

# Criteria for activity providers quality grading



# Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
	1.1.1 The Scheme	3
	1.1.2 The Benefits	3
<b>1.2</b>	<b>How the Scheme works</b>	<b>4</b>
	1.2.1 The Awards	4
	1.2.2 Fees & Procedures	4
	1.2.3 How to Apply	4
<b>1.3</b>	<b>The Visit</b>	<b>5</b>
	1.3.1 The Assessment	5
	1.3.2 Brown Tourism Signage	5
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Designators</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.5</b>	<b>Grading Bands, Riders &amp; Sectional Consistency</b>	<b>7</b>
	1.5.1 Grading Bands	7
	1.5.2 Riders	7
	1.5.3 Sectional Consistency	7
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Criteria</b>	<b>8</b>
	1.6.1 Pre-Arrival	8
	1.6.2 Experience	9
	1.6.3 Catering	11
	1.6.4 Retailing	12
	1.6.5 Toilets	13
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Code of Practice</b>	<b>14</b>

# 1.1 Introduction

## 1.1.1 The Scheme

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For Northern Ireland Tourism to reach its potential as a destination, quality has to be a common goal for all stakeholders in NI Tourism PLC. Tourism Northern Ireland (Tourism NI) is committed to increasing visitor numbers and expectations through developing a quality experience.

Tourism NI is operating a Quality Grading Scheme for Visitor Experiences which will give operators an independent Quality Assurance Award.

Scheme participation consists of a visit by a Quality Advisor to make a qualitative assessment of the condition and standard of facilities and services provided and that the Code of Practice is being fulfilled. Feedback is given on the findings during the visit and advice of other sources of business support.

The Scheme has been developed with 4 primary objectives:

- To provide visitors with the means to identify Visitor Experiences which provide the desired quality of facilities and services
- To help operators market themselves more effectively by providing an official independent endorsement of their Visitor Experience
- To encourage and acknowledge improvements in standards throughout the industry
- To improve the performance of the Visitor Experiences

Core criteria are standard for all sectors with specific criteria tailored to reflect differences between designators.

## 1.1.2 The Benefits

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The award is an assurance to visitors that Tourism NI has independently verified your Experience. In addition to providing a Quality Grading assessment for the visitor, the Scheme will direct you to those bodies or individuals able to provide development advice and other support services.

For Visitor Experiences achieving an award, Tourism NI will provide a web logo, plaque, written report, full debrief, award certificate, priority listing on [discovernorthernireland.com](https://discovernorthernireland.com) and a range of other benefits.

Information regarding all of the Quality Schemes can be found on the industry website [tourismni.com](https://tourismni.com).

# 1.2 How The Scheme Works

## 1.2.1 The Awards

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There are five quality grades awarded for the standard of facilities and services following the assessment of the appropriate areas. The five grades are represented by 1 – 5 stars, and convey the following standards:

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Excellent
★★★	Very Good
★★	Good
★	Acceptable

## 1.2.2 Fees & Procedures

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Visitor Experiences and Attractions will be invoiced annually with the visit taking place on an annual basis.

A procedure exists for Visitor Experiences that are dissatisfied with the award given. A second visit can be requested. If the operator is still dissatisfied with the result of the second visit an appeal can be made.

## 1.2.3 How To Apply

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You can either email [qa@tourismni.com](mailto:qa@tourismni.com) and request an application pack or contact the Quality & Standards unit on **+44 (0)28 9044 1682**.

An incognito visit will take place, taking into account any noted periods when a visit would be unsuitable such as refurbishment or closed periods.

# 1.3 The Visit

## 1.3.1 The Assessment

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Incognito visits are carried out every year and are undertaken by one Quality Advisor. However, in the event that Tourism NI in its absolute discretion deems it necessary, assessments (whether incognito or not) may be carried out by more than one person.

The Quality Advisor will visit the Experience without prior notice to sample an authentic customer journey. While at the Experience, verbal feedback will be offered to the owner, manager or other appropriate staff member. Following the visit a full written report will be prepared and the award will be advised in writing.

There are six key areas of assessment. These include Pre-Arrival and Arrival, which are assessed for all Experiences, followed by Attraction/Presentation and a further three areas: Catering, Retail and Toilets which are included in the assessment if they form part of the visitor experience. Where an Experience does not include these facilities, they are not included in the calculation of the award and have no impact on the result. The assessment of the visitor experience specific to each Experience is tailored to reflect the nature of the designator.

