



National
Guidance
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Exchanges and Homestays

See also the following related OEAP National Guidance documents:

- [3.2g "Vetting and DBS Checks"](#)
- [7r "Overseas Visits"](#)
- [7s "Hosting a Homestay"](#)
- the [model homestay information forms in various languages](#)

Rationale

Exchange visits and homestays take place both in the UK and overseas. Homestays can be simply a means of providing young people with accommodation during a visit, but they can also provide rich learning and development opportunities as an integral part of the visit.

The most effective way of understanding a different country, culture or language is to experience it first-hand. Our understanding of and relationship with the wider world has never been more important. An exchange visit, placing young people in family homestay settings, is one of the best ways of enabling this.

These experiences can help young people to develop self-esteem, self-confidence and independence and provide both an insight into the culture and an opportunity to use language skills in a real context.

Arranging a Homestay

Sometimes homestays are organised as a private arrangement between families, with no involvement of an establishment.

If an establishment is involved with the arrangements (including if it uses a third party provider, such as an agency, to make the arrangements) then it is responsible for taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the homestay setting is suitable and to minimise the risk of harm to young people. Typically, establishments arrange homestays in one of three ways:

1. Homestays where the hosts just provide accommodation but not supervision or care, as in a B&B. Establishment staff remain responsible for supervising the young people throughout the visit using remote supervision: see OEAP National Guidance document [4.2a "Group Management and Supervision"](#).
2. Homestays where the hosts (and/or an accommodation agent) take full responsibility for supervising the young people while in the family setting,

including for agreed family activities (thus acting as third-party providers). The establishment staff hand over their roles as 'Activity Leaders' to the hosts for the periods during which the hosts are responsible for supervision. See OEAP National Guidance document [4.4h "Using External Providers"](#) and the following example.

A UK school visits Germany as part of a cultural exchange. Students are provided with homestays organised and vetted by the host German school. The host families take full responsibility for supervising the young people while in the family setting, including for agreed family activities, thus acting as Activity Leaders.

The UK school staff act as Activity Leaders during the journey to Germany.

When the group arrives at the host school, the group meets the host families and the UK staff hand over their role as Activity Leaders (with responsibility for supervision and welfare support) to adults from each host family. The Visit Leader and other UK staff stay locally with host staff and visit each household once during the week-long visit in order to thank the hosts and to monitor the provision. They also exchange daily text messages with the young people to check that all is well, and are available to be contacted by the young people at any time day or night in the event of a concern or emergency.

On some days during the visit, there are cultural events organised by the German School. The families hand the role of Activity Leader back to the UK staff for these events.

3. Homestays where young people are supervised by the hosts, who are in turn under the supervision of establishment staff. This arrangement is only likely to be possible where families and their homes are well known to the establishment and staff can make regular supervision visits.

Where more than one establishment is involved in a homestay, the role of each establishment must be clear: see the following example.

Two schools from different parts of England or Wales arrange annual exchange visits involving homestays. The schools agree that the host school will arrange for parents to provide accommodation and supervision in homestays. The host school is therefore responsible for ensuring that the homes used for homestays are suitable, and for carrying out the selection, vetting and briefing of homestay hosts. The visiting school exercises its overall responsibility for its young people by liaising closely with the host school so that it is satisfied with these arrangements, preparing the visiting young people and their parents for the homestay, and allocating staff who make regular monitoring visits to the homestays and provide a 24/7 contact.

Where an exchange visit or homestay is arranged for the first time, or involves a significant number of new staff, a preliminary visit is recommended. Face-to-face dialogue between exchange/homestay partners provides an opportunity to discuss and agree the arrangements and activities and allows for a greater understanding of the practical setting and how any risks will be managed.

Selecting and Vetting Homestay Hosts

When an establishment arranges a homestay, there must be a thorough process of selecting and vetting host families, which should include:

- considering how well families are known to the establishment;
- checking the suitability of the host family home, including the privacy of sleeping and toilet arrangements;
- considering whether the families and young people are suitably matched for gender, age, diet, religious belief, special needs, etc.;
- verification of the host family structure and clarification of which adult(s) will be responsible for supervision;
- decisions about the suitability of these adults, and other adults in the household.

In assessing the suitability of adults in homestay households, the establishment responsible for selecting hosts should take into account all available relevant information and use their professional judgement. Information should include the establishment's prior knowledge of the families concerned and criminal record checks, where required and if available, together with any other available intelligence. Where potential homestay hosts are not known to the establishment, it may be advisable to seek references or hold informal interviews.

For homestays in the UK, depending upon the detailed arrangements, criminal records checks carried out by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) may be necessary. Guidance on making decisions about whether DBS checks are needed for a homestay, and which adults should be checked, can be found in OEAP National Guidance document [3.2g "Vetting and DBS Checks"](#).

It must be understood that a DBS check, by itself, is no guarantee of the suitability of an individual to work with young or vulnerable people. When an establishment places an adult in a situation of professional trust with young or vulnerable people this should always be subject to a thorough engagement process.

The equivalent of DBS checks is unlikely to be available in many countries visited by young people from the UK. Visit Leaders should ensure that the overseas host establishment, or agency, has a vetting procedure in place to assess the suitability of home placements. Parents should be fully informed about the nature of this vetting. If the host establishment, or placing agency, does not have measures that appear sufficiently thorough, the Visit Leader should seek alternative measures and/or reconsider whether the visit should take place. Establishments may decide to contact the embassy or High Commission of the country to be visited to find out what procedures might be possible.

To assist organising establishments in gaining information from potential host families, there is a model form (OEAP National Guidance document [8a "English Homestay Information Form"](#)), with [versions in several languages](#). This form is provided in an editable format, so that it can be adapted to meet the needs of the specific homestay.

