



National
Guidance
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Overseas Visits

This document should be read in conjunction with other OEAP National Guidance documents relevant to the planned overseas visit, such as [4.2a "Group Management and Supervision"](#), [4.2b "Residentials"](#), [4.3e "Safeguarding"](#) and [7.1q "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;
- the environmental and cultural impact of the visit, including travel;
- an assessment of the risks;
- current advice about coronavirus – see the Coronavirus section below;
- the costs.

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 coronavirus, 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.

The UK's exit from the European Union (EU) has resulted in some changes to procedures and requirements. Government advice on travel to the EU, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein is at www.gov.uk/visit-eu-switzerland-norway-iceland-liechtenstein and in the section on "school trips and exchanges" at 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 section on Crime, Terrorism and Conflict below.

Coronavirus

Specific advice for people travelling overseas during the pandemic, including the rules for entering England or Wales, is at www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-abroad-from-england-during-coronavirus-covid-19 and gov.wales/rules-foreign-travel-and-wales-coronavirus-covid-19-html

It is important to check the legal requirements and local advice in any country you are planning to visit. For example, some countries may require proof of vaccination or proof of a negative COVID test, and some countries may require a period of quarantine or self-isolation.

You can check using the UK government's foreign travel advice at www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice and the website of the consulate, High Commission or embassy of the country to be visited – see: www.gov.uk/government/publications/foreign-embassies-in-the-uk. The EU provides information on the measures in place in all EU countries, including on quarantine and testing requirements for travellers, on its Re-Open EU website reopen.europa.eu/en and mobile apps.

The NHS COVID Pass can be used as a proof of vaccination for travel overseas for adults and children from the age of 12. Details are available at www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-pass (for England) and gov.wales/nhs-covid-pass-prove-your-vaccination-status (for Wales).

You should monitor the situation in any country that you are planning to visit and consider the alternatives and options should that visit no longer be able to proceed. If you are using a travel provider, you should liaise closely with them.

You should have contingency plans for circumstances such as:

- a participant or leader becoming sick with coronavirus, or testing positive, or having to self-isolate, and how this might affect their involvement in the visit and their ability to travel home;

- changes in UK or overseas government travel policy before or during the visit, including the possibility that further travel restrictions may be introduced.

For further guidance about planning visits during the coronavirus pandemic, including links to government advice for schools and other establishments, see OEAP National Guidance document [4.4k "Coronavirus"](#).

Leader and Staff Competence

In determining necessary leader competence, it is important to take account of 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.

In some countries, there are legal requirements for leaders of certain adventure activities, such as skiing and walking in alpine terrain, to hold a specific qualification or licence. UK qualifications may not be recognised. You should check the situation in any country you intend to visit.

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.

See also OEAP National Guidance document [3.2d "Approval of Leaders"](#).

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.

From a date in 2024, still to be confirmed, British citizens will be required to have an ETIAS visa waiver for short visits to EU countries and Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein – see travel-europe.europa.eu/etias_en.

Many countries, including those in the EU, have a requirement for passports to be valid for a minimum period (often three or six months) beyond either the date of entry to the country or the planned date of departure, 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-eu-switzerland-norway-iceland-liechtenstein or home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/visa-policy_en 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.

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. You will need to ensure that any backup leader holds a valid passport and, if necessary, an appropriate visa.

In the event of an incident affecting a young person overseas, their parents may wish to travel at short notice. It could therefore be advisable that the parents of children going on an overseas visit also hold a valid passport. However, mentioning the possibility could cause concern, and for some parents the cost of obtaining a passport may be prohibitive, and so this issue should be managed sensitively.

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.

Collective Passports

Collective (group) passports, which are valid for groups of children travelling to certain European countries, are a lower-cost alternative to individual passports. Details are available at www.gov.uk/collective-group-passports. Applications may take six weeks.

There have been changes to the countries which accept collective passports, and 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 or consulate.

There have been reports of some travel companies, such as ferry operators, not accepting collective passports – you should check with your travel company.

A deputy leader (or more than one if possible) should be included and designated as such on the collective passport, so that it remains valid if the group leader is unexpectedly not able to travel.

If a child is not able to travel home with the party (for example due to sickness), and does not have their own passport, you should contact the British embassy or consulate to obtain an emergency travel document.

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 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/bringing-goods-into-uk-personal-use.

Travel, Transport and Driving

Travel is one of the major considerations for any visit overseas. It can have very high positive and negative impacts:

- a journey is a significant educational opportunity in itself;
- some forms of transport, particularly flying, have a large carbon footprint;
- travelling long distances can be stressful, tiring, time-consuming and hazardous.

For general guidance on transport, see OEAP National Guidance document [4.5a "Transport – General Considerations"](#).

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 OEAP National Guidance document [4.5b "Transport in Minibuses"](#). This document contains information which may also be useful for other types of vehicle.

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.

Asylum seekers awaiting determination of their claim are not permitted to leave and re-enter the UK.

Advice for non-British citizens with indefinite leave to remain in the UK, including for travel outside the UK, is available at www.gov.uk/guidance/indefinite-leave-to-remain-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 OEAP 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 several 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.

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 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.

Accommodation

For general guidance about residential visits including considerations about accommodation, see OEAP National Guidance document [4.2b "Residentials"](#).

In some countries, accommodation may not meet normal UK/European standards and so might require additional controls:

- it is essential to make an assessment of the hazards of the accommodation and the immediate surroundings on arrival, and to brief the participants about the safety aspects;
- depending on the destination, consider taking items such as toilet paper, hand sanitiser, mosquito nets, smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, padlocks, door wedges.

Crime, Terrorism and Conflict

At times of conflict, in addition to the direct affects of the conflict, there may be indirect effects in the area and in surrounding areas. For example, there could be fluctuations in exchange rates, travel restrictions or disruption to supplies, key services or transport. You should make contingency plans for such eventualities.

If you decide to go ahead with a visit to an area where there is a significant risk from crime, terrorism or conflict, 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, or is affected by conflict. See OEAP National Guidance documents [4.1b "Emergencies and Critical Incidents – Overview"](#) and [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. Pickpocketing 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;
- COVID-related costs, including medical treatment, repatriation, cancellation, quarantine or self-isolation, and changes in UK or overseas government travel rules.

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 policies. As always, you should read the small print.

The Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) has published guidance about travelling overseas during the coronavirus outbreak at: www.abta.com/tips-and-advice/travelling-during-coronavirus.

See OEAP National Guidance 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 OEAP National Guidance, including [4.1c "Emergencies and 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 OEAP National Guidance documents [3.2b "Monitoring"](#), [4.2c "Reviewing"](#) and [5.1d "Evaluation"](#).

