



Guide to Club Trips

What you need to know before diving with us in open water

This guide is designed to offer divers new to the branch with a source of information to answer most of the common questions or provide missing knowledge prior to embarking on their first open water dives with the branch. In some cases, the information has already been provided, though perhaps in a piecemeal fashion or in fact sheets once read but now forgotten, so being the nice guys we are at London Branch, we've tried to put it all in one place.

If you're reading this, it means you've completed your Ocean Diver pool sessions and now have numerous questions about what equipment you need to buy, what you need to bring with you and generally what happens on a branch dive. Or maybe you already dive, but don't have your own equipment or have never dived in the UK or from a RIB before. If so, read on.

Diving Equipment

For your first few dives there is certain equipment that you will need to purchase yourself and the rest that can be provided by the branch. In a nutshell, you'll need your own dry suit and your own diving computer. It's highly advisable to also have your own mask, hood and gloves though you could use club ones.

Equipment to hire

For training you can use club equipment for free (except that we don't have dry suits to hire). For trips you'll need to buy your own or hire it from the club. We generally recommend to hire the 'big stuff' from the branch initially. This will be:

- cylinder(s)
- buoyancy compensator
- set of regulators

There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, this will be the same or similar kit to that which you used to train in the pool, so you will not have to contend with new or unfamiliar equipment on your first few dives. Secondly, these are some of the big ticket items in terms of financial outlay. Using the club equipment to start with will give you time to start saving!

Whilst you are welcome to go out and buy everything yourself, we generally advise against this. You will get a better idea of what you need by observing what others in the club are using and asking questions, etc. In fact, it is not uncommon to make costly mistakes buying equipment which was thought suitable only to have to purchase replacements (or wish you'd have bought something else) once you've been diving for a while. Also, you may not take to diving or decide it's not for you, in which case you will have wasted more money.

We encourage new divers to start buying their own equipment once they are in a position to do so. The club has a limited amount of equipment which is suitable for open water, and priority is generally given to trainees, so once you've qualified it's only fair that you free up resources for those who were in your shoes not so long ago, though you can carry on hiring from the branch as long as you need to.

Hiring from the branch

Each item is charged at a daily rate - see the latest fee schedule on the clubroom wall or check with the equipment officer for details.

Equipment is only available subject to availability. Please ask the equipment officer well in advance of your intended hiring dates to avoid disappointment.

When you come in to collect the equipment it is a good idea to assemble, pressurise and check it all whilst still in the clubroom. If there are any leaks or something needs exchanging, now is the time to do it, not on the dive site. Ask someone if you have any doubts.

You should hire equipment on the Tuesday night immediately prior to the trip (which night you should plan on attending in any event to obtain last minute details from the dive manager). It may not be possible to hire equipment any further in advance as it may be required for pool training. Likewise, for the same reason it should be returned to the equipment room as early as possible on the Tuesday immediately following the trip. Even if someone else transported the equipment for you on the trip it is still your responsibility to make sure it is returned in a timely fashion.

Also please make sure you read the equipment hire sheet fully before signing it. Yes, it's boring but it is important.

When hiring these items you need to make sure of the following:

Cylinders

These need to be in test before you can take them out of the club room. If you present an out of test cylinder to a filling station they *will* refuse to fill it, so it is in your interests to check this before taking the cylinder home. Also check with the dive manager for the trip you plan on attending how many cylinders are required. Several of the locations we regularly dive are a considerable distance from the nearest filling station so you will need two cylinders if you plan on doing two dives each day.

We like you to take empty cylinders and bring them back full (the club will pay for the extra fill) but if the dive manager says it isn't possible to fill a cylinder before the first dive then you'll need

to take a full one. Unless there's no other option please don't take a half empty cylinder that we could have used again in the pool.

Regulators

The open water regulators are kept separately from the pool regulators and are DIN rather than A-Clamp. Check with the equipment officer that you are taking the correct one. If you are diving in a dry-suit then you will need a dry suit hose on your regulator set. Please ensure that this hose works on your chosen dry-suit (not all the direct feeds have the same valve as each other).