Preparing for a Homestay

Young people are not directly supervised by Visit Leaders whilst they are with host families. Therefore, everyone involved must be clear about their responsibilities and the supervision arrangements.

It is important that host families, the parents of the young people taking part in a homestay and the young people themselves are fully informed about the arrangements for the homestay and other aspects of the visit.

The following are key questions for an establishment preparing for a homestay, and will also assist parents entering into a private arrangement between families to host young people:

- Have 'house rules' and/or a code of conduct been agreed? See document 8i "Model Code of Conduct".
- In case it is necessary to move a young person at short notice, are contingency plans in place?
- Is there a plan for monitoring (or remotely supervising) the homestay (see below)?
- Is there a 24-hour contact number that young people and families can use in the event of concerns or an emergency?
- Have young people, their parents and host families been briefed about what to expect, how to make the most of the homestay, how to stay safe, and what to do should problems arise?
- Have homestay hosts been briefed about safeguarding and what to do if a young person makes a disclosure of safeguarding concern?
- Does work experience feature as part of the visit? If so, has an appropriately competent person assessed the safety management systems of the work environment, and is there suitable insurance in place?
- Has consideration been given to the safety and wellbeing of the young people during travel, and does this include appropriate drivers and transport whilst with the host family?
- Have 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' activities on 'family days' been agreed with the host family prior to the visit? For example, is there an opportunity to go skiing, cycling or horse riding, or a visit to a beach with swimming? If such, or similar, activities are to form part of the experience, parental consent is required.

Exchanges Involving Work Experience

Any exchange visit that includes work experience should be considered in the context of the organising establishment employer's work experience policy. Where this does not cover work experience abroad, special arrangements may need to be made, in which case, organisers are recommended to contact their employer at the earliest possible stage of planning.

Monitoring

This guidance is for the situation where the hosts take on responsibility for supervision of the young people, and the visiting establishment monitors this

provision (example 2 in 'Arranging a Homestay' above). Similar considerations apply for the remote supervision of young people (example 1). In example 3, where the hosts act under supervision, it is likely that the host establishment will know the hosts well and so will need to be involved in their supervision while the visiting establishment monitors.

The Visit Leader should have a plan in place for monitoring the homestays. This will include checking that accommodation is as expected, that young people are being properly supervised and that their welfare needs are being met. The details of this plan will depend on factors including the nature of the young people and how well the hosts are known.

As a minimum there should be:

- arrangements for effective 24/7 communication with young people, hosts and any host establishment, including access to a phone or mobile phone for young people to call or send text messages either routinely or in an emergency;
- an agreed emergency 'keyword' between leaders and young people, for when young people want assistance but feel unable to speak freely in front of their hosts;
- daily contact with all the young people, by phone, text or in person;
- contingency arrangements for picking up a young person in an emergency and providing alternative accommodation.

For short homestays, it may not be practicable for staff to visit the homestays, unless there is a specific concern. For longer stays it can be useful to plan to visit each homestay at least once, as a courtesy to thank the hosts and as a check that all is well.

It can be useful to have a map prepared in advance with the location of all the homestays, and of any staff accommodation.

There should also be a process for checking that work placements and other locations used during the visit are as expected.

The Visit Leader should ensure that feedback and review is built into the homestay arrangements. This should involve the young people, parents, host families, leaders and partner organisations and can help with end of stay celebrations as well as contributing to the planning of future visits. Any significant issues should be shared with the establishment's Educational Visits Coordinator, head/manager and/or employer as appropriate.

Communication with Host Families

For many homestays, the host establishment or agency will do the preparatory communication with host families. However, in some circumstances it may be more appropriate for the visiting establishment to communicate with the host families, either directly or through the host establishment or agency.

The OEAP National Guidance document [7s "Hosting a Homestay"](#) could be given to host families, or used as a basis for information provided for them.

Final Checks for EVCs and Visit Leaders

- The establishment responsible for arranging a homestay has been thorough in its processes and has used its professional judgment in the selection of hosts for young people, taking into account benefits and risks. It has decided who in UK host households require a DBS check using the guidance in OEAP National Guidance document [3.2g "Vetting and DBS Checks"](#).
- Where the homestay is a private arrangement between families, there has been correspondence or dialogue between host families and the families of those visiting so that there is an understanding of the suitability of the arrangements.
- Training on safeguarding issues has been provided to relevant establishment staff so that they fully understand their responsibilities
- UK host families have been briefed about safeguarding and what to do if a young person makes a disclosure of safeguarding concern.
- Young people have been provided with suitable advice.
- Information about participants' needs, including dietary requirements and any special or additional needs, has been shared appropriately with all who need it.
- Travel arrangements are in place.
- A supervision / monitoring plan has been agreed.
- 'House rules' and agreed standards of behaviour are in place covering such things as alcohol, smoking, drugs, sexual relationships, videos, internet use, social media, curfews, bedtimes etc.
- Host families have been given names and contact details, including 24/7 emergency numbers, and there is an invitation to leaders to home visit.
- Both routine and emergency communication systems are in place - including specifically that a young person is able to contact Visit Leaders in an emergency.
- The detail and arrangements have been agreed and fully shared between the visiting establishment and any host establishment.
- For the overseas part of an exchange, staff and young people are aware of the cultural and legal differences and sensitivities of the host country.

Specific Advice

For advice about your specific circumstances, you should consult your establishment's Educational Visits Coordinator or your employer's Outdoor Education Adviser. To find an OEAP adviser, go to oeapng.info/find-an-adviser-home.

