

CHAPTER 9 VISITS ABROAD General

197. Travelling abroad can be hugely rewarding for pupils and adults alike, but it is important that careful preparation takes place. Much of the earlier advice in this booklet applies to visits abroad, but there are some additional factors that need to be considered, not least because the legislation may be different from that of the UK. Group leaders should always comply with the school/LEA policy on visits abroad. School visits abroad can be made in a number of ways.

Organising your own visit

198. A head teacher or group leader may decide to organise a package abroad without the help of an outside body. Package organisers have responsibilities under Directive 90/314/EEC. This is

implemented in the UK by the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 (The Package Travel Regulations). These regulations apply to packages sold or offered for sale in the UK. They define a package as a combination of any two of: accommodation, transport, or other tourist services not ancillary to transport. Most package arrangements come within scope of the regulations unless they are occasional or part of an educational course programme as compared with a leisure activity such as skiing. At the time of this booklet's production, the legal position of packages arranged as part of an educational course is subject to the effects of a future judgement in the European Court of Justice. Head teachers should be aware of these regulations in case they are in scope.

Organising your own transport

199. Group leaders should ensure that drivers taking groups abroad are familiar with driving the coach or minibus in the countries being visited and those en route. EC regulations require the fitment and use of a tachograph and prescribe maximum limits on driving time and minimum requirements for breaks and rest periods. These regulations apply for most drivers of school passenger vehicles when undertaking an international journey. Different licence requirements would normally apply for driving abroad. DETR can provide advice on the relevant transport legislation.

200. Factors to consider when travelling abroad include:

- ▼ the need to be aware that different legislation and regulations may apply for drivers' hours and record-keeping purposes, particularly in non-EU countries;
- ▼ EU drivers' hours and tachograph regulations normally apply to any vehicle with 9 or more passenger seats on journeys through EU countries and some countries outside the EU. In other countries, drivers must observe the domestic rules of the countries being visited. Advice on domestic rules may be obtained from the relevant embassies of the countries

concerned. See also Taking a Minibus Abroad (DETR);

- ▼ special documentation is required for minibuses taken abroad;
- ▼ all group members should be aware of unfamiliar right-hand drive traffic. The passenger doors on UK minibuses and coaches may not open on the kerb side in countries where travel is on the right hand side of the road. Extra care will be necessary when the group is climbing in and out of the vehicle. Detours may be necessary to ensure safety;
- ▼ carrying capacity and loading requirements;
- ▼ DETR can provide information on legal requirements for travel abroad. See Annex A for publication details and Annex B for address details.

Using a Tour Operator

201. Before using a tour operator group leaders should ensure it is reputable. Ascertaining this should form part of the risk assessment. The Civil Aviation Authority licenses travel organisers and tour operators selling air seats or packages with an air transport element (Air Travel Organisers Licence or ATOL). The licence is a legal requirement and provides security against a licence holder going out of business.

202. A travel agent does not need to be an ATOL holder if acting only as an agent of an ATOL holder. But if so the group leader must check whether or not the whole package being supplied is covered by the ATOL. If it is not, the organiser must show evidence of other forms of security to provide for the refund of advance payments and the costs of repatriation in the event of insolvency.

203. There are seven bonding bodies approved by the Department of Trade and Industry:

- ▼ Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA)

- ▼ Federation of Tour Operators Trust (FTOT)
- ▼ Association of Independent Tour Operators Trust (AITOT)
- ▼ Passenger Shipping Association (PSA)
- ▼ The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT)
- ▼ Yacht Charter Association (YCA)
- ▼ The Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust (ABTOT)

Operators based abroad

204. Directive 90/314/EEC (as referred to above) applies to all states of the European Economic Area (EEA). Group leaders may wish to use a package organiser based abroad in an EEA state. If so, they should check that it satisfies the requirements of the national legislation implementing the Directive. Details may be available from national tourist offices or embassies/consulates.

Sources of further advice for school travel abroad

- ▼ The Department of Trade and Industry - for the regulations governing tour operators;
- ▼ The Schools and Group Travel Association (SAGTA) is an independent association with a members' code of good conduct and safety rules. All its members are in ABTA;
- ▼ Alternatively, there are voluntary bodies established to promote school journeys, such as the School Journey Association;
- ▼ Head teachers or group leaders who decide to arrange travel independently may also seek the advice and help of the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office's (FCO) Travel Advice Unit. The Unit's purpose is to help intending travellers to avoid trouble abroad. It can provide information on threats to personal safety arising from political unrest, lawlessness, violence etc.