Buoyancy compensator

We use the same BCs for both pool and open water, so there are no extra steps for selecting one suitable for hire, other than making sure you pick up the correct size for you.

Weights

You should have done a full kit assessment in the pool prior to starting your open water training during which you will have estimated how much lead you may require. Don't forget that if diving in the sea you will be more buoyant and so will need one or two more weights. The boat or your instructor may have some spare for this purpose, but they also may not, so it is a good idea to take an extra couple of blocks from the clubroom just in case. There are a limited number of weightbelts and weights in the branch, so after your first couple of dives, please start to think about acquiring your own. These are not expensive items and buying your own will both free up club resources and give you more choice - for instance many people prefer softer belts with pouches for lead shot rather than bare weights on webbing. Just remember when buying your own that our weights are random amounts (hopefully marked with their weight) so don't just count the blocks and assume these will be the same. If in doubt weigh the belt you used that worked.

Dry suit

Sea temperatures in the UK generally range from around 7°C in the winter to 18°C in the summer depending on depth and coastal location. Inland freshwater sites can be (a lot) colder. However on average, during the diving season (typically April to September when conditions are more reliable) you can expect figures in the low to mid teens. Therefore most UK divers wear a dry suit all season and those who wear a wetsuit tend to only do that later in the season (August to October).

You can't hire a dry suit either from the club or from anywhere else. Therefore you will need to buy your own.

This is an expensive purchase and, importantly, it takes months between ordering and delivery, after which it may need to be sent back for tweaks. So you need to bite the bullet and get on

with this process well in advance of the diving season. The club is very happy to help with advice on this.

Mask

A mask should, more than any other desirable attribute, fit well. There is no correlation between price and how well a mask fits so it may be the cheapest mask that's best for you. The only way to tell is to try many masks on. A well fitting mask should be easy to keep stuck to your face without the strap just by breathing in through the nose. It should also feel comfortable once the strap is on.

You should choose a low volume design - this makes it easier to clear, is less likely to be dislodged (e.g. from strong currents) and will increase your field of vision due to the lens being closer to your face. Make sure you purchase a mask from a reputable equipment manufacturer which is designed for diving and is of durable construction.

If you wear glasses or contact lenses, some masks can be fitted with prescription lenses, or you can wear contact lenses under your mask. Take your optical prescription when you go and buy a mask and if it's a fairly simple prescription they can fit it at the dive shop. Lenses can be obtained for more complicated prescriptions e.g. for astigmatism but they're not stocked by normal dive shops, so ask someone in the branch for details about firms to contact to obtain these. Cost: around £20-40, plus £20-25 per lens for standard prescriptions.

Snorkel

Whilst skin diving techniques are taught as part of your pool training (during which you can use branch equipment), snorkels have limited use for divers in open water and have no application other than on the surface. You will find that most divers in the branch do not take them diving, so we would therefore recommend that you put your money towards something else at this stage. If you're going to get a snorkel then get the rubber rollup type that can go in a BC pocket rather than the plastic rigid type.

Fins

There are a wide variety of fins on the market, and it is common for manufacturers to bring out new designs every year, each claiming some advance in technology. The marketing claims are largely spurious, though you should bear certain factors in mind. You will need a fin with an open heel and an ankle strap to accommodate the larger (and flat soled) boots of a wetsuit or drysuit. Also, diving in the UK generally involves wearing thicker suits and/or more equipment plus currents can be stronger than some tropical destinations. Stiffer fins which generate more thrust are therefore generally better suited to such conditions, and also have the advantage of being able to deliver a finer degree of control where gentle manoeuvring (e.g. around delicate corals or easily disturbed sediments) is required. Whatever you buy, make sure they fit the boots of your suit.

Gloves, hood and booties

Neoprene to cover your extremities will depend on the style of exposure suit you choose. Wetsuits will sometimes, though not always, have a hood attached already, though you will need to buy booties. Drysuits often have integral boots but won't have an attached hood (though a separate hood will usually come with the suit). In either case you will need to buy gloves. Neoprene gloves are essential most of the year in the UK, but some people don't wear them in the warmest months. They tend to come in either 3mm or 5mm, with the thicker ones offering greater warmth but with some loss of manual dexterity.

