Accreditation guidance for scheme coordinators

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Accreditation guidance for scheme coordinators – January 2014

1
Background

What is accreditation?
Accreditation was introduced by Natural England, who previously ran Walking for Health, as a way of giving participants, prospective partners, funders and health professionals added confidence in local schemes.

Schemes who were accredited under Natural England were asked to:

- Offer at least one health walk per month, which is suitable for beginners (i.e. a flat walk that lasts less than an hour with no stiles), led by a trained walk leader.
- Meet best practice guidance, including regular use of the Outdoor Health Questionnaire (OHQ), walk register and risk assessment form, and hold valid public liability insurance.
- Collect basic monitoring information by using the database or provide the required data separately on a quarterly basis.

Natural England suspended the accreditation process in November 2011 when they knew that they would not be running Walking for Health after March 2012. We’ve continued to recognise the schemes that were accredited by Natural England.

Why are we reintroducing the accreditation?
We have hundreds of different organisations running schemes under the single umbrella of the Walking for Health brand. This is what makes the programme vibrant and successful, but it also presents some challenges in ensuring consistency across our schemes. We see accreditation as an important way of establishing some common standards across the 600 Walking for Health schemes, creating a strong, consistent offer. This will help us all to strengthen our brand, our profile and the support of funders, partners, volunteers and participants.

From what you’ve told us at our workshops and from the feedback of the Scheme Coordinator Advisory Panel, we also know that the previous accreditation was popular with many schemes who found that the accreditation mark genuinely added value and inspired confidence in the public, partners and supporters.

Why are we changing the accreditation?
Many local schemes have told us they would appreciate clear guidance about what they should be doing and how they should be doing it, so that they can be clear to potential funders, partners and supporters, volunteers and participants about what they can offer.

By strengthening the accreditation standards, we’re offering a guarantee to new and existing walkers, volunteers, supporters, partners and funders that they will be part of a high quality experience. We want our schemes to thrive, grow and harness the support that they need through additional or continued funding, attracting more volunteers or increasing the number of walkers. Our new criteria will be a central part of enabling our schemes to achieve these things.
We’re making this an online process to reduce the amount of paperwork you need to complete and to make the provision of supporting evidence as simple and straightforward as possible.

We’re also increasing the validity period of the accreditation from one to two years to reduce the time you spend on accrediting your scheme.

**Why should you be accredited?**

By being a Walking for Health accredited scheme, you will:

- Continue to receive support from the Walking for Health team – including access to training, insurance cover, free materials, examples of good practice amongst other things.
- Have your walks promoted on the Walking for Health website and on the Ramblers Walk Finder.
- Be part of a strong national brand, England’s largest network of short walks and a programme that has a strong mission and ethos.
- Secure increased confidence and recognition from funders and stakeholders.
- Have access to the benefits and rewards of any partnerships that Walking for Health may have in the future.

We will be withdrawing the support of the Walking for Health team from those schemes that aren’t accredited by 1 March 2015. If you’re not accredited, you’ll no longer be recognised as a registered Walking for Health scheme. This means that if you’re not an accredited scheme, you won’t able to access the resources and support, including the insurance we offer.

By scheme we mean:

‘A structure, which delivers health walks across a specific geographical area, that meets our accreditation criteria and which has at least one designated coordinator who oversees the quality, management and support of all their volunteers, walks and related activities within their defined area.’

**The new accreditation**

**What’s the timetable?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation criteria and process announced with details of events and webinars to attend where you can get more information</th>
<th>17 October 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| One hour webinars                                                                                                        | Monday 28ᵗʰ October 2013 - 12:00  
Wednesday 20ᵗʰ November 2013 - 15:00  
Thursday 5ᵗʰ December 2013 - 19:00  
Tuesday 14ᵗʰ January 2014 - 10:30  
Friday 7ᵗʰ February 2014 - 13:00 |
Accreditation guidance for scheme coordinators – January 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme coordinator workshops with a morning session on accreditation</th>
<th>4 workshops across the country took place throughout November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applications for accreditation open</td>
<td>1 March 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final deadline for applications</td>
<td>20 December 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applications processed</td>
<td>1 March 2014 to 1 March 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for unaccredited schemes withdrawn</td>
<td>1 March 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are the new criteria?
There are eight requirements which schemes must meet to achieve the new accreditation standard. We’ve developed these standards based on feedback from scheme coordinator workshops and in conjunction with the Scheme Coordinator Advisory Panel.

