

## The ukactive Outdoor Code of Practice: British Military Fitness Case Study

British Military Fitness was founded in April 1999 by Major Robin Cope and Sergeant Harry Sowerby as an alternative form of group fitness training to gyms. The idea was, and still is, to get people of all fitness abilities outdoors training in parks, with motivation provided by highly trained military instructors. Today, British Military Fitness deliver over 400 classes a week in over 140 parks across the UK.

All BMF sessions are led by instructors with infectious enthusiasm to ensure a fun and effective way of getting fit. With their encouragement you train in pairs, groups and teams, climbing over, crawling under and running around each other from the first to the last minute. Everyone, from exercise rookies to fitness veterans, are welcome.

The Outdoor Code of Practice was implemented by ukactive in 2014 as part of their commitment to raising standards in the pursuit of a more active and healthier nation. Group exercise classes and personal training sessions conducted in parks have soared in popularity. Whilst the delivery of these classes continues to enjoy public support, there is a need for them to be delivered responsibly with effective safeguards in place.

The ukactive Outdoor Code of Practice defines the minimum performance criteria for group exercise and personal training delivered in outdoor spaces to ensure customers are provided with a safe environment in which to engage with leisure activities.

The Code supports exercise professionals to attain specified minimum standards of health and safety, improving public confidence by demonstrating that they take their responsibilities seriously. Where the Code does not create a new law or act as a substitute for any existing regulations, it does cover all group exercise classes that are conducted in parks and open spaces. These fall into the three key categories; health & safety, exercise professionals and customer care.

The popularity of BMF has soared to the extent that they are now training over 20,000 people per week in parks up and down the nation. Whilst training in the great outdoors has numerous additional health benefits to indoor alternatives, the risks compared to a normal gym environment are also very different, and constantly changing.

The safety of all customers is of paramount importance and something BMF have always treated as a number one priority. Having started the movement of outdoor group fitness in the UK, they are very proud to also be the first outdoor fitness provider to pass the ukactive Outdoor Code of Practice, ratifying that they have sound risk management procedures in place, combined with highly qualified staff who are appropriately trained and continuously developed.

BMF believe that continuing to raise standards in our industry will not only better protect customers and as a result, business, but also ensure that fitness enthusiasts have the confidence that BMF not only produces excellent fitness results, but they can be assured that they will take the very best of care of them.

Furthermore, this initiative will save councils time and money in controlling the standards of operators training in their boroughs, at a time when all council resource is so precious.

**David Stalker, CEO, ukactive;** The Outdoor Code of Practice is a key part of ukactive's commitment to raising standards in the pursuit of a more active and healthier nation. This can best be achieved most effectively in an environment where local authorities and exercise professionals are governed by a set of standards that ensures customers are safe and well supported while taking part in exercise.+

The assessment process is very thorough and involved a review of all of BMF systems and processes, as well as unannounced assessments at their venues across the UK.

The basic professional standards were checked and verified first; operational procedures, insurance and liability certificates, Health and Safety policy and adherence, and how risk assessments are created and managed.

Then came a review of staff qualifications and training records, including First Aid training and how BMF train and communicate with their teams to ensure that they are all aware of the requirements and where all of the supporting information is located.

The other section concerns how BMF care for their customers, not only from a wellbeing point of view, but how they also nurture new starters, explain what they do, the clarity of contract conditions and a review of how they sell. This includes how BMF communicates to customers, how they invite comment from members and how this information is used to continuously improve what they do.

The office review was simply a case of submitting evidence of the information that BMF have and the processes followed, whilst the in park assessment was unannounced so it is the true experience that was assessed.

The Code of Practice has given BMF a good reassurance that they have sound processes in place to protect their business, staff and most importantly, their customers. Going through the process delivered a good opportunity to review where further improvements could be made, and also where they could automate certain things to streamline certain processes.

**Rob Love, MD, BMF;** Outdoor fitness has surged in popularity but operating in the outdoors requires different competencies and carries different risks to those that people might face when delivering workouts in a more traditional facility. The Code of Practice provides a strong framework to ensure that all outdoor fitness is safely delivered with all operators agreeing and committing to the necessary standards required. Constantly improving these standards can only be a good thing for all customers and provides peace of mind for authorities managing outdoor spaces whilst removing a huge administrative burden. He went on to say, We are certainly very proud to have been awarded the ukactive Outdoor Code of Practice, and I am confident that our customers will value what we have achieved, and potential customers that have a choice of provider, will take confidence from seeing this seal of approval.

Currently, every local authority has to invest a large amount of time and resources in to reviewing potential operators to verify that they are safe to operate. At a time when council resource faces continuous pressure, the Outdoor Code of Practice removes a large amount of work and adds in additional security and peace of mind, which is a classic win-win scenario.

Outdoor fitness is incredibly popular and continues to grow at a huge rate. It is right that every provider makes a commitment to their industry to operate in a safe and responsible manner to protect all customers and the reputation of outdoor fitness. If everyone aspires to achieve these basic professional standards then customers will be protected, providers will be more welcomed by local authorities, processes will be simplified, standards will be raised and the outdoor fitness market and its reputation will continue to grow.