Flag

If you are an Ocean Diver (or equivalent) then you will need to dive with a flag so that, in the event of separation, you can surface safely and then make your presence on the surface clear to the boat.

These are of a fabric construction rolled around a collapsible plastic pole and secured to the side of your cylinder underneath loops of bungee cord or other suitable fastenings. They can be extended immediately prior to surfacing (if other surface markers have been lost) to prevent injury from boat traffic, or as an aid to detection in the unlikely event of being lost at sea. The branch sometimes keeps a stock of these which it can pass on at cost.

Whistle

A whistle is essential in case you surface out of visible range of the boat (perhaps in mist or behind some rocks).

If you buy a flag it will usually come with a whistle – otherwise the club has a stock which we can pass you on at cost.

Knife/Line cutter

It is important to carry a cutting device, especially for wreck diving, to mitigate the risk of entanglement. You don't need anything large or fancy though. The club has a stock which we can pass you on at cost.

Surface Marker Buoy (SMB) and Reel

We encourage every diver to carry a delayed SMB (DSMB) and reel. Whilst deployment of an SMB underwater is something you will not be taught until Sports Diver, the marker you carry may be used as a backup by your instructor or dive leader should they have to let go of their reel (e.g. to assist you) or the deployment of their marker buoy is fouled in some fashion. There are several different kinds, though you should ensure that it is of a good size (at least 1.5m long and a reasonable width), of a closed or semi-closed (baffled) construction (i.e. not completely open ended which may deflate when not under tension), and coloured red/orange. Do not buy a yellow SMB as these are often seen as emergency signals by some dive boat skippers.

Most reels are typically a compromise between being small enough to stow about your person and large enough to effectively wind in. Most designs employ a ratchet mechanism which will allow line to be wound in but not let out unless a lever is disengaged, typically operated by your thumb. Most divers have a variety of reels, having bought and subsequently discarded various designs over time, so talk to others in the club to see what they recommend.

Wet Bag

These are typically mesh bags of varying construction which can hold your mask, fins, gloves, etc. keeping them together and out of the way. Whilst not mandatory, we strongly recommend you get one, or you will find that on a crowded boat your equipment ends up at the four corners of the deck, or lost, trodden on, broken or simply in the way. Have you got the hint yet!? Another good idea is to slide your mask (faceplate down) into the foot pocket of one of your fins which will offer quite a good deal of protection from errant feet. Expect to pay £5-10.

Computer

The club doesn't have computers to hire so you will need to get one. If diving on tables you could instead purchase a dive timer, however no one in the club does this and you will quickly realise the need to buy a computer.

There are several different makes of computer and within each make there are many models at different prices.

Our suggestion would be to get the cheapest model of Suunto. This is because most people have a Suunto computer (and so will be able to help you with it) and because the extra features of the more expensive models are largely gimmicks or designed for very technical diving (which we don't do within the branch).

Other items

There are 1001 other items that one could buy for diving but we suggest you stick to the above until you've gained some experience and proficiency. Once you've been on a few club trips and seen what other divers do you will have a better idea about what equipment is actually required.

Larger purchases

As mentioned above, we recommend that you borrow the club equipment for your first few dives, and in most cases before buying your own regs, BC and cylinders you should quiz other members about their own kit as well as ask for advice from your instructors.

Where to buy

There are a few local dive shops (LDS) in the London area, which may present you with a reasonable selection of equipment to choose from. However, if you wish to compare a broad selection of what is available on the market, then you will have to visit several different shops. Retailers get increasingly large discounts from wholesalers the more product from that brand they commit to stocking per year, such that attempting to stock any more than a few brands will significantly decrease his profit margins. Even if you do appear to be presented with a reasonable choice, there will typically be one or two contracts that are much larger than the others, which the retailer is financially motivated to prioritise when making a sale. Whilst the advice given by retailers is often unbiased and excellent and whilst the lines they stock may be products they also believe in, this dynamic is nonetheless worth observing when asking for unstructured advice in a dive shop.

