

Safety on Group Walks FAQs

(Last updated May 2023)

What has happened so far?

At General Council in April 2022, two motions relating to risk assessments were debated. One of the motions suggested risk assessments should be removed completely and the other that they be simplified. While the discussions were varied and wide ranging, both motions were passed. A working group was set up to review the motions, commissioning some insight work with Martin Chester to look at best practice in the sector, the organisational risk responsibilities and options going forward. A survey of walk leaders was also undertaken in January 2023. From this, the working group identified that a 'core approach' to managing risk on group walks is needed, to give walk leaders the support they need to lead safe, enjoyable walks.

Who is Martin Chester?

Martin Chester is one of the foremost experts on risk management in the outdoors sector. Previously Director of Training at Plas Y Brenin (National Outdoor Centre) and CEO of NICAS – he brings extensive experience of the design and review of outdoor interventions for the likes of Sport England, Forestry England, National Trust, and a host of National Governing Bodies. Martin also currently sits on the independent safety committee for Glenmore Lodge.

Who was involved in the working group?

The working group was made up of trustees, staff and an external consultant, Martin Chester. The group used insight and feedback from walk leaders, as well as benchmarking and best practice from across the outdoors sector, to review Ramblers approach to risk management.

Will the research from the working group be shared?

As part of the group's work, an external expert conducted a review of risk management in the outdoors sector – including to benchmark Ramblers' approach and make recommendations about the way forward. A report of the review findings will be shared when available.

Can we see the full results of the walk leader survey?

Yes. We'll share the survey results in an upcoming Volunteer Update and on Assemble.



The motions were passed in 2022 – why has this work taken so long?

We appreciate that this work has taken some time – but it was important to get this right, and for the board to take time to fully consider review findings and different options available. We'll now work together to develop our new approach and introduce it in phases from September 2023.

The 'core approach'

What exactly do you mean by a 'core approach'?

We want to establish clear standards for how we plan and lead great group walks. This will include a new Walk Leader handbook, resources and training for walk leaders – to give everyone the skills, knowledge and confidence to manage safety and lead great walk experiences. This is about standards, not standardisation – putting the right support and training in place and trusting walk leaders to make decisions locally.

What is the timeline for making these changes?

Now we have a clear understanding of the approach we need to take, we want to work with walk leaders and build on good practice to develop the new handbook, templates and resources.

- **Between June to August 2023**, we'll be holding a series of workshops and online conversations for walk leaders and other volunteers to get involved and give feedback.
- **From October 2023**, we aim to have the new approach in place for all new walk leaders.

How can volunteers get involved / provide feedback?

We're planning a series of workshops and online conversations for volunteers between June-August 2023. We're working out the details, and will share more information about these sessions, and how to get involved as soon as possible. We'll communicate regularly with area and group leaders, walk leaders, programme coordinators and members to keep everyone up to date with progress between now and October too.

What will change for walk leaders?

Walk leaders will have access to updated guidance and training, including a new Walk Leader Handbook. This will support walk leaders in taking a consistent and proportionate approach to managing safety on walks. From October, new walk leaders will take part in an induction before they start to lead Ramblers walks – and all walk leaders will be encouraged to refresh their skills and knowledge too.

Does this apply to Ramblers Wellbeing Walks too?

Yes – the core approach will apply to Ramblers Wellbeing Walks. We'll continue to provide specific training for anyone who would like to lead these walks too.



What does this mean for Walk Leaders?

For every Ramblers walk, we want to provide the best possible experience for walkers and for our leaders to have the confidence and skills to lead them well.

As part of the onboarding for new walk leaders, we will ask them to complete some simple online training. This will help build their confidence as well as enabling us to demonstrate that we are taking proportionate steps to manage risk on ramblers walks.

We recognise that for our more experienced walk leaders the training needs will be different. As we continue to develop our training offer, we will be encouraging all Ramblers walk leaders to refresh their skills.

Do we still need to fill in a risk assessment form?

