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## Exchanges and Home stays

Visit leaders using this document should ensure that they have read and understood the content of the related documents "*Vetting and DBS Checks*" in section 3 of this guidance and "*Overseas Visits*" in section 7.

### Rationale

The single most effective way of understanding a different country, culture or language is to experience it first hand. Given our dependence on a global economy, an understanding of the wider world has never been more important. An exchange visit involving the placing of young people in a family home stay setting has traditionally been seen as one of the best ways of enabling this.

Such experiences help young people to develop self-esteem, self-confidence and independence, while developing their knowledge base and broadening their horizons. Staying with a host family gives young people both an insight into the culture and a first hand opportunity to use their language skills in a real context.

Home stays may also take place between host families in the UK to provide young people with accommodation during a visit.

### Management arrangements

Young people are not directly supervised by the visit leaders whilst they are with host families. Therefore, home stays require careful planning to ensure everyone involved is clear about both their responsibilities and the supervision arrangements. Home stays can occur under a variety of management arrangements. For example they may be organised as 'remote' supervision, where establishment staff remain responsible for young people throughout the visit. Alternatively they may be organised with the host family (and/or an accommodation agent) as third party provider(s) who have delegated responsibility during some activities and periods of the visit.

It is essential that all parties involved fully understand the management and supervision arrangements and are clear about who is responsible for what and when. Young people must be appropriately supervised throughout and parents must be able to give, or withhold, consent based on a clear understanding of how the visit will be managed.

## Key questions relating to home stays

When organising this type of educational experience, you should consider the following questions. The questions will also assist parents entering into a private arrangement between families to host young people:

- Are families and young people carefully matched for gender, age, diet, religious belief, special needs etc?
- How well are families known to the host establishment?
- Has the host establishment confirmed the host families as suitable and that they have been selected through a process appropriate to the length and nature of the home stay arrangements, including police checks where appropriate?
- In case it is necessary to move a young person at short notice, are contingency plans in place?
- Has consideration been given to the safety and well being of the young people during travel, and does this include appropriate drivers and transport whilst with the host family?
- Are young people and host families aware of a 24 hour contact number and are they fully briefed as to procedures should problems arise?
- Do leaders have daily contact with all young people?
- Is there 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 host family.
- Will young people have access to a phone or mobile phone to call or send text messages to their establishment staff?
- Have the young people and their parents/guardians been briefed about personal safety, and have they been issued with written guidance on this topic? See the Child-Safe publications mentioned below.
- Does work experience feature as part of the exchange? If so, has an appropriately competent person assessed the safety management systems of the work environment, and is there appropriate insurance in place?
- Have "*acceptable*" and "*unacceptable*" activities on 'family days' been agreed prior to the visit? e.g. 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.

Where an exchange visit 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 partners provides an opportunity to agree aims, objectives and activities and consider a specific risk-benefit assessment at first hand. As a minimum, any agreement should include a commitment to the health, safety and welfare of the young people involved.

## Vetting and DBS Issues

Establishments will need to determine whether host families that are providing accommodation for young people are engaged in regulated activity, and therefore whether or not a DBS check is required. For guidance on making this decision see the document '*Vetting and DBS Checks*' in section 3 of this guidance.

Establishments clearly have a duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure that young people are placed in appropriate homes.

It must be understood that a DBS check, in 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 robust engagement procedure, which may include references, interview, induction, training and monitoring, as well as a DBS check if this is appropriate.

Visit Leaders should ensure that parents understand that an equivalent to DBS checks is unlikely to be available in countries visited by young people from the UK. It is therefore critical that Visit Leaders ensure that the overseas host school, or agency, has a vetting procedure in place to assess the suitability of home placements. If the host establishment or placing agency does not have appropriate measures in place for carrying out checks to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the young people, the Visit Leader should seek further assurances and/or reconsider whether the visit should take place.

The vetting of host families should include:

- Criminal record checks where required and if available.
- Verification of the host family structure.
- Checking the suitability of the host family home, including the privacy of sleeping and toilet arrangements.
- Ensuring 'House Rules' and a Code of Conduct are agreed (see the document "*Model Code of Conduct*" elsewhere in this guidance).
- Home visit checks.
- Agreeing allowable family activities, within the scope of parental consent.
- Checking transport (including drivers) is suitable and covered by parental consent.

## Monitoring

The Visit Leader should have procedures in place to sample monitor the home stay. There should be arrangements for effective communication with young people and hosts, and a process for checking that accommodation, work placements and other locations used during the visit are as planned.

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 the celebration of success, as well as contributing to the planning of future visits. Any significant issues should be shared with the EVC, the establishment Head/Manager and the employer.

## Exchanges involving work experience

Any exchange visit that includes work experience should be considered in the context of the employer's own 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.

## Final Checks for EVCs and Visit Leaders

- The establishment has used its judgment in the selection of appropriate hosts for young people, taking into account benefits and risks, and has decided whether UK host families require a DBS check.
- Where the home stay 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.
- Appropriate training on safeguarding issues has been provided to relevant staff.
- Young People have been provided with suitable advice.
- Appropriate information about any young or vulnerable person's additional needs has been shared with all who need it.
- Travel arrangements are in place and appropriate.
- The supervision plan, including who is responsible for what and when, as well as arrangements for remote supervision 24/7, has been approved.
- '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 - specifically a young person is able to contact visit leaders in an emergency.
- For the overseas leg of an exchange, the detail and arrangements have been agreed and fully shared with any host country establishment.
- For the overseas leg of an exchange staff and young people are aware of the cultural and legal differences and sensitivities of the host country.

Visit Leaders may find it useful to refer to the role-specific checklists elsewhere in this guidance.

