

# Authorisations - A District Commissioner's and Group Scout Leader's Guide



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This is a new factsheet on The Scout Association Authorisation Scheme and was introduced in February 2001. In particular it replaces FS120003.

It provides the information required for those managing the process of applications from those seeking Authorisation to lead or supervise all adventurous activities under the Scout Association's Authorisation Schemes with Members of the Scout Association.

Further editions will be published in the light of experience. The publication of future editions will be notified in SCOUTING Magazine, Talking Points and the Activities Newsletter.

## Introduction

District Commissioners are, ultimately, responsible for all programmes and activities within their District. Most are approved by default i.e. the District Commissioner does not specifically authorise most activities. An example would be a Cub Scout handicraft competition or a Scout weekend camp. A few are specifically authorised by means of one of the Association's schemes of Authorisation; examples are hillwalking and canoeing. The purpose of this Factsheet is to set down, as simply as possible, the District Commissioner's and Group Scout Leader's responsibilities and actions for specific activity Authorisation.

## The Authorisation Process

The first stage of the Authorisation is for the applicant to obtain a copy of an up-to-date application form. The applicant should read,

understand and complete the form attaching any documentary evidence. The form should be passed to the Group Scout Leader. When the Group Scout Leader receives an application form, if the applicant is not a warranted Leader, they must satisfy themselves that the applicant has been subjected to the Association's confidential enquiry procedure and has produced two satisfactory references. The Group Scout Leader then has to consider if they are prepared to sign the statement:

*I am satisfied as to the maturity, ability to lead and supervise young people and the general suitability of the applicant.*

The Group Scout Leader may wish to make some enquiries before signing this but these should be done quickly. They should aim to forward the application within seven days of receipt on to the District Commissioner. Occasionally the Group Scout Leader may feel that they cannot sign the above statement and they should then return the form to the applicant. It is helpful and supportive if they outline to the applicant their reasons for returning the form. As the person responsible for all Scouting activities within their District, the District Commissioner also needs to decide if they are prepared to sign the statement:

*I am satisfied as to the maturity, ability to lead and supervise young people and the general suitability of the applicant.*

Again as with the Group Scout Leader, some enquiries may be required. The District Commissioner should aim to forward the application to the person in the Area/County responsible for organising assessments within seven days. This may be the Assistant

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Area/County Commissioner (Activities), the Area/County Activity Adviser or an Area/County Registrar. Occasionally the District Commissioner may feel that they cannot sign the above statement and they should then return the form to the applicant. It is helpful and supportive if they outline to the applicant their reasons for returning the form. It is important that both the District Commissioner and the Group Scout Leader realise that in no way are they being asked to judge the *technical competence* of the applicant. They only have to satisfy themselves as to the requirements of the above statement.

It is the responsibility of the District Commissioner to check that the applicant has a valid (within the last three years) first aid qualification appropriate to the Authorisation. The minimum level is the Association's First Response Course. An Authorisation does not become invalid because the first aid qualification becomes out of date, but must be in date at the time of any re-assessment.

After the applicant has been assessed, the District Commissioner will receive the application form back with a recommendation from the Assessor as to the level of Authorisation to be granted. If the District Commissioner wishes to grant an Authorisation that differs from the recommendation of the Assessor they must consult with that Assessor. The District Commissioner can **NEVER** go above the recommendation of the Assessor, but they may choose to go below the recommendation. The District Commissioner should inform both the Assessor and the person in the Area/County holding records of recommendations. Note that only in very exceptional circumstances would the holder of a National Governing Body Award be given an Authorisation less than that covered by the National Governing Body Award. The completed Authorisation should then be returned to the applicant within seven days. Depending on local procedure additional copies should be provided to key personnel: either the Registrar or the District records secretary and the Adviser. It is vital that the District Commissioner keeps a record of the Review Date (maximum five years) they have put on the application, because before that

review date is reached the applicant needs to be re-assessed if they still wish to take young people on the activity subsequently. Once that Review Date is reached the Authorisation is **Null and Void** and the applicant cannot take young people on the activity until they have been reassessed. There are no exceptions to this. A re-assessment e.g. because the applicant has gained more experience or wider skills, can be carried out at any time. The applicant completes a new form and submits it in the same way as the original application.

