



SYNOPSIS

During an unauthorised deviation from a planned powerboat trip for a party of 14/15 year old school boys, the coxswain of a rigid-hulled inflatable boat (RIB) strayed away from the other boats in her group and into rough water. There, she lost control of her RIB and it capsized, resulting in eight people entering the water, some beneath the inverted boat. All managed to get clear of the upturned hull and were quickly rescued by another RIB. One passenger was injured and subsequently air-lifted to hospital for medical treatment.

A school party staying at the Plas Menai National Watersports Centre had set out on an authorised powerboat journey within the Menai Strait to go kite flying. Three RIBs carried the group, each driven by a qualified professional instructor. However, the assistant instructor (AI) helming *RIB 6*, the RIB that capsized, was much less experienced than the other two. When the party arrived at their destination, the weather was unfavourable for kite flying and the two experienced instructors agreed an ad-hoc alternative plan. This involved leaving the Menai Strait to give their passengers a more interesting and exciting trip in the outer channel. They did not adequately brief the AI, or fully consider her inexperience. They did not seek permission from the course supervisor to deviate from the approved plan, as required by Plas Menai procedures, and their revised plan involved an element of “thrill riding” which was not an approved activity at the centre.

Initially all was well, but the AI was allowed to stray from the others and take *RIB 6* into particularly rough waters. Realising that she was heading in to danger, the AI turned the RIB, but lost control and it capsized. Fortunately all on board escaped without serious injury, and were quickly rescued by *RIB 5*.

The two experienced instructors decided to recover *RIB 6*, and so landed most of the students, including those rescued from the water, ashore on a nearby beach. The centre was not informed of the accident, but the coastguard was contacted by mobile telephone with a request for the local RNLI lifeboat to assist recovering the upturned RIB. Meanwhile, on the beach, one student’s condition deteriorated and he required helicopter evacuation to hospital. The other students were unhurt, and were later returned to the centre.

The investigation identified a number of safety issues including the planning, control, and leadership of the activity, and communications shortcomings.

The Royal Yachting Association (RYA) has provided guidance to its members on the conduct of peripheral waterborne activities. Plas Menai centre has taken action to remedy most of the shortcomings identified in this report, and a recommendation has been made to the centre to review its communications infrastructure.