



National
Guidance
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Overseas Visits

This document should be read in conjunction with other documents relevant to the planned overseas visit, such as [4.2a "Group Management and Supervision"](#), [4.2b "Residentials"](#), [4.3e "Safeguarding"](#) and [7g "Overseas Expeditions"](#).

Rationale

The potential benefits and learning outcomes of overseas visits include:

- Knowledge, skills and understanding to live in, and contribute to, a global society;
- Understanding the world in which we live, including the values, cultures and everyday life of different societies;
- Enriching curriculum areas such as languages, history and geography;
- Personal and social development including self-confidence and independence;
- Meeting new people and developing new friendships and inter-cultural understanding;
- Broadening horizons.

Where and Whether to Go

The decision about which country to visit, and which areas of that country to visit or avoid, should be based upon:

- The aims and expected benefits of the visit;
- The needs and aspirations of the group;
- An assessment of the risks;
- Current advice about coronavirus – see the Coronavirus section below;
- The costs;
- The environmental and cultural impact of the visit, including travel.

A key resource for planning and risk assessment is the UK government's foreign travel advice, available at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice. This covers safety and security, terrorism, local laws and customs, entry requirements, health, natural disasters, money and travel advice help and support. It should be checked in the early stages of visit planning and then at regular intervals and immediately prior to leaving.

Government advice on travel to Europe from 1st January 2021 is at www.gov.uk/visit-europe-1-january-2021.

The Department for Education has published guidance to schools for visits to Europe after 1st January 2021. See the section on “school trips and exchanges” in www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-schools-during-the-transition-period-and-after-1-january-2021.

When planning a visit to countries that are further afield, or that have experienced disasters, conflicts, terrorism, high levels of violent crime, serious health problems or civil unrest in recent years, you should also seek local information and advice about the current specific levels of risk. This could be done through a tour operator, activity or accommodation provider, host establishment, etc., or by conducting a preliminary visit. If the level of risk increases significantly, you should be prepared to change or cancel your plans. Any reputable tour operator, provider, host or insurance company should understand this and show flexibility and support.

See the sections on Coronavirus, Health, and Crime and Terrorism, below.

Coronavirus

The Department for Education and the Welsh Government are currently advising against overseas visits with children under 18.

Government advice on travelling overseas during the coronavirus pandemic is available at www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus.

For further guidance about planning visits during the coronavirus pandemic, see National Guidance document [4.4k “Coronavirus”](#).

Leader and Staff Competence

In determining necessary leader competence, it is important to take into account the extra complexity involved in leading a visit overseas as compared to a visit within the UK. There should be someone who can communicate effectively and has a good understanding of the local culture. In the absence of this ability in the visit leadership team, a suitable person should be available to contact for help and advice on a 24/7 basis.

All leaders should be trained in child protection/safeguarding, taking into account the additional risks involved in residential situations and being overseas. In order to avoid situations that could lead to accusations of inappropriate behaviour, leaders and helpers should be aware of issues relating to personal safety, including personal and professional protection.

When determining staffing ratios, consideration should be given to the ease with which a substitute leader may be dispatched during the visit, should they be required to cover an incident, emergency or to replace another leader.

Visits should include succession planning, and any future Visit Leader should have the opportunity to learn as much as possible as an Assistant Leader.

Preparation of Staff, Young People and Parents

The establishment should provide parents with full information about the visit so that they can make informed decisions when consenting to the arrangements, including any 'Plan B' alternatives. A pre-visit parental briefing session is good practice. It will provide an opportunity for parents to ask questions. The briefing should:

- Set clear expectations about the behaviour of young people, including circumstances in which parents should be prepared for young people to be sent home early, or to be responsible for their collection, and when such repatriation may be at parental expense;
- Include a detailed programme of the visit, including any specialist activities;
- Explain the supervision arrangements, including any use of remote supervision (e.g. shopping during a visit without direct supervision);
- Cover expectations about downtime, curfews, bedtimes, alcohol, smoking etc.;
- Ensure that parents are aware of the need to disclose full information about their child's physical and emotional wellbeing or mental health that may affect them during the visit, and of any medications that they need to take;
- Set expectations about mobile phone/tablet use, social media activity etc.

It is good practice to supply participants with some form of ID card that they carry with them, containing:

- Name and contact details of the establishment;
- Contact details of accommodation;
- Leader mobile phone number for emergency use.

Passports and Visas

Personal identification is required for international travel and within many countries, usually in the form of a passport.

Some countries require visas in addition to passports, and most countries have a limit on how long visitors can stay.

Many countries, including those in the European Union (EU), have a requirement for passports to be valid for a minimum period (often six months) beyond the date of entry to the country, and some require them to be less than ten years old even if they have the required period remaining.

Check requirements with your travel company or at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice or www.gov.uk/visit-europe-brexit, or with the consulate, High Commission or embassy of the country to be visited – see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-embassies-in-the-uk.

You should ensure that all passports are in good condition.