Quality Advisors undertake a rigorous training programme. Assessments are objective and draw on extensive experience of the visitor attraction sector.

## 1.3.2 Brown Tourism Signage

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Brown Tourism signs are not obligatory for participation in the Scheme, but it is recommended that these are in place. Where permission has not been granted for road signs, this will be taken into account.

# 1.4 Designators

As shown, the Quality Grading award can be a combination of star grade and designator. The designators give clear information to visitors on the type of facility or experience. Current Tourism NI designators are:

## Visitor Attraction

A range of attractions and experiences including visitor centres, churches, distilleries and steam railways.

## Activity Centre

Centre based activities, including soft play, arts & crafts and horse riding.

## Activity Provider

Adventure activities and extreme sports, including abseiling, kayaking and mountaineering.

## Arts Venue

Theatres, art centres and performance venues. The assessment does not take into account the content of performances or events as this will vary.

## Castle

May be inhabited or ruined.

## Garden

Gardens open to the public.

## Garden Centre

Retail outlets specialising in the sale of plants and gardening supplies.

## Historic Attraction

An experience of historical significance. May relate to a period of pre-history or early-history.

## Historic House

Houses or palaces of historic significance.

## Leisure Centre

Leisure pools, swimming pools and sports centres.

## Museum

Displaying artefacts of historical or other significance.

## Tour

Guided walks, bus and boat tours.

## Tourist Shop

Retail outlets with an emphasis on local crafts, produce and products.

## Wildlife Experience

A variety of experience types including wildlife visitor centres, boat trips and walking tours which offer a nature-based experience with possibilities of viewing flora and fauna in a natural or protected environment.

**Each applicant should indicate on the application form the designator they feel would be most appropriate for their Experience. This can be discussed at the time of the visit, where the Quality Advisor's advice may be that another designator is more appropriate.**

# 1.5 Grading Bands, Riders & Sectional Consistency

## 1.5.1 Grading Bands

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During the assessment each of the elements will attract a score between 1 and 10. These are used to calculate an overall percentage which will place the Experience in one of the grading bands listed here.

★	55%-63%
★★	64%-70%
★★★	71%-77%
★★★★	78%-84%
★★★★★	85%+

## 1.5.2 Riders

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In addition at 3, 4 and 5 stars, key elements of the Experience must achieve a minimum score before these awards can be confirmed. These are called riders and the minimum scores are:

★★★	7/10
★★★★	8/10
★★★★★	9/10

These are identified against the relevant elements throughout the guidance notes.

**Please read the guidance notes carefully to ensure you are aware of all the relevant riders which relate to your specific designator.**

## 1.5.3 Sectional Consistency

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Visitors will have an expectation that all areas of a Visitor Experience displays a similar degree of quality. This expectation is reflected in the grading by **sectional consistency**.

The areas that must achieve sectional consistency are **Arrival, Experience (Core), Catering, Retail and Toilets**. All of these areas must achieve the minimum percentage of the relevant grading band for that award to be confirmed.

The single exception to this is that one of **Catering, Retail and Toilets** can sit one grading band below the overall award. For example at three stars the overall score will have to sit within the 3 star grading band i.e. between 71% and 77%.

**Pre-arrival** is exempt from sectional consistency.

The **Arrival and Experience (Core)** sections must also sit within the 3 star grading band; 71-77%.

Of the following three areas **Catering, Retail and Toilets**, one may score below the minimum percentage for 3 stars (71%) but not below the minimum percentage for 2 stars (64%).

# 1.6 Criteria

## Activity Provider

Activities offered from a centre base or with an independent operator including water sports, mountaineering and extreme sports.

The following sections will be assessed at all Experiences. Where elements such as catering and retailing are not part of the visitor experience, these will not be included in the overall assessment.

### 1.6.1 Pre-Arrival

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#### 1. Brochure/Leaflet/Website

- Appropriate information given including opening times, charges, activity details, pictures, frequently asked questions, location map, contact options
- Use of foreign languages
- Ease of use
- Accurate description of Experience

#### 2. Road and Directional Signs

- Appropriate advance signage
- Content and accuracy
- Distances and consideration of seasonality

#### 3. Booking Procedure/Efficiency (Rider)

- Well structured booking procedure
- Outline of activity/plan for the day/duration of activity
- Clear and effective information on content, safety instructions and changing facilities
- Assessment of suitability of activity including relevant medical conditions
- Disclosure of risk
- Assessment of experience/ability
- Appropriate clothing required/gear provided
- Lunches, food, water
- Details of meeting place and time
- Confirmation verbal/postal/email
- Contact details taken
- Clear Terms and Conditions
- Reassurance