205. Address details are provided in Annex B.

Planning and preparation

206. It is good practice that an exploratory visit to the location should always be made. If this is not possible, the group leader should gather as much information as possible on the area to be visited/facilities from:

- ▼ the provider;
- ▼ the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's Travel Advice Unit;
- ▼ other schools who have used the facilities/been to the area;
- ▼ the local authority/schools in the area to be visited;
- ▼ national travel offices in the UK;
- ▼ embassies/consulates;
- ▼ travel agents/tour operators;
- ▼ The Suzy Lamplugh Trust, a national charity for personal safety, who have produced guidance, including a book called *World Wise: Your Passport to Safer Travel*, a video of the same title, and information on the Internet. See Annexes A and B for publication details and contact addresses;
- ▼ the Internet, books and magazines.

Staffing the visit

207. Staffing ratios for visits abroad are difficult to prescribe as they will vary according to the activity, the pupils' age and sex, the location, and the efficient use of resources. A minimum ratio of 1 adult to 10 pupils is a general rule of thumb but at least two of the adults should be teachers. There should be enough adults in the group to cover an emergency. Mixed gender groups should have at least one male teacher and one female teacher.

Preparing pupils for visits abroad

208. Factors to consider for visits abroad include:

- ▼ language - particularly common phrases;
- ▼ culture eg body language, rules and regulations of behaviour, dress codes, local customs, attitudes to gender etc;
- ▼ drugs, alcohol-usage;
- ▼ food and drink - group members should be warned of the dangers of drinking tap water in certain countries. In some countries it is safer to drink bottled water, and care needs to be taken with raw vegetables, salads and unpeeled fruit, raw shellfish, underdone meat or fish;
- ▼ money - how to carry money and valuables discreetly eg money belts, zip amulets. If larger amounts of money will be needed, it is advisable to take travellers cheques;
- ▼ how to use phones abroad, money required (a BT contact card allows calls to be charged to the home number) and the code for phoning home;
- ▼ what to do in an emergency. See Emergencies in this chapter, paragraphs 229 - 232, and Chapter 10 Emergency Procedures.

Briefing meeting for parents

209. It is particularly important that parents are given the opportunity to meet the teachers and others who will be taking the pupils overseas. See Chapter 5 Communicating with Parents.

Vaccinations

210. The group leader should find out whether vaccination is necessary and ensure that all members of the group have received it in good time. Check whether the country to be visited requires proof of vaccination. The Department of Health gives advice on vaccination requirements in their publication, Health Advice to Travellers Anywhere in the World (see Annex A).

Insurance

211. The group leader must ensure that the group has comprehensive travel insurance. See also Chapter 7 Insurance.

Foreign legislation

212. The group leader needs to check relevant legislation, particularly on health and safety eg fire regulations.

Language abilities

213. One of the adults with the group should be able to speak and read the language of the visited country. If not, it is strongly recommended that the leader or another adult learns enough of the language to hold a basic conversation and knows what to say in an emergency. It is also advisable that pupils have a basic knowledge of the local language before the visit.

Visas/passports

214. The group leader should ensure that all

members of the group have valid passports and visas (if appropriate) in the early stages of planning the trip. A group passport may suffice in certain circumstances.

215. Photocopies of the group's passports should be taken for emergency use. Otherwise there can be problems if someone other than the designated leader has to accompany an injured pupil back to the UK.

Nationality

216. If the group includes pupils whose national or immigration status or entitlement to a British passport is in doubt, it is advisable to make early enquiries of the Home Office's Immigration and Nationality Directorate (see Annex B for address details) concerning the requirements of the immigration rules and the right of re-entry.

217. Pupils who are not nationals of any EU member state may need a visa to travel from the UK to another member state. However, they may receive visa exemption if they are members of a school group. Details and forms are available from the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges. (See Annex B for contact details.)

218. Pupils other than EU nationals may require a separate passport and may need to use separate passport control channels from the rest of the group.

Care orders and wards of court

219. If a child is subject to a care order, foster parents will need to ensure that the Social Services Department consents to any proposed trip. If a pupil is a ward of court, the head teacher should seek advice from the court in relation to school journeys

and activities abroad well in advance.

Emergency Medical Facilities

220. Some of these are available through reciprocal health care arrangements in European Community (EC) countries to EU Nationals. Form E111 from DSS is the certificate of entitlement to free or reduced cost treatment and must be completed by the child's parent. It is available from Post Offices or Free Phone 0800 555777.

221. It is advisable to take a contingency fund as sometimes treatment must be paid for in advance and money has to be claimed back later.