An LDS also has the advantage that you can try things on for size. This is essential for items like exposure suits, though does not apply to all equipment. The other alternative is online shopping. Several large e-tailers dedicated to scuba diving now exist offering a typically broader selection of products and often cheaper prices. Sometimes these businesses will be extensions of existing full service dive shops, in which case advice may also be available by telephone, though in some cases these are warehouse only operations with little or no technical expertise offered by staff. It is tempting to be led by price alone in all cases, and although it may seem to make financial sense to ask for advice and try on, say, a wetsuit in your LDS and then buy the same product online, if everyone did that then a lot of dive shops would close. Remember these are also the places that we rely on for gas fills, servicing, emergency replacements, spare parts, local knowledge and so forth, so it pays in the long run to put extra business their way from time to time even if it costs a few pounds more, particularly if you've used their services to inform your choice. Also, you may find that if you ask for a discount, especially if buying several items at once, you may be pleasantly surprised.

The other alternative is second hand. There are some classifieds in the back of diving magazines, however by far the largest market for used scuba gear exists, as for many things, on eBay. More so than buying new, it is advisable to establish exactly what it is you are buying. Products may be well described but also misleading, so always Google the product to verify that the picture and the description matches that listed. Also, it is recommended that you limit purchases to used, privately owned, but relatively new (as a rule of thumb, can the same or similar model still be purchased in the shops), good condition items from well known brands rather than new items from second-rate or unheard-of manufacturers offered by commercial sellers, or older items which you cannot identify or have no knowledge of. Some products also lend themselves to their condition being more easily verified, and again unless you know what you are looking for, it is recommended that you restrict any purchases to items whose condition can easily be assessed visually.

Going Diving with the Branch

Your first open water dive will be either at an inland site (such as Wraysbury Lake or Vobster Quay) or in the sea. As you get towards the end of your pool training you need to think ahead to

where you'll do your first open water dives. Branch dives are listed on the branch website (www.londondiver.com), together with details of any training days but it's important to discuss it with any of your instructors. They'll be able to give you some advice, or direct you to the training officer or the diving officer. You don't have to have completed all your open water training dives before you can participate in normal branch diving, but some dive sites are not suitable for first dives. In the winter our activities are limited by the weather, so the only option may be a training day at an inland site.

Some common questions we get asked are:

Where do you go diving? Most of our diving is done around the UK – all along the South Coast from Bognor to Cornwall, and we also go to Wales, and Scotland. The further destinations tend to be organised as week-long trips. Often, members organise trips abroad open to the branch too (we've been to the South of France, and further afield to the Red Sea, the Maldives and Indonesia) though training opportunities may be limited or non-existent on these trips.

How much do they cost? This will vary depending on the type of accommodation being used, the meal plans and how long the trip is. There is a cost/comfort trade-off with choosing accommodation so you are always free to organise your own. The dive manager will typically sort something out for the group according to local availability. For a weekend trip, staying in self-catering caravans the cost of accommodation, diving, air and food will usually come to about £200. You will additionally need to get yourself to the dive site and may need to pay for kit hire.

How do I get on a trip? The dive manager will email the branch with the details of the trip – you will just need to reply to that to register your interest and then pay the deposit when requested. The dive calendar lists all the planned dive trips and who is managing them so you can also get ahead by messaging the dive manager before they email out. It may be worth asking first whether the trip is suitable for you to attend based on your experience or level of training. Most privately organised diving in the UK operates on an unwritten honour system and our branch is no different. This essentially means that once you say you are coming we expect you to honour that commitment or apply good sense if you need to cancel. A trip needs a minimum number of divers to be financially viable and also needs to be balanced in terms of the experience and skills of those attending. This also applies to you as a novice as plans may have been made specifically for your benefit. It is not acceptable to simply not turn up or to give last minute notice that you don't feel like attending. If you have a genuine last minute emergency, then this obviously cannot be helped. Likewise if your plans change then provided you can give as much notice to the dive manager as possible, then this is often not a problem. Conversely you should not try to avoid this problem by leaving it until the last minute to put your name down for a trip. If your needs are particular (e.g. requiring training or controlled diving conditions) it may not be possible for the dive manager to accommodate these at such short notice, plus the trip may well have been cancelled at this stage if no interest was registered. If this all sounds like a bit of a social minefield, don't worry, it isn't. Really all that is required is a little common sense and consideration. Remember, we're not a business providing a service to you, but you are now part

of a club and together we can make sure that everything runs smoothly and that everyone enjoys themselves.