#### 4. Booking Procedure/Friendliness/Attitude (Rider)

- Friendly positive attitude
- Anticipate client needs
- Willingness to answer questions
- Good product knowledge
- Readily expanding on detail
- Inspiring confidence
- Friendly professional manner



# 1.6 Criteria

## 1.6.2 Experience

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### 5. Orientation (Rider)

- A structured approach to scene setting
- Clear, concise and detailed briefing
- Disclosure of risk
- Appropriate use of media/resources
- Accurate setting of expectations
- Pre-activity confirmation of health, experience and ability

### 6. Changing facilities (Rider)

- Adequacy of changing facilities
- Spaciousness
- Privacy
- Innovative and imaginative alternatives to fixed changing facilities
- Quality and maintenance of facility

**Note: The provision of some form of changing facility is required at a 3, 4 and 5 star level. This may be basic and temporary in nature, but will give consideration to the privacy and comfort of clients. The use of the clients own vehicle for changing into and out of wet sports gear would not be considered acceptable at 3, 4 and 5 stars.**

### 7. Group management

- Inclusive approach to all group members
- Awareness of differing levels of experience and ability
- Awareness of individual and group needs
- Maintaining pace and keeping to time plan
- Group presentation skills
- Development of group dynamics where appropriate

### 8. Attitude/friendliness of instructor (rider)

- Warm, friendly manner, general attitude, professional style, good customer care

### 9. Activity experience/instruction (rider)

- Recognition of differing levels of experience and knowledge
- Ability to pitch instruction to suit client needs
- Explanation of safety procedures and disclosure of risk
- Clients to feel confident and assured
- Clear and easy to understand instruction
- Repetition and review of instruction
- Coaching and encouragement
- Awareness of psychological impact
- Clients given maximum benefit and enjoyment from visit

# 1.6 Criteria

## 10. Environmental responsibility

- 'Leave no trace' guidance
- General information about local environmental issues and contexts
- Evidence of environmental policies and/or codes of conduct
- Thoughtful route planning accommodating environmental considerations
- Clear guidelines regarding toilet etiquette
- Considerate waste disposal mindful of recycling
- Vehicle selection

## 11. Appearance of staff/instructor

- Corporate clothing and name badge, where appropriate
- Staff distinguishable and suitably dressed
- Smart and presentable appearance

## 12. Equipment

- Appearance, cleanliness
- Impact on experience including ease of use, comfort and confidence

**Note: Fitness for purpose will not be assessed as this will be covered under your own independent safety accreditation.**

## 13. Internal signing (Directional signs) (Where applicable)

- Visibility, clarity, quality, presentation
- Layout of information
- Use of corporate identity

## 14. Decor/maintenance (Facility only)

- Quality and condition
- Good decorative order in keeping with Experience
- General maintenance

## 15. Cleanliness (Centre based activities) (rider)

- Overall level of cleanliness and tidiness

## 16. Farewell/departure

- Review of Experience
- Feedback on achievements
- Advise on further instruction and/or other activities
- Invite client feedback
- Friendly farewell

# 1.6 Criteria

## 1.6.3 Catering

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### 17. Layout

- Appropriateness of layout to the catering facility
- Style of service effective within establishment
- Positioning of furniture, ease of movement within catering area
- Self-service hatchery in relation to the tables

### 18. Menu presentation

- Location of menu
- Style and quality of menu
- Clear indication of price
- Helpful descriptions and information

### 19. Food presentation & quality

- Food quality, including temperature, flavour, presentation
- Use of local or seasonal ingredients
- Balance of choice available, e.g. healthy option, children
- Visual appeal of food

### 20. Attitude/efficiency of staff (rider)

- Warm, friendly welcome, attitude, professional style, good customer care
- Efficient service, appropriate to style of operation
- Consistent standard of service
- Efficient/prompt attention to requests
- Regular/efficient cleaning of tables
- Attention to detail, especially hygiene standards
- Sufficient levels of staff, training, competence, supervision
- Ability of staff and facilities to cope with demands

### 21. Appearance of staff

- Corporate clothing and name badge, where appropriate
- Staff distinguishable and suitably dressed
- Smart and presentable appearance
- Evidence of attention to hygiene

