

Do you want to be an instructor?

When young people ask our advice on becoming an outdoor education instructor we suggest that as a start they take all the opportunities they can to do and enjoy outdoor activities as a hobby. It is also a very good idea to keep a diary from the beginning, noting down all the mountains you have climbed, rivers you have paddled and so on. This will be very useful later on for filling in logbooks or explaining to a potential college tutor or employer how much experience you have.

Working as an instructor is extremely rewarding if you have plenty of patience and enjoy helping other people to achieve their goals. Apart from the job satisfaction of watching your students' progress, there is the opportunity to live and work in beautiful areas of the country, to be active and to spend plenty of time out of doors. Working in an outdoor education centre is seldom boring, as each group is different and different weather and conditions constantly present new challenges.

However, we would advise you against fixing your sights only on a career in the outdoors, but to think about other careers that might suit you as well, and certainly not to give up your academic work early because you think it is not important.

We say this because the outdoor activities and outdoor education fields are very competitive. There isn't really a logical career structure in this line of work, and there are a lot of seasonal contracts and jobs where pay and conditions are not very good. These things may not seem important to a young person, but at the stage in someone's life where they may be thinking about having a steady relationship, perhaps getting married and starting a family, then money, job security and reasonable working hours all become important issues. There is also the worry that instructors have that they will sustain an injury that will prevent them from carrying on with their outdoor work.

The outdoor education centres offering jobs with the best pay and conditions of work often look for staff with a teaching or youth work qualification, or for a very high level of activity leadership qualifications.

Most outdoor centres will require their staff to hold a first aid certificate, a minibus driving qualification, possibly a lifesaving award plus a collection of National Governing Body awards. These are the qualifications in leadership in the various activities. The general route to one of these awards is to register with the scheme and start keeping a logbook of your experience. Then, when enough experience has been gained, a training course is attended. There is then a further period of logged experience before an assessment course. If the assessment is passed, the award holder is expected to continue to log further experience, and there is sometimes a requirement to undertake further training periodically in order to stay up-to-date.

The basic awards needed in many outdoor centres are the Mountain Leader Award, the Single Pitch Award (for rock climbing) and a British Canoe Union Coach Award. There are other awards in other activities (sailing and caving for example), and a whole range of more advanced awards as well.

These days there is a lot of useful, relevant and up-to-date information to be found on the internet. You might try, for example, www.outdoor-learning.org , www.mlte.org or www.bcu.org .

Good luck with your plans, and we hope that some of this information and advice may be of use to you.