Guidance on Overseas Travel Risk Assessments

Health and Safety law requires that all work activities are risk assessed, this includes all overseas travel, work and study must be risk assessed. The responsibility for carrying out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment depends upon the type of travel. For individual staff travel it is the responsibility of the individual traveller. For group travel, either groups of staff or staff-supervised groups of students, it is the designated group leader. For independent student travel connected to a course of study it is the student traveller together with their academic supervisor. Where students are travelling on a non-academic trip that has been organised by the University it is the student traveller(s) together with the manager responsible for the trip. If the trip is connected to a student placement, the risk assessment should be carried out by the placement organiser in conjunction with International Partnerships and in consultation with the placement student.

The hazards and risks associated with overseas travel and work are extremely variable. As such there are two Overseas Travel, Work and Study Risk Assessment forms, one for higher risk destinations and one for lower risk destinations. The vast majority of travel undertaken on behalf of the University will be to lower risk destinations.

The overseas travel risk assessment process starts with consultation of the Foreign Travel Advice produced by the UK government (https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice). Information provided by the country-specific web pages on this site determines whether the destination(s) visited on a trip are considered of lower or higher risk, defines which risk assessment form should be used and informs that risk assessment.

Definition of lower and higher risk destinations

Higher risk destinations are defined as all areas where specific UK government travel restrictions are in place, either areas where the advice is against all but essential travel or against all travel. Such areas are normally indicated in either orange (advice is against all but essential travel) or red (advice is against all travel) on a colour-coded map on the country-specific travel advice webpage. However, this is not always the case, current exceptions are India and Pakistan where there is no colour-coded map, but there are travel restrictions in place. It is important to check the advice pages carefully. Note that undergraduate travel to such higher risk areas on behalf of the University, i.e. for study or project research, is not permitted.

Lower risk destinations are defined as all areas where no UK government travel restrictions are in place. This includes all areas labelled in green on any colour-coded country map.

Overseas Travel risk assessment for lower risk destinations

The travel risk assessment form for lower