

What are the training requirements for OSCAR staff?

There is no required "OSCAR qualification" for staff employed in OSCAR services, however basic training requirements do apply through legislation and the Social Sector Accreditation Standards.

There is a legal requirement under health and safety legislation to adequately train staff in:

- the safety procedures of your organisation
- safe use of equipment and facilities
- hazards in your workplace
- what to do in emergencies
- how to manage any activities or situations that pose an element of risk.

On-going supervision and monitoring of all staff is also a legal duty. Employers should ensure that a staff member is competent to carry out their duties safely, OR they should be supervised by a suitably competent person.

The Social Sector Accreditation Standards, which most OSCAR services operate under, require that "the organisation provides adequate induction, training, professional development, and support for all staff." The only required qualification under the standards is current first-aid certification – usually at least one staff member on-site at all times. When an Assessor from the Accreditation team reviews an OSCAR service they will look for "evidence that staff are adequately trained, according to the services delivered".

As well as first aid, the standards specifically mention these elements:

- staff induction training on the organisation's process for abuse prevention and reporting
- staff training on the recognition of and responses to the signs of abuse
- that the "paramountcy" principle is reflected throughout service provision, including staff induction and training
- staff training and professional development plans that relate to - the performance appraisal or performance management process
- a health and safety component in the staff induction programme, with sign-off by a staff member when it is completed

With all this in mind we recommend that OSCAR services keep accurate records of all external training undertaken by staff and how they train staff in policies and procedures, including induction and ongoing training in how staff will work with the children and contribute to a safe environment.

As a matter of priority we would recommend the following training for staff:

- active supervision and risk management – responding effectively to changing circumstances in the programme and ensuring good supervision coverage is constantly maintained
- group management and behaviour guidance techniques that are non-punitive and focus on promoting positive behaviour
- how children with special needs will be accommodated by the service, considering diet, medication, equipment, modified activities, or modifications to the programme and environment
- recognising and responding to suspected child abuse and current best practice in safeguarding their programme

What are the options for training?

Programmes take a variety of approaches to meet these training requirements. This includes doing their own in-house training, either run by people within their organisation or with external trainers. This do-it-yourself approach is quite common in the sector and a suitable option where you have

casual and short term staff who need to learn how your programme operates and to get familiar with essential procedures for supervision of children, behaviour guidance and keeping safe.

Accessing external training opportunities can be more of a challenge. Timing, location and cost can all pose potential barriers for people wishing to develop OSCAR skills and knowledge. What is available locally will vary from region to region. Some areas have regular provision of training opportunities that are designed for OSCAR staff. It may also pay to look at courses offered for other sectors such as teaching, youth work, sport and recreation.

Core competencies for OSCAR Staff

What would you consider to be the essential skill set for an OSCAR worker? Person specifications for an OSCAR role will often include these elements:

- Interpersonal skills: relating to others, especially children; verbal and written communication; maintaining positive and supportive relationships within a team
- Activity and group facilitation skills: experience and skills in particular activity areas; managing groups; resolving conflict; promoting a positive social environment; problem-solving – “thinking on your feet”, resourceful, creative and flexible approach to activities and programmes
- Child-centred practice: an understanding of and commitment to child development and well-being; effective supervision, risk assessment and awareness of safety issues when working with children
- Organisational skills: planning and scheduling; time management

OSCAR employers often talk about being as concerned about gauging a prospective employee’s commitment to the OSCAR role (and passion for working with children), as they are about relevant skills and experience.

Very few people are hired into an OSCAR programme “fully equipped” for their role in that programme, so employers need to be prepared for an induction process that introduces the new staff member to how this particular programme operates.