1. All walks run by the scheme meet the definition of a Walking for Health walk, including at least one walk between 10-30 minutes per month, which can be a standalone walk or part of a longer walk (see more information under the definition of a Walking for Health walk).
2. The walker registration form (currently known as the Outdoor Health Questionnaire) or a version of the form that has been approved by the Walking for Health team must be used and completed by all new walkers or walkers who have experienced changes to their health. [http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/volunteering/volunteer-resources/leading-walk-kit](http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/volunteering/volunteer-resources/leading-walk-kit)
3. Schemes must have up to date risk assessments in place – these are living documents that should be reviewed on a regular basis and be updated as and when new risks appear. Ideally, they should be no more than six months old. [http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/volunteering/volunteer-resources/insurance-and-risk-assessments](http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/volunteering/volunteer-resources/insurance-and-risk-assessments)
4. Schemes must use the Walking for Health database or be able to supply the management information that is needed by the Walking for Health team to demonstrate our impact and progress on a quarterly basis from March 2014 (see more under what we mean by management information below).
5. Schemes must use the Walking for Health brand in accordance with our brand guidelines. [http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/running-health-walks/coordinator-resources/marketing-resources/our-brand](http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/running-health-walks/coordinator-resources/marketing-resources/our-brand)
6. Schemes need to keep their pages on the Walking for Health website up to date.
7. Schemes must complete the annual scheme audit. The next audit will be launched in February 2014.
8. Schemes should adopt a volunteering policy that ensures good standards of volunteer management. Our policy, as well as a template for schemes to create their own policy based on this, can be found here – [http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/running-health-walks/coordinator-resources/managing-and-recruiting-volunteers](http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/running-health-walks/coordinator-resources/managing-and-recruiting-volunteers).
What do we mean by management information?
All schemes that use our database provide us with a range of data that helps you and us to see how we’re doing, to take stock of the programme and to make the case for Walking for Health.

We will be introducing a new database next year and we’d like as many schemes as possible to use it. However, we know that some schemes can’t use our database, for example because they’re required to use the systems set up by funders or host organisations. From March 2014, we will need those schemes not using our database to provide us with specific information on a quarterly basis.

This will include:

- Total number of walkers
- Number of new walkers
- Walker demographics: age; gender; ethnicity; long-term health conditions, including cancer; locations and level of physical activity
- Number of walkers referred by a health professional
- Number of volunteers
- Number of walks that took place during the given time period
- Distance/duration of each walk
- Walk attendance

This list may change depending on our ongoing monitoring and evaluation requirements.

We’ll be designing a template to make it as easy as possible for schemes to submit this information if you can’t or choose not to use the database. This will be developed over the coming months and will be in place before we open the accreditation application process.

What is the definition of a Walking for Health walk?
There are several components to our definition of a Walking for Health walk. Every walk that you offer must meet all of these conditions in order for your scheme to be accredited. Walking for Health walks should:

**Be free**

There should be no charge made to walkers for taking part in a Walking for Health walk. Schemes are free to raise voluntary donations from walkers, but this must be done in such a way that no-one feels obliged or forced to offer money.

**Be easily accessible by walking or taking local public transport**

Our walks must take place near to the intended audience and, wherever possible, should be accessible by walking or using public transport. Walkers shouldn’t need to travel substantial distances to be able to walk. The exceptions are for rural areas or other situations where walkers would find it difficult to join a walk.
without a car, taxi or transport provided by the scheme (e.g. a walker with disabilities). We know that schemes do their best to make walks accessible in the local area, for example, some schemes arrange minibuses to transport walkers to and from sheltered housing – this is okay.

**Be over easy terrain**

Walks must use routes that cover flat and safe terrain, providing walkers with a range of abilities the chance to get to and sustain a pace that’s right for them. We know that conditions can vary, and that schemes do their best to make walks accessible in the local area. Walks should avoid, wherever possible, steep sustained climbs, long flights of steps, stiles and rugged, uneven, overgrown or excessively muddy paths.

**Require no special equipment**

Walkers don’t need specialist clothing or equipment to enjoy our walks. That means that Nordic walking does not form part of a Walking for Health walk, as it requires the walker to use special equipment and to learn a specific technique from a qualified instructor, with additional expense. While it is important that walks meet the needs of the group, participants should be encouraged to move on to other physical activity opportunities outside of Walking for Health when they are ready.

**Encourage walking at a pace that makes walkers feel warmer, breathe harder and their heart beat faster whilst still being able to talk to others around them**

The maximum health benefits from walking are achieved at this pace, in sustained bouts of at least 10 minutes. Even the least fit and able walkers should be able to sustain this kind of pace without being left behind. Our training and guidance on leading walks suggest some ways to do this: [http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/running-health-walks/training](http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/running-health-walks/training). The pace must not be set according to the abilities and preferences of those who are very active.

**Be a minimum of 10-30 minutes**

The lower end is designed to cater for very unfit walkers, for example, those who have or are recovering from illness such as cancer or for those who are experiencing fatigue as a result of treatment. This doesn’t have to be a standalone walk. It can be part of another, longer walk where the unfit walkers stop after 30 minutes, but others who are able to carry on.

**Be no longer than 90 minutes**

A Walking for Health walk will be ideally no longer than 60 minutes and never longer than 90mins. Anything above this is not a Walking for Health walk and can’t be advertised or branded as a Walking for Health walk. Depending on a range of circumstances, such as age and level of fitness, a person walking briskly could cover on average 1 mile per 15 to 20 minutes – we’re allowing for a pace slower than this as our walks are designed to help people who are the least active, including people who experience health inequalities or who have long-term health conditions, become active and stay active. Or to help walkers ‘step down’ from
previously high levels of physical activity as a result of age, injury or health conditions. They’re not designed to support activity levels beyond the UK Chief Medical Officers’ guidelines of 150 minutes per week.

