

BCU Five Star Leader Sea Kayak

Guidance notes

Aim

Successful performance at this level indicates that a candidate has entered a higher level of performance, involving a high level of personal skill and leadership in advanced situations.

It is a leadership award and the appropriate test for paddlers who wish to lead groups of other paddlers in appropriate locations in advanced tidal waters and dynamic weather conditions typified by the Climate of the British Isles.

The five star leader has the skills and judgement to select appropriate trips for a range of ability levels, however it is not a coaching award and not suitable for introducing beginners to the sport.

Candidates should be assessed to a verifiable common level, regional and climatic variations notwithstanding. When used with the relevant coaching award it shows that the candidate has sufficient expertise to coach and lead groups in more demanding situations.

This award is intended for paddlers who journey on the sea in areas where tidal races, headlands, open crossings, swell and challenging coastlines will be encountered.

The award should be accessible to all those people who journey on the sea on a regular basis and should not be seen as the preserve of a few elite performers. It is envisaged that a committed club paddler, sea kayaking regularly in a suitable range of situations, sea areas and conditions should be able to obtain this award within a period of three years.

Pre requisite Journeying

The successful candidate should have documented a minimum of 24 days paddling on the open sea (during this time the candidate must have assumed the leader's role). Two of the journeys must have taken place in a different sea area.

At least one multi-day journey must have involved an overnight camp or 'bivvy'.

These will also have involved a variety of different conditions including:

Journeys of a minimum distance of 20 nautical miles in 4 Star conditions.

An open crossing of at least 5 nautical miles.

Navigation in poor visibility /darkness.

Onshore winds reaching at least force 4.
Exposure to no landing zones and difficult landings
Tidal streams of at least 4 knots
Tide races and overfalls.
Paddling in swell and waves.
Camping from a kayak.

Equipment

It is expected that by the time the candidate is ready for assessment they will be aware of what equipment is required for undertaking a multi-day journey. It is reasonable for people to make personal choices as regards equipment but they should be prepared to justify those decisions. Borrowed equipment will be considered the candidates own.

A suitable sea kayak must be used for the duration of the assessment.

They should have some experience of paddling and leading a variety of sea kayaks including singles and doubles.

Anyone operating within sensitive environments has a responsibility to the environment and wildlife. Consequently, the candidate should be mindful of the local wildlife, its habitats and preservation. They must also have knowledge of, and abide by, relevant codes of practice.

The assessment course will normally be run over a weekend or similar time span. It is anticipated that an overnight 'bivvy' or camp will be involved therefore this equipment needs to be carried throughout the test.

Part A - Personal Skills;

This will incorporate application of the practical techniques listed below.
The paddler should keep their actions within the "safety Box" and perform strokes on both sides.

Launching and Landing

The candidate should show the ability to launch and land themselves and the members of their group in a variety of conditions. This could involve beaches, rocky inlets, headlands and dumping surf.

They should also show the ability to land an injured paddler.

The appropriate use of helmets must be considered.

Forward Paddling

Efficient forwards paddling. Demonstrate efficient and sustained, forward paddling in advanced conditions throughout a day's journey. This should include a following sea and a beam wind.

Manoeuvre and Control; The candidate should show maneuvering skills in relation to static and moving objects and demonstrate good control in moving and broken water.

Where a rudder or skeg is fitted the candidate should demonstrate reasonable control in the event of a failure.

Rolling; Perform a roll in rough water. If the candidate fails the first roll then they would be expected to self-rescue and perform a roll later in the assessment to perform a "competent" roll is a requirement to pass. (the candidate must capsize both sides)

Navigation

The candidate must demonstrate the ability to

- keep a compass course on open water and make good a course using transits.
- fix their position using a combination of bearings and transits.
- navigate in poor visibility or the hours of darkness.
- plan alternative/escape routes whilst afloat which take into account wind and tidal conditions.
- identify features from the chart and recognise navigation marks.
- Candidates must not rely on satellite based positioning systems during the navigation exercises when on assessment.

Part B Rescue skills

Rescues

The candidate must have a good repertoire of rescues and be able to adapt them to a range of conditions. It is expected that they be able to rescue a loaded sea kayak with assistance only from the casualty.

Self Rescue; In addition, the candidate must have knowledge of a variety of self-rescues and be able to demonstrate one. This part of the test must take place in conditions of Sea state 4. The candidate must be able to empty their kayak without landing or accepting external assistance.

Towing

The candidate must have a towing system and must show effective strategies for towing the casualty to a point of shelter in assessment conditions.