I don't drive/have a car? You will be reliant on other people to take you to dive sites for your training (although some places may be served by public transport the equipment is very heavy). For some trips, people will be happy to offer lifts in return for a share of travelling expenses, but this can sometimes be difficult to arrange, so you must plan well in advance. Also, if there are several of you in the same position, hiring a car for the weekend often works out to be quite reasonable.

What happens when I get there? The dive manager may have indicated a time and place to meet on the first morning. If you are likely to be late, please make an effort to let the dive manager know, as he will likely have to alter arrangements as a consequence. If there is no agreed plan, then go and find the dive manager to let them know you have arrived. This might be on the first morning, or in most cases people travel down the evening before, so “check-in” as soon as possible so the dive manager knows what resources he has to manage.



Introduction to the branch RIB

Whilst your first trip may contain a variety of new experiences, there are many facets involving the branch RIB which, even if you've dived from a boat before, will likely be new to you. Following is an introductory guide which should help to demystify the RIB somewhat and allow you to just concentrate on your diving.

Diving from a RIB is very much part of the British club diving experience and offers maximum access to the dive sites, maximum versatility in terms of dive marshalling, and generally a lot of fun. However, it does present its own set of challenges due to exposure to the elements and lack of space. It demands a certain amount of personal organisation and preparation not only to make life easier for yourself but also others around you. For those who haven't done much RIB diving, here's a guide of what to expect and what is expected from you. If you need any clarification on anything don't hesitate to ask.

Equipment

Assemble and check your equipment before getting on the RIB. Once you are out at sea little can be done and you will miss the dive. Ensure that all cylinders are turned off before putting them onboard as they can accidentally start to free flow and you can lose your air. Divers in drysuits should ensure that the zip is fully closed before getting on board (falling in could have disastrous results). Be wary when you are wearing your weightbelt. Slipping with 10 kg around your waist can cause injury, wading in water with serious lumps of lead tied to you might not be a good idea! Equally do not wear just your weightbelt in the boat until you start kitting up, in case you fall overboard.

Regulators and pressure gauges should be stored inside the BC or otherwise tucked away to ensure they are not damaged by cylinders or by someone stepping on them. The assembled set (cylinder, BC and regs/console) is stored in the metal frame in the centre of the boat. These should be secured in place using the bungee cords. Weightbelts tend to be stored on either side and in front of the centre console. Car keys can be stored in the "dry box" on the A frame. Help each other when getting kit on/off the boats; ensure that it's not always the same person heaving cylinders from the water into the boats. Remember use the strength in your arms and legs when shifting cylinders, straight backs may save a strain.

Except weightbelts, all waterproof equipment should be stored in a mesh 'goody' bag. These are stowed at the front of the boat and are passed back to divers as they kit up. After kitting up they are passed back to the front. You may see other divers leaving fins or masks wedged in the metal grab rail above their dive kit. Whilst this is an acceptable and convenient place to temporarily put them whilst you are kitting up, please do not leave them there after your dive. The grab rail is just that, something to grab onto, both for divers trying to climb back into the boat and whilst underway in rougher conditions, and its use is disabled by errant kit. Make sure you set a good example by quickly packing your fins back in your goody bag after the dive and stowing this in the bow section.

Protection from the elements

Don't forget warm hat and sunscreen on every trip, even on the dullest day you can suffer windburn and UV burn. If you are diving in semi dry or a wet suit, we cannot stress enough the importance of having adequate thermal protection no matter what the weather forecast, any threat of hypothermia should be taken very seriously. This applies to the trip out to the dive site as well as back. Whilst the foamed neoprene in your suit will provide insulation, heat loss will still occur via convection from the wind on the speeding boat. You are advised to bring a thin (nothing too bulky, we don't have enough space) windproof jacket to counter this.