Where a District or County/Area operate a Camp Site or Activity Centre at a location which is geographically not within their usual boundaries Instructors and staff are authorised by the appropriate responsible District or County/Area Commissioner taking technical advice from the relevant County/Area Specialist Activity Assessor. As many of the people concerned may be active in the host District or County/Area where the centre is situated, there should be a dialogue between the responsible Commissioners to ensure coherent standards.

#### **Further Action by the District Commissioner**

A District Commissioner should not worry that at some time in the future the applicant might be involved in an accident and that somehow the District Commissioner will be held responsible. The Authorisation can be based, in good faith on the recommendation. It is strongly recommended that the District Commissioner and the applicant should meet to discuss the limitations of the Authorisation. There should be no misunderstanding as to what these limitations are and District Commissioners should make their views very clear.

Usually applicants will be briefed on one of two options. The first is that the applicant can plan and conduct the activity without further reference to the District Commissioner *provided they remain strictly within the limits of their Authorisation*. The second is that the District Commissioner requires to be informed on each and every occasion when

the activity is being planned. Which is chosen is a matter of decision by the District Commissioner although the first is generally recommended. What the District Commissioner should guard against, is introducing some bureaucratic system with additional forms etc. It is people who make an activity safe not bits of paper.

When it comes to Activity Authorisations a good District Commissioner needs to be friendly but very firm! They will hear tales of woe where a leader has a wonderful camp planned and at the last minute has realised that their Authorisation is out of date. Nevertheless the rule is clear No Valid Authorisation – No Activity. The District Commissioner may see or hear of activity programmes that exceed the Authorisation of the leader running the activity. In all cases the District Commissioner must take the appropriate action, which in such instances will almost always mean the immediate suspension of the individual's Authorisation, pending further consideration. They will sometimes have to re-emphasize that it is the authorised activity leader (who may only be an Assistant Scout Leader or helper) who is responsible for **all the decisions** once the party has set foot on the mountain, launched the canoe, rigged the sails etc. By all possible means District Commissioners have to make their policy crystal clear.

This policy may sometimes involve some hard decisions and may upset some leaders but for the future good of the Movement **and the safety of the young people concerned** the District Commissioner must make those decisions. Policy, Organisation and Rules, 37.7 covers breaches of activity rules. If a District Commissioner has to withdraw an Authorisation, details of the circumstances must be reported to Headquarters.

For some years the unofficial motto of Scout Activities has been **TO ENABLE MORE YOUNG PEOPLE TO EXPERIENCE MORE ACTIVITIES - SAFELY**. Now there is an additional one

- **NO VALID AUTHORISATION - NO ACTIVITY.**

## Validation

A person who has been authorised by the responsible Commissioner to lead or supervise adventurous activities may act on this Authorisation with parties of Members from other Districts at their request. For example, a party from a London visiting the Lake District may use the expertise of an authorised person in a Cumbrian Scout District without further Authorisation.

## Bibliography

The current editions of:

*Policy, Organisation and Rules of the Scout Association*

*Risk Assessment*

FS120000

*Mountaineering with Scouts - The Vital Culture*

FS120415

*Application for Authorisation for Hill Walking*

FS120416

*Authorisation schemes for activities in Moors hills and Mountains*

FS120418

*Authorisation Scheme for Climbing and Abseiling*

FS 120402

*Authorisation for Activities in Caves and Mines*

FS 120403

*Water Authorisation*

FS120601

*The Water Activity adviser/Assessor*

FS120602

*First Aid the saving of Life*

FS120051

*Authorisation for Air Activities*

FS120701

*Authorisation Scheme for Snow Sports*

FS120414

*Home Contact*

FS120078