Paperwork

222. The group leader should ensure that they obtain and take with them:

- ▼ travel tickets, passports and visas. It is also advisable to carry a separate list of the numbers of any travel documents/passports, and photocopies of all the group's documents in a sealed waterproof bag;
- ▼ a copy of the contract with the centre/hotel etc, if appropriate;
- ▼ medical papers eg form E111s and significant medical histories;
- ▼ parental consent forms and permission for group leader to authorise emergency treatment on parental behalf;
- ▼ the phone numbers and addresses, at home and in school, of the head teacher and of the

school contact;

- ▼ the names of parents and the addresses and telephone numbers at which they can be contacted (home and workplace);
- ▼ copies of a list of group members and their details;
- ▼ details of insurance arrangements and the company's telephone number;
- ▼ the name, address and telephone number of the group's accommodation;
- ▼ location of local hospital/medical services.

223. The group leader may wish to ask parents for passport size photographs of the pupils. It might be useful to have photographs of the adults in the group as well.

Information retained at the school

224. Full details of the visit should be retained at school while the visit is in progress. This should include:

- ▼ the itinerary and contact telephone number/address of the group;
- ▼ a list of group members and their details;
- ▼ contact names, addresses, telephone numbers of the parents and next of kin;
- ▼ copies of parental consent forms;
- ▼ copies of travel documents, insurance documents, medical papers;
- ▼ a copy of the contract with the centre/hotel etc, if appropriate; and
- ▼ LEA emergency contact numbers.

225. It is the head teacher's responsibility to ensure this information is available at all times. This is particularly important if the visit takes place when the school is closed. Independent school bursars should also hold the information.

During the visit

226. It is advisable for pupils to carry a note in the relevant foreign language for use if they get lost, asking the reader to re-unite them with the group at the accommodation/meeting point, or to take them to the police station. They should also carry the group leader's name and the duty contact's phone number.

227. All group members should carry an appropriate amount of foreign currency at all times eg money for telephone (or a phone card).

228. It is important to be able to identify group members readily eg uniform, brightly coloured back-pack, cap or item of clothing, badges. However, no student should display their name clearly on their clothing - this could result in their being isolated from the group by an apparently friendly, personal call.

Emergencies

229. The group leader must ensure that all members of the group know what action to take if there is a problem.

230. The group leader and supervisors should know where the nearest British Embassy or Consulate is located and the telephone number. Depending on the age of the pupils, it may be appropriate to ensure that they have this information to hand.

231. Group leaders need to be aware that some diseases are more prevalent in some countries than in others and should know what action to take should a member of the group become infected.

232. Many of the health problems of pupils on longer visits are caused by lack of food, of liquid or of sleep.

The group leader should take this into account at the planning stage and take measures to prevent these risks. If appropriate, parents should be asked to provide suitably factored sun protection creams and sun hats/glasses. Group members should be advised about the dangers of over-exertion in the heat and of dehydration, which can cause headache, dizziness and nausea. In warm climates it is important to keep fluid levels high, take extra salt and wear loose, lightweight clothing - preferably made of cotton or other natural fibres.

Contacts at home

233. It is advisable to have a teacher/contact at home with a valid passport, who could go to the area being visited to provide support to the group in the event of an emergency.

Travel by air

234. Taking a school group on an aircraft requires careful planning and preparation. The airline/travel agent will be able to advise on particular requirements. If the group includes any members with disabilities, it is advisable to check that the airline has a wheelchair service and lifting facility etc, if appropriate. The group leader should resist any attempt by the airline to split the group between different aircraft.

Exchange visits

235. The success of an exchange visit largely depends on good relationships and communications with the partner school.

236. Individual school exchanges differ from other visits abroad in that pupils will spend most of their time with host families and are, therefore, not always under the direct supervision of school staff. Host families will not be subject to English law.

237. Pupils must be aware of the ground rules

agreed between the group leader and the host family. Many of the considerations which apply to residential and day trips also apply here. In addition, the following should be ensured by the group leader:

- ▼ a good personal knowledge of the host school and counterpart;
- ▼ satisfactory pairing arrangements. The partner school should tell the host families of any special, medical or dietary needs of their guests, age and gender;
- ▼ matches should be appropriate;
- ▼ parents, pupils and the host school should be clear about the arrangements for collecting and distributing pupils to families, and for transporting pupils throughout the visit;
- ▼ the head teacher should retain a list of all the children involved and their family names and addresses;
- ▼ pupils living with host families should have easy access to their teachers, usually by telephone;
- ▼ parents should be made aware that their children living with host families will not always be under direct teacher-supervision.

Vetting host families

238. Exchange or home stay visits can be arranged through agencies, in which case the agency should have some responsibility for vetting the host families. Group leaders making their own arrangements need to be clear about procedures in the relevant country for vetting the suitability of host families including criminal background checks insofar as these are available.

239. If the host school or placing agency does not have appropriate measures in place for carrying out checks to ensure the health, safety and welfare of

exchange or home stay pupils, the group leader should seek further assurances and/or reconsider whether the visit should take place.