Tide and time wait for no man

Do not underestimate the responsibilities your dive managers have voluntarily taken on board. They are trying to provide you with an exciting weekend but are contending with an environment that is changing constantly above and below the water and trying at all times be aware of all safety and group capability issues. If the boat is set to leave at a certain time, or for a certain location, there is a good reason. Please ensure you do your bit so we can all 'dive the plan'. Don't plan/judge your state of readiness by taking the lead from other people, this just means that the group lags behind the slowest person! Take individual personal responsibility for being on time with kit checked, ready to dive.

Underway at sea

Hold onto the boat at all times. The boat handler will instruct you to hold tight when they are about to accelerate. For efficiency and comfort, the boat should be evenly balanced at all times, judge where you should be sitting to achieve this. In order to get the boat planing the boat handler may ask you to move forward. At the very back of the boat, on the floor is a rectangular inset box known as the bilge. This sometimes fills with water and sometimes spills over into the bottom of the boat. This is nothing to be concerned about; the boat handler can use an electric pump to clear the water, so let them know if you see this happening.

Discipline

The person driving the boat carries a legal burden of responsibility, his/her decision is final, you should be ready to act upon any of his/her instructions immediately at all times. Dehydration contributes to DCS. Get into the habit of drinking lots of fluids. Some people may bring large bottles to share around, though you should not rely on this so bring your own supply. Smoking is absolutely prohibited on the RIB at all times.

Safety Equipment

The RIB has several safety features which it is worth being aware of. If you haven't been on the boat before (or not for a while) ensure that you are given a full briefing of these before setting off. Emergency flares are stored in one of the yellow dry boxes mounted on the A-frame. Oxygen for diving emergencies is in a marked cylinder behind the back rail on the starboard side. Do not

use this cylinder for going diving, its contents may prove fatal at depth. In an emergency requiring O₂ you will hear someone ask for the “oxygen kit”. This comprises a regulator and oronasal mask and is contained in a bright orange pelican case stored underneath the seat in front of the console. The boat has a marine VHF radio built into the console which can be used to call the coastguard. The RIB itself is also one large safety feature - the inflatable tubes provide an enormous amount of buoyancy which means the boat will not sink even if completely filled with water.

Man Overboard

It is extremely unlikely that you will be thrown out of the boat. But if you are, do **not** attempt to hang on to the side of the boat in an effort to stop yourself falling in. Just let yourself go. Ignoring this advice opens you to risk of severe tearing of muscles etc (the boat can be travelling at up to 30 kts), or worse still, could lead to impact with the propellers. Your exposure suit will give you plenty of buoyancy. Just keep your eyes on the boat. It'll soon be back with you asking for an OK signal. If someone does fall overboard, everybody in the boat should maintain visual contact. It is also important that everyone points at the person in the water and continues to do so until he/she is recovered. Divers in the boat must assume that the driver has not noticed a man overboard. The correct procedure for alerting him/her is to shout loudly ‘man overboard’ and tap the driver’s shoulder so by immediately indicating which side of the boat the swimmer is and keep pointing. You may get to practice this if someone’s hat is blown off (a much more regular occurrence) as the ‘hat overboard’ procedure is much the same!

Sea Sickness

When the sea is a little rougher you may find you start to feel sea sick. This usually happens when kitting up as you will be often bending down looking at the floor as the now stationary boat rocks from side to side. In this situation it helps to concentrate on the horizon if you can rather than the rocking boat. However, it can also occur even in calmer conditions, for instance if you get a couple of lungfuls of petrol exhaust fumes. In either circumstance, always notify the driver who may be able to position the boat to keep the fumes downwind or find shelter from the waves whilst you kit up. Even if you feel bad in the boat, it is worth attempting to go diving. You will likely feel much better once you are under the water. If you’re feeling ill, let someone know so that we can get you into the water first if possible.