**Be regular**

Regular physical activity is the key to good health. Ideally, walks should follow a set pattern, which could be that they happen at the same time each week or month, they leave from the same place or there is a clear rotation of starting points.

**Be run by a recognised scheme**

You must be registered with the Walking for Health team to be considered for accreditation. We define a scheme as a structure which delivers health walks across a specific geographical area that meet our accreditation criteria and which has at least one designated coordinator who oversees the quality, management and support of all their volunteers, walks and related activities within their defined area.

**Follow emerging best practice guidelines, including that walks should be graded and must be led by Walking for Health trained walk leaders**

All walk leaders must be trained by registered Walking for Health cascade trainers before leading walks. Any new walk leaders that joined your scheme after July 2013 must also have shadowed a walk leader and led a walk under the supervision of an experienced walk leader before being able to lead walks on their own.

**Schemes should also:**

- Follow our recommendations about the grading of walks, which we will be publishing shortly.
- Follow our safeguarding policy, which will be available from March 2014, unless one is already in place through a funder or the organisation where you’re based.

**The application process**

**What is the application process?**

We’ll be designing a simple, online application process for schemes to complete. We are in the process of designing the application form and we’ll continue to work with the Scheme Coordinator Advisory Panel to make sure it’s as straightforward and easy to use as possible. We’ll also test the application process, including the form, with some schemes during early 2014.

The online form will be available for schemes to complete from 1 March 2014. You can apply at any time between then and 20 December 2014. Once you’ve submitted your form, the Walking for Health team will review it along
with the supporting evidence you’ve provided (see below). Please allow at least six weeks for your application to be processed and a decision to be made.

If your application is successful, you will receive a certificate and the accreditation logo will be added to your scheme page on the website. Your accreditation will be valid for two years from the date the certificate is issued.

**What supporting evidence needs to be provided?**

We will need the following information to support applications for accreditation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation criterion</th>
<th>Evidence needed from schemes</th>
<th>Evidence the Walking for Health team will collect in addition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meet the definition of a health walk, with at least one 30 minute walk per month</td>
<td>• Provision of an up-to-date walks programme or, for those that use the existing database, details of any walks that aren’t currently listed on the website or database</td>
<td>• Review of the database and website information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the standard walker registration form or a version of the form that has been approved by the Walking for Health team</td>
<td>• Confirmation that the standard registration form is used or • Provision of any walker registration forms that are used instead of the standard one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have up-to-date risk assessments</td>
<td>• Provision of completed risk assessment(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the national database or be able to supply equivalent data</td>
<td>• Confirmation that your scheme will supply equivalent data if you don’t use the database</td>
<td>• Review of database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use the Walking for Health brand in accordance with the guidelines</td>
<td>• Confirmation that the brand is used in accordance with the guidelines • Two or three examples of how you’ve used the brand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep scheme page(s) on the Walking for Health website up to date</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Review of website page(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete the annual scheme audit</td>
<td>• Confirmation that you will complete any future annual audits</td>
<td>• Review of audit submissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopt a volunteer policy that ensures good standards of volunteer management, valuing the volunteer contribution and participating in</td>
<td>• Confirmation that you have or will have a volunteering policy in place, or equivalent guidelines • Provision of policy or other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accreditation criterion</th>
<th>Evidence needed from schemes</th>
<th>Evidence the Walking for Health team will collect in addition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>volunteer recognition initiatives led by the national Walking for Health team</td>
<td>evidence to show examples of good practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Further support and guidance

#### Frequently asked questions
You can find answers to the accreditation frequently asked questions [here](#).

#### Scheme coordinator workshops
We spent the morning of the November scheme coordinator workshops taking you through the accreditation process and answering your questions. A summary of the events and useful resources from them, such as the accreditation presentation can be viewed [here](#).

#### Webinars
We’re also running monthly webinars with members of the Walking for Health team so that you can ask questions about any aspect of accreditation and tell us how we can best support you to achieve it. These will take place on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday 28 October 2013</td>
<td>12:00-13:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 20 November 2013</td>
<td>15:00-16:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday 5 December 2013</td>
<td>19:00-20:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday 14 January 2014</td>
<td>10:30-11:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday 7 February 2014</td>
<td>13:00-14:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can sign up for a place on the upcoming session by clicking on the date above. The webinars will be recorded and can be viewed at any time on the website afterwards.

If you’re were unable to join us at a workshop or online, or you’d like a more detailed discussion about what this means for your scheme and the support that you need, our regional development officers are getting out and about to as many network meetings as they can across the country. If you’re not currently part of a network, please contact us and we’ll put you in touch with an existing network or talk to you about setting up a new network in your area.
You can talk to us at any time about accreditation by getting in touch via our email walkingforhealth@ramblers.org.uk or general enquiries line on 020 7339 8541.

We’ll also keep you updated with any news and key developments via the website and scheme coordinator newsletters, so please continue to check these regularly.