Collective (group) passports, which are valid for certain European countries, are a lower-cost alternative to individual passports. Details are available at www.gov.uk/collective-group-passports and applications can take at least six weeks. Some countries require visas for those travelling on a group passport, even if they do not need one when travelling on an individual passport. Check with the country's embassy, High Commission or consulate.

Check the national citizenship status of all members of the group with care. If a group member is not British, or is a British Overseas Territories Citizen, British Overseas Citizen, British Subject, British National Overseas or British Protected Person, they may need a visa that is not required by British Citizens. This may also be relevant to countries through which the group passes in transit.

An emergency plan for an overseas visit should include the action to be taken if a member of staff becomes incapacitated or has to leave the visit. If the country to be visited requires a visa, you will need to ensure that any backup leader holds an appropriate visa.

It is good practice to obtain at least two photocopies of all passports, visas and other important travel documents. One set should be kept by the home base emergency contact, and the second copy kept with the group - but separate from the original documents.

Mobile Phones

In some countries, it can be extremely expensive to use a UK mobile device for calls or data. You should check roaming charges with your provider(s), and inform staff, participants and parents about these.

Customs Restrictions

Many countries have restrictions on what goods can be brought in, so you should check the restrictions for countries you plan to visit. For information about travel to the EU see https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/travel/carry/index_en.htm.

For example, you are not allowed to take meat or dairy products into the EU. This could affect groups carrying snacks, packed meals, or food for self-catering.

There are restrictions on taking large amounts of cash in or out of the UK. See www.gov.uk/bringing-cash-into-uk.

There are restrictions on taking goods into Northern Ireland, and on bringing goods into the UK on return from overseas. See www.gov.uk/duty-free-goods.

Driving

If you are planning to drive a vehicle while overseas, you should check the licence requirements. For some countries, you may need an International Driving Permit.

If you are taking a vehicle overseas, you must ensure that you comply with the relevant regulations and insurance requirements.

For detailed information about the requirements, see www.gov.uk/drive-abroad.

If you are planning to drive a minibus, see also National Guidance document [4.5b "Transport in Minibuses"](#).

Re-entering the UK

You should ensure that any members of the group who are not British citizens have evidence of their right to reside in the UK.

The government has issued guidance for groups entering the UK by coach. This is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-parties-visiting-the-uk-by-coach.

The guidance, which explains how to prepare for border control and avoid delays, says that all passengers must get off the coach at border control so that a Border Force officer can check them face-to-face. You can make sure you are prepared for crossing the border by:

- Asking passengers to put on shoes and coats;
- Ensuring that each passenger is holding their passport or travel document;
- Letting passport control know that you are the leader of the group;
- Ensuring that passengers leave food and drinks on the coach;
- Leaving all luggage on the coach.

Parental Consent

You must not take a child overseas without the consent of everyone with parental responsibility for the child.

See www.gov.uk/permission-take-child-abroad and National Guidance document [4.3d "Parental Consent"](#) for details about parental responsibility and obtaining consent.

Border officials in the UK and other countries monitor departing children because of concerns about child sexual exploitation and abduction, and occasionally ask for evidence of parental consent from all those with parental responsibility. Establishments should therefore consider carrying evidence of parental consent from all those with parental responsibility, for all children in the group, when travelling overseas.

If it is known or suspected that a child is a subject of concern by UK authorities, contact should be made with the police by phoning 101 in advance of the visit. The caller should be directed to the appropriate authorities to pre-empt any issues at the border.

If any child in the group is a citizen of a country to or through which you are travelling, you should check with the country's embassy, High Commission or consulate about any restrictions or requirements, including about parental consent, that might affect them in or when leaving that country.

In some countries, it may be necessary for Visit Leaders to provide evidence of their responsibility for children in their party. Proof of parental consent may also be required by medical professionals overseas, prior to carrying out treatment. The age at which someone is considered a child is different in different countries, and so you should check the situation for any country you are visiting.

Health

The UK has reciprocal health agreements with a number of countries, including the Isle of Man and Jersey (but not the other Channel Islands), and the EU. The provision varies from country to country – for details, including information about the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) and the UK Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC) see:

www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/healthcare-when-travelling-abroad

You should ensure that all party members who are eligible for a EHIC or GHIC, obtain a card and bring it with them. Many insurance policies include a condition that a EHIC (or GHIC) is used when possible.

You should also ensure that all party members are covered by sufficient health insurance for the countries to be visited. This is important even for countries where there is a reciprocal agreement, to cover costs not covered by the agreement and to cover party members (such as non-UK nationals) who may not be included in the agreement. See the section on Insurance and Cancellation below.

For health information about countries to be visited, see <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>. If any vaccinations or medication (such as for malaria) could be required, you should consult a GP or private travel clinic at least 3 months prior to the visit.

Crime and Terrorism

If you decide to go ahead with a visit to an area where there is a significant risk from crime or terrorism, you should ensure that the level of security and other preparations match the level of the threat.

You should consider whether it is necessary to prepare a plan of what to do in specific circumstances if your group is subject to a criminal or terrorist attack. See the National Guidance document [4.4e "Terrorism"](#).

