

Scottish Visually Impaired Skiers (SVIS) is a Club formed to enable visually impaired (VI) skiers to undertake recreational ski-ing with sighted volunteer Guides and is a Charity Registered in Scotland.

No formal ski qualifications required to be a volunteer guide but a basic level of recreational ski-ing is essential in order to manage the VI Skier who is being guided at the same time as both are moving on the piste. Most essential is a good rapport between skier and guide and this is assessed by 'on the job' training. Acceptance as a Guide is entirely up to the VI Skiers who allow the training and make an assessment based on their confidence to ski with each Guide when training and ultimately by allowing Guides and VI Skiers to ski as a team on the piste.

As a club supporting Visually Impaired Skiers we are fully aware of the dangers inherent in the sport of ski-ing and how they may be further increased, for both parties, when partnering with a Visually Impaired Skier. We need to take measures to prevent accidents in so far as this is possible and be prepared to cope with those which do occur. It is incumbent on all members of the club to behave responsibly, to look after each other, to stop and give details if accidents occur and to give assistance when required. In a registered Ski Area it is a legal requirement to do so.

When ski-ing each VI Skier must be accompanied on a minimum one-to-one basis with a Member Guide who has no other responsibilities. These pairings, before going on to any ski area should first inform the relevant centre or ski patrol personnel of their intentions. This offers the centre the opportunity to advise of any pitfalls which may be present on the pistes, on that day and is also a common courtesy which benefits all. Should an incident occur on the piste both members require to have an emergency procedure for safe evacuation and bear in mind it may be the VI Skier who has to take charge. If other VI pairings are also ski-ing it is beneficial if they have a common/shared emergency plan and if using radio for communication each pairing also needs to ensure that they have separate channels.

Risk assessments are made by discussion each time there is a pairing for any ski activity and are dependent on the weather, ability and mix of available VI Skiers and Guides. In order to make those assessments the following guidelines have been prepared by, and for, club members.

1. Assessment of Risk

Ski-ing, in common with many other active, outdoor sports, carries an increased (with respect to normal life risk) element of risk. This is implicitly accepted by participants and risks can be grouped as follows:

- Adverse weather or snow conditions causing disorientation, exposure or fatigue and hypothermia.
- Injury which may be self-inflicted or due to third parties, especially if the slopes are crowded.



- Over-extending one's capabilities with regard to ski-ing or mountain awareness.
- Ski-ing without proper equipment or with poorly maintained equipment. Club Guides have additional responsibility to take care of the Visually Impaired Skier in their charge. Both VI Skier and Guide must wear suitably identified Hi-Vis Vests and the Guide needs to have the capability to guide the Visually Impaired Skier while assessing all of the above. The guide also works within a framework of instructions and control determined by the Club and agreed between both VI Skier and Guide for each and every ski outing. As a minimum this includes an agreed and workable method of communication and a contingency plan should communication fail or be interrupted.

2. Mitigation of Risk

The risks can be lessened by the Club Members through individual preparation and awareness.

- Members require to have had instruction and/or practice under controlled conditions before participating in club activities with a lesser degree of supervision. This applies to both Guides and VI Skiers. Currently this is done at Hillend.
For competent skiers willing to act as guides a pairing with a competent VI Skier who knows the ropes while being shadowed by another experienced Guide may be all that is required to build up expertise and communication'.
New Guides will be issued with a set of 'Notes for Guides'.
For VI persons wishing to ski, but who have had no ski experience in this situation it will involve two Guides initially with one acting as Guide and the other acting as reserve/backup. If the VI person has not skied before, or needs to be brought back to competency then a ski instructor/guide and another 'guide' for safety and slope protection will be used for as long as is necessary.
- Members should always maintain self-sufficiency in clothing and, if applicable, food and piste maps even when ski-ing as a group. Guides should familiarise themselves with slopes, runs, piste layouts, snow conditions etc. before taking a VI Skier on to the area. Guides will have the final say on suitability of conditions for safe ski-ing.
- Members should always try to read the weather and store this information for future use.
- Members should not over-reach themselves just because they may look silly or 'feart' if they do not follow others who may in fact be acting recklessly.

As a club, through experienced members acting as Mentors as well as Guides we can also conduct ourselves in a way which will lessen risk on less familiar slopes.

- Members whether fully sighted or VI have different ski-ing abilities and levels of competence. Persons acting as Guides may have no ski-ing qualifications and it must be stressed that the Club is not set up for competitive ski-ing or any instructing outside a controlled environment such as Hillend.
- At least two Members who are experienced in ski-ing and mountain awareness should accompany any group outing away from the normal Club Meeting Slopes at Hillend. Remember that any person in the group can suffer illness or injury so backup should be inbuilt into any outing - ideally there should be at least one 'spare' guide to allow for assisting in an



emergency without compromising others in the party. Members not guiding and wishing to ski on their own should nevertheless keep a weather eye open for any dangers which may befall others and make the group aware of them. They should be prepared to break off from their own plans to assist other members of the club if this is required.

- The Guide/VI Skier pairing should be structured to provide roughly equal ability and interest. If conditions are favourable Members should encourage further involvement and responsibility by making use of trainee guides under supervision, shadowing of guide and VI pairs with a view to increasing awareness and enjoyment for all.
- Ground rules should be laid down for the circumstances pertaining on the day. This will be done with regard to the number and capabilities of those present and the weather conditions prevailing or forecast for the day.
- First Aiders should be known and at least one plus a basic medical pack should accompany the group or the whereabouts of such facilities and the method whereby they can be obtained should be known by all Members prior to setting out. In Registered Ski Areas the Ski Patrol and centres have full first aid facilities and need to be involved in any emergency.
- Members should be experienced in recognising the symptoms of exposure, altitude sickness and fatigue and take immediate measures to remove any person to a place of safety with due regard for the safety of the remainder of the group.
- Members should know where to contact assistance from Ski Patrol etc. and have a clear plan for any emergency or weather clampdown.

Insurance Cover

Snowsport Scotland has arranged Civil Liability insurance cover for all members of affiliated Clubs. SVIS is covered by this and the cost of this insurance is included in the yearly membership fee for Club Members.

This Civil liability insurance cover operates should a member cause injury or death to other people while skiing anywhere in the world but is not a Personal Injury, Travel or Medical Insurance and policy details may change from year to year.

Etiquette and Safety

Evacuation

The Guide assesses when conditions require evacuating slope i.e. poor weather now or approaching; accident in area; personal or slope equipment has broken or developed a fault; the Guide or Skier is unfit or unwell; Plans to evacuate to be communicated with others in the group by Guide or Skier, or Ski patrol (if available)

Safe Skiing

Skiing within 'comfort zone' and not speeding

Keeping to the side of piste when climbing or descending on foot

The Guides to stop the skier when slope/hill is congested with other skiers/boarders

The Guides to choose routes respecting other skiers/snowboarders space

The Guide to check for other skiers when joining a slope

