all participants, irrespective of whether or not they are directly involved with the abseiling activity.
- 5.2 Utilise effective communication skills to identify and react to the needs of the group in relation to involvement, interest, enjoyment and achievement.
- 5.3 Manage the safety of those arriving at the top of a wall.
- 5.4 Brief individuals and the group appropriately.
- 5.5 Avoid common abseiling problems.
- 5.6 Deal with common abseiling problems if they occur.



6. Managing/supervising other staff

- 6.1 Describe the role and scope of an assistant. Describe the opportunities and liabilities presented by using an assistant in a session.
- 6.2 Manage an assistant.

7. Decision making

- 7.1 Carry out dynamic risk assessments throughout each abseiling session.

8. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

- 8.1 Deliver technical abseiling instruction to individuals and the group.

Guidance

Outdoor abseil towers can be quite exposed to the weather, so you should dress and equip your groups accordingly.

You must give your group a clear brief on how the abseil is going to work so that they can visualise the sequence of events. You need to identify safe zones and incorporate scope for the group to support and photograph each other. You need to be well positioned to offer support to the abseiler when going over the edge and to be able to observe them down to the ground.

You should be conversant with the common problems which might occur when abseiling. These might include loose garments, rope ends or even hair catching in the abseil device. Take care and time to avoid this happening, make sure hair is tied back, baggy clothing is tucked securely out of the way and there are no loose ends of rope in reach of the abseil device. Figure of eight descenders can Lark's foot themselves if dragged over edges and jam.

Common abseil problems can usually be prevented and are rare. If an abseiler does become stuck then by far the easiest solution is to tie off the safety rope and release the tension on the abseil rope.

This is easily achieved with a releasable abseil set up. You will need to be capable of tying off an Italian hitch or a belay plate when it is under load quickly and efficiently.



Key practice point

- Practise releasing the abseil rope under load to become slick and confident at this technique – that is reassuring to the abseiler and the rest of the group.

Teaching and learning skills



9. Teaching and learning

- 9.1 Communicate effectively and appropriately with a group and individuals, checking for understanding.
- 9.2 Explain the reasons for evaluating a session and success of the outcome.



Guidance

Climbing Instructors need to quickly create an environment of trust and confidence within their group so that participants feel safe and comfortable to tackle new and challenging activities. Age, ability, special needs, confidence and energy levels amongst the group will influence the best approach to achieve this.

Good communication skills are key. The foundations of effective teaching include 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.



Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Chapter 13 Inspiring others

Key practice points

- A good demonstration saves a thousand words – focus on the abseiler's posture.
- Practise at ground level with novices before going to height.



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

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- A wide range of accredited development workshops, events and opportunities
- Specialist mentoring for your qualification
- Regional networks and opportunities to build connections with others in the sector
- The quarterly The Professional Mountaineer magazine offering advice, tips and guidance on working and/or volunteering in the sector from 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.