They must be aware of the need for flexibility and be able to drop and pick up the tow with ease. They should demonstrate single and multiple tows.

Part C - Leadership and Group Control

The candidate must exercise appropriate group control whilst on the water and choose a position appropriate to the prevailing conditions on the journey.

The candidate must not pass on the responsibility of decision making to a third party and at all times they must be concerned for the comfort and welfare of the party throughout the whole journey both on and off the water. The ability of the weakest member of the group must always be taken into consideration.

The importance of effective group control cannot be over-emphasised.

Although the 5 star is not a coaching award it should be recognised that candidates must be able to communicate effectively and pass on relevant information and advice to the group as required.

They would need to have the skill to pass on tips to improve the group members overall paddling ability and confidence.

Incidents

The candidate must be equipped and prepared to deal with any incidents, which could occur during the course of the journey and have easily accessible the following:

- A suitable means for summoning help in an emergency.

- A first aid kit and be familiar with the use of its contents.

- A repair kit must also be carried. It should be possible to effect a repair on a kayak whilst afloat as well as being able to deal with more substantial problems to the equipment whilst ashore.

Part D - Theory

As well as oral questions over the course of the assessment it is envisaged that there will be two written examinations. The first will take the form of a written paper or research paper. The second will be a navigation exercise, which will be undertaken on one evening of the assessment course. The candidate should have produced sufficient work, within two hours, for the assessors to make a judgement as to their competence.

Navigation

Plan a two-day journey in an unfamiliar area, which includes an open crossing.

Weather

Know where to obtain relevant shipping and weather forecasts. Understand the probable sequence of weather, which occurs during the passage of a depression and associated changes in atmospheric pressure.

Have an understanding of the following:

- The formation of fog, onshore and offshore winds, the effect of relief and line squalls.

- The relationship between the pattern of isobars on a synoptic chart and the probable resultant wind speed and direction.

- Be able to relate physical signs to the actual forecast.

The candidate must have a good understanding of the behavior of the sea and the effect the past, present and future weather may have, in particular on a multi-day trip.

Equipment

Show an understanding of the variety of technology, which is available including VHF and GPS.

VHF – when considering a means of summoning emergency assistance the leader must carry a VHF set and have attended a VHF operator's course and hold required registration as per legal requirements.

Environment

Candidates should be aware of the environmental factors that affect the sea. These will include the effect of wind, tidal movement, swell and physical factors. The candidate should also show a basic knowledge of the wildlife which is likely to be encountered on the sea and be aware of times and areas when special consideration should be given.

History

Show substantial knowledge of past and present developments in the sport of sea kayaking.

Coastguard

Have knowledge of the role and responsibilities of the Coastguard Service.

Specific Guidance Notes for Trainers and Assessors;

An understanding of the sea and significant experience enable leaders to consistently make good decisions and reduce risk whilst efficiently and effectively achieving an objective.

The 5 star sea kayaker needs to be familiar with the characteristic features of swift moving water on the sea. This requires experience and understanding of the behaviour of the flow of the moving water and associated eddies and flow boundaries.

An appreciation of wave shape in relation to the power and energy in the wave (whether swell, surf or standing wave) and not just size, is required for safe judgement.

The average sea kayaker can establish their personal skill/fitness level in a controlled environment. But knowledge of personal physical and mental reserves tends to be gained in a more challenging environment. This is likely to be when presented with the unexpected, whilst tired, and under pressure

1. A journey is an important aspect of a 5 star training course. It must be emphasised that the purpose of the journey is not simply to be a test of stamina and power, and should be organised to provide maximum opportunity for variety of environments and coaching input. Therefore, given the time available during training, distances of around 8-10 miles or 4-5 hours paddling depending upon conditions would be appropriate.
2. A priority during training is to ensure candidates can effectively manoeuvre their kayaks in a range of situations and conditions.
3. The philosophy behind the night paddle is one of the group returning late in the dark from a days journey, not deliberately paddling out in big conditions at night. As such the conditions do not need to be advanced.
4. Candidates must leave the training course having experienced a variety of leadership styles in advanced conditions.
5. On a 5 star training course candidates must leave with an appreciation of their own kayaking abilities and limitations, together with a clear understanding of the conditions one is expected to deal with at this level.
6. When assessing in advanced conditions on the sea the choice of location is of the utmost importance. In strong winds the group ideally needs to assess in a location where the whole group can run directly down wind to sheltered waters. Only when 5 star kayakers and coaches have satisfied themselves as to the strength of the group as a whole should they venture out on a committing area of the coast.
7. For assessment a group 3/4 of suitable paddlers should be available for candidates to lead.