Groups can be particularly vulnerable when arriving in a foreign country, especially at night or if tired after a long journey. Criminals often target busy airports, railway stations and bus stations. Pick pocketing and luggage theft are common, and more serious crime such as sexual assault and kidnapping are not unknown in some areas. The risks can be reduced by:

- Having leaders who are familiar with the location and speak the language – if this is not the case, it can be very helpful to have a trusted local person to meet the group at the airport/station to facilitate arrival;
- Delegating specific leaders to concentrate on group supervision while others deal with other tasks;
- Preparing participants to keep valuables secure and out of sight, to be alert and vigilant, to stay together and to know what to do if they feel threatened;
- Ensuring that participants' clothing and behaviour minimise unwelcome attention;
- Having a clear plan, so that the group moves purposefully;
- Having pre-arranged transport to the first night's accommodation (if using public transport, a leader should be familiar with it);

- Ensuring that the first night's accommodation is secure and in a safe area, so that it provides a refuge for rest and orientation.

Insurance and Cancellation

Travel insurance is essential for all overseas visits. You should check that the following are covered:

- Cancellation;
- Medical costs (even if travelling to a country with which the UK has reciprocal arrangements, to cover those expenses not covered by those arrangements);
- Any pre-existing medical conditions (it is important to ensure that all such conditions are declared as required by the insurer);
- Repatriation;
- Rescue (in remote regions, helicopter rescue or air ambulances can cost tens of thousands of pounds);
- The costs of parents, should they need to come out to stay with a young person in hospital, or to accompany them home;
- Personal belongings, baggage and money.

Insurance companies often link their insurance conditions, including for cancellation, to the exact wording of the government's foreign travel advice (see 'Where and Whether to Go' above).

You should be aware of the dangers of 'dual' or 'double' insurance – having two policies covering the same risks. This could lead to a more protracted and complicated claims process, or even invalidate one or both of the policies. As always, you should read the small print.

See document [4.4c "Insurance"](#), and the section on cancellation in document [3.2i "Contracts and Waivers"](#).

Legal and Cultural Differences

The legal definition of what constitutes a 'child' and a 'criminal offence' varies from country to country, and some everyday actions may be subject to different legal attitudes. For example, crossing the road without using pedestrian crossing points and dropping litter are punishable by spot fines in some countries.

You should ensure that the party is aware of the legal position of issues such as the age at which young people may consume alcohol and give sexual consent. Where necessary, you should make sure that parents have been informed of how such matters will be dealt with during the visit. It is strongly recommended that these issues are addressed by ensuring that both young people and their parents have agreed a behaviour code or set of ground rules that includes possible sanctions, including the circumstances in which it may be necessary to repatriate a member of the party.

Emergency Procedures

Both the establishment and any third-party provider should have an emergency or critical incident plan. The establishment should ensure that the two plans will interact effectively before the visit takes place.

The plan should outline actions to be taken and include the following:

- 24/7 emergency contacts back at the establishment, including overnight, holiday periods and at weekends;
- Whole group evacuation/repatriation;
- Contingency funding arrangements;
- Getting support out to the group.

Visit Leaders should refer to their employer and establishment Critical Incident/Emergency Planning guidance for details of how they should respond to a serious emergency and how to initiate support from their employer.

An emergency plan for an Overseas Visit should consider action in case a member of staff or a young person becomes incapacitated or has to leave the visit, including the need for a backup member of staff to meet any visa requirements.

Please see the documents about critical incident planning and emergency procedures in section 4 of National Guidance, including [4.1c "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Guidance for Leaders"](#).

Young People with Specific Needs

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities are more vulnerable and therefore face additional risks during overseas visits. The following additional precautions and procedures are recommended:

- A preliminary visit is strongly recommended for visits involving children and students with special educational needs and disabilities;
- More adults/carers may be required to provide effective supervision and ensure access to appropriate gender support;
- As part of the risk-benefit assessment process, it should be considered whether any specifically trained person(s) are required to be part of the visit leadership team;
- All leaders supervising the visit should be aware of the young people's medical needs and medical emergency procedures;
- Visit Leaders should check whether travel insurance covers pre-existing health conditions, or mental health issues such as self-harm;
- Visit Leaders should check whether there are appropriate housekeeping arrangements for disposal of soiled dressings, pads, etc.;
- Bunk beds may not be appropriate;
- Visit Leaders should check the availability of an interpreter trained in Makaton, signing or other appropriate communication medium if necessary.

Monitoring, Reviewing and Evaluation

After any visit, it is good practice to have a process of feedback, review and evaluation. This should involve the participants, the parents, the leaders and partner organisations. It can help the celebration of success as well as feeding into the planning of future visits. Any significant issues should be shared with the Education Visits Coordinator (EVC), the Head/Manager and the employer's Outdoor Education Adviser. See National Guidance documents [3.2b "Monitoring"](#), [4.2c "Reviewing"](#) and [5.1d "Evaluation"](#).