### 22. Ambience/atmosphere

- Related to type of experience and facility
- Conducive to eating, including lighting, decor, heating, themes
- Level of noise/disturbance
- Style and theme of decor and furnishings is appropriate to facility
- Table appointment is appropriate to style and theme of facility
- Use of architectural features
- Use of music

# 1.6 Criteria

## 23. Decor/maintenance

- Quality and condition
- Good decorative order in keeping with Experience
- General maintenance

## 24. Cleanliness (rider)

- Overall level of cleanliness and tidiness
- Evidence of attention to cleanliness with regard to hygiene, including cutlery and crockery

## 1.6.4 Retailing

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### 25. Layout

- Goods for sale are provided in an area set aside for that purpose
- Use of reception is acceptable but attention to space/clutter will be assessed
- Layout suitable for size and type of shop
- Sufficient space for customers to move around, especially when busy

### 26. Merchandise

- Range and variety of stock
- Range appropriate to size or type of Experience

### 27. Presentation

- Goods attractively and conveniently displayed
- Quality of display units
- Pricing is adequate and effective
- Similar goods displayed together
- Location of items clearly indicated (larger shops only)
- Favourable environment in which to shop

### 28. Decor/maintenance

- Quality and condition
- Good decorative order in keeping with Experience
- General maintenance

### 29. Attitude/efficiency of staff (rider)

- Warm, friendly welcome, general attitude, professional style, good customer care
- Efficient service appropriate to size of establishment
- Efficient and prompt attention
- Sufficient level of staff, training, competence, supervision
- Good level of product knowledge, ability to deal with enquiries

# 1.6 Criteria

## 30. Appearance of staff

- Corporate clothing and name badge, where appropriate
- Staff distinguishable and suitably dressed
- Smart and presentable appearance

## 31. Cleanliness (rider)

- Overall level of cleanliness and tidiness
- Attention to display shelves

## 1.6.5 Toilets

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### 32. Layout

- Clear directional signs to and at facility
- Sufficient space to use facility
- Hand basins are well laid out
- Opening of doors does not cause obstruction

### 33. Fixtures and fittings

- Range and provision
- Quality of cubicles
- Range of fittings, e.g. children, sanitary bin
- Levels and condition of lighting
- Quality of ventilation and extraction fan
- Quality of additional machines

### 34. Decor/maintenance

- Standard of interior decor and maintenance
- Condition of sealed surfaces
- Paintwork fresh, bright and well maintained
- Safety of electrical connections and fittings
- Maintenance of door locks, taps, hooks

### 35. Adequacy of provision

- Sufficient toilets to meet demand
- Baby room
- Children's facilities
- Sufficient soap, towels, toilet paper

### 36. Cleanliness (rider)

- Standard of cleanliness – grouting, bins
- Good overall level of housekeeping
- Condition of surfaces around wash basins and cubicles
- Evidence of regular cleaning

# Tourism Northern Ireland

## Code Of Practice For Visitor Experiences

### The Owners and Management of all participating businesses have undertaken:

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1. To display this Code of Practice to comply with the following provisions of the code.
2. To describe accurately to all visitors the amenities, facilities and services provided in any advertisement, brochure or any other means, and to indicate any significant restrictions on entry.
3. To display clearly at public entry points any charges for entry (including service charges and taxes where applicable) and whether there are any additional charges for individual Experiences and hours of operation (opening and closing).
4. To manage and, where appropriate, staff the Experience in such a way as to maintain a high standard of customer care, cleanliness, courtesy and maintenance to ensure visitor safety, comfort and service. All staff who meet visitors should be recognisable as employees.
5. Where appropriate to the nature, scale and location of the Experience, to provide adequate toilet facilities, coach and car parking and catering arrangements.
6. To give due consideration to access and other provision for people with special needs and to make suitable provision where practicable.
7. To deal promptly and courteously with all enquiries, requests, reservations, correspondence and complaints from visitors.
8. To provide public liability insurance or comparable arrangement including cover for any activities provided and to comply with all applicable planning, transportation, safety and other statutory arrangements.
9. To adhere to a relevant environmental Code of Conduct where an outdoor/wildlife element is offered as whole or part of their experience. This must be clearly displayed for visitor reference and may be included in promotional literature.
10. To commit to ensure staff are trained in WorldHost.
11. To ensure a fair and balanced picture is presented when portraying Experiences of a political/historical nature.
12. To commit to participating in customer satisfaction surveys and incorporating the feedback for continuous improvement.



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