At the dive site

After you arrive at the dive site, first the boat handler and/or dive manager has to find the site or a particular point on a site and does so using a combination of transit points, echo sounder and GPS. This may involve several passes over apparently the same place or it may even appear that the boat is just going around in circles. Sometimes this is very difficult and requires intense concentration, so please try not to get in the way or distract them. Time is also taken studying the water movement, if a shot has been put in time may be needed to ensure it’s not drifting. Safety is paramount, so please have patience.

Before getting in you will be briefed on the dive as to who you will be diving with and this may also include an order of entry into the water. If you are not getting kitted up, help others by giving them space and help each other. Do not attempt to kit up in a standing position. Rest your set on the tubes and sit down into the BC (you may wish your buddy to steady your set whilst you do so). Depending on conditions, it might be important to kit up quickly. After this, complete your buddy check and go over your dive plan. You should then let the boat handler know when your buddy pair is ready ("ready" means mask on ready to dive right now, **not** "I just need to put my gloves on and then..."), they will then gently manoeuvre the boat over to the entry point.

Listen to the boat handler intently - they will give you a countdown, "3, 2, 1, Go". On "Go" roll backwards and make sure you go smartly, otherwise you might miss the shot (not all dives are 'shot') or worse land on top of another diver. On surfacing from the backwards roll, give the OK signal to the boat handler. Try not to get into the habit of doing this automatically without thinking, make sure everything really is OK first and wait for confirmation signal back. As you surface, you may be a little disorientated, if so, look towards the boat, the boat handler or DM will be pointing to where the shot is. You should try to get to the shot as quickly as possible. When there, compose yourself and continue with your dive.

On surfacing after your dive, buddy pairs should remain together, keeping a look out for the RIB and other hazards. You should now give the OK signal to the boat handler to indicate all is well and receive acknowledgement OK signal back; If the boat doesn't immediately come to pick you up, don't worry. They know where you are and maybe picking others up first. If when you surface, you cannot see the boat deploy your safety flag or use a whistle to attract attention. The boat will approach and you will be told which side of the boat to enter, either both on one side or on opposite sides. Even if on opposite sides, still remain close to your buddy as the boat approaches, parting to drift down the side only when it is upon you (don't worry, it won't run you over!). Although the alternative may seem intuitively helpful, do not swim apart on the boat's approach - it will then only be able to pick up one diver and as the diver left behind you may be unable to swim back to the boat as it drifts with the wind and you drift with the tide.

When de-kitting, keep close to the boat (you may need to hold on periodically to avoid drifting away) and keep your mask and fins on and your regulator in. Weightbelts are handed up first (when removed they are surprising easy to let go so make sure you hold it tightly, and if the weights are not secured with retainers make sure you hold the standing end rather than the buckle or the weights will slide off and be lost). Then, unclip any waist or chest straps, disconnect your suit inflation hose (if wearing a drysuit) before sliding one arm out of the shoulder strap, remove the regulator from your mouth and swing the BC round to the front (you may find it easier to loosen the strap first or unclip the buckle). Pushing up on the bottom of the tank will help those on the boat lift your BC in. Then kick hard with your fins until you can take hold of the grab rail or something else to pull yourself in.

Now you have finished diving you are part of the topside group whose joint responsibility is to the safety of not only themselves but those underwater. So keep your eyes peeled, constantly scan through 360 degrees just in case a diver unexpectedly surfaces, keep a look out for bubbles

breaking the surface, this will help keep track of divers, get ready to help de-kitting and getting divers aboard. If you are waiting to dive, ensure your kit is positioned in a convenient space for efficiency. When everybody is aboard, you will be asked to give your dive time, max depth, air quantity when you went in and what's left when you came out.

Respect the Sea

Please don't throw anything overboard which you are not certain is biodegradable. Watch out for any loose plastic bags or sweet wrappers that may be blown overboard.

Back at the dock/shore

Don't run away to the loos and forget to come back and help everybody else get all the kit off and secure the boat. At the end of the trip, your diving doesn't end until the boat is put away. Get involved, learn how to contribute and we can all get to the pub/home earlier!