By establishing clear standards, a process to plan walks and walk leader training, we can reduce the impact on walk leaders every time you lead a walk. It will no longer be required to fill in or keep a written risk assessment for every walk provided walk leaders take proportionate steps to manage safety, and some walks will still need a risk assessment.

There will be templates and tools to support you with this – including additional planning steps for ‘higher risk’ walks, which will be defined in a new Walk Leader Handbook. **As we don’t have this new framework in place yet, please continue to follow the current process for now.**

Will we still need to keep paperwork for three years?

We recommend keeping copies of risk assessments, but it will no longer be required to keep a written risk assessment for three years.

What about insurance – what’s changed?

We checked this approach with our insurance brokers. They are extremely supportive of what is being proposed and reinforced the importance of taking a proportionate approach based on the level of risk of our activities – and see this as a significant improvement to what we have in place now. They also agreed that the lack of evidence and robust core approach was why they firmly recommended risk assessment templates were introduced.



Does this mean there will be even more paperwork / red tape?

No. We want to build on the great practice already taking place to ensure that our approach is proportionate and suitable for the different types of walks we lead. It will provide a guiding framework for walk leaders to make decisions about risk and safety locally, backed up by training and support – while also putting clear evidence in place to demonstrate how Ramblers deliver brilliant and safe walks.

What about walker responsibilities / everyone walks at their own risk?

It's important that everyone on a group walk plays their part to keep themselves and the group safe. However, walking with the Ramblers is fundamentally different to walking with friends. As an organised group activity, there is a different duty of care and responsibility for both the walk leader and charity – and as with all organisations, we must be able to demonstrate that we are taking appropriate steps to manage safety.

What happens if we don't follow the core consistent approach?

Risk management in the outdoors is dynamic and it's right that we evolve our approach - however our findings are clear – we must legally protect walk leaders, walkers, and The Ramblers. This refreshed approach does that in a practical and proportionate way.

Everyone has a part to play and **walk leaders need to take proportionate steps to manage safety – this is an integral part of leading a Ramblers group walk.** Walk leaders who actively choose not to work with us to ensure safe walking experiences, will not be protected by the Ramblers.

Am I liable if something goes wrong on a walk? / Will I be insured if I don't follow the guidance?

All Ramblers walks are covered by our insurance, on an understanding that walk leaders, and Ramblers as a charity, have taken proportionate steps to manage walks safely.

Risk management in the outdoors is dynamic and it's right that we evolve our approach - however we must legally protect walk leaders, walkers, and The Ramblers. The new guidance will do this in a practical and proportionate way.

In the unlikely event that something goes wrong, and it results in a claim, then the individual circumstances will be looked at. In such an incident, it's important that walk leaders can demonstrate that they took *proportionate* steps to plan and lead a safe walk. Without that evidence, insurers are reliant on witness evidence, which leaves them more exposed to being challenged by a claimant.



Everyone has a part to play and walk leaders need to take proportionate steps to manage safety – this is an integral part of leading a Ramblers group walk.

Walk leaders who actively choose not to work with us to ensure safe walk experiences, will not be protected or supported by Ramblers – and we accept that some leaders may choose to stop leading walks as a result.

This will put walk leaders off / it's already difficult to recruit walk leaders...

The walk leader survey results show that walk leaders value support and tools to help them carry out their role, and this guidance will give walk leaders the knowledge and skills they need to manage their walks safely. By taking a proportionate approach it will be easier for walk leaders to manage risk, taking them through the natural thought processes when planning and leading a group walk. There is a wealth of guidance and support available for walk leaders on Assemble, including tips for recruitment.

You haven't listened to volunteers...

We understand that our volunteers have a lot of knowledge in this area. Last year, the board set up a working group to review, benchmark and understand our options in response to volunteer feedback and the motions discussed at General Council. In January 2023 we also undertook a walk leader survey and received over 2700 responses. Now that we've established a way forward, we want to work together with you to develop the new approach. We're planning a series of workshops and online conversations between June – July 2023, and will share more information about how to get involved as soon as possible.

Can I speak with Ross / trustees about this directly?

Both Ramblers staff and trustees will be happy to speak with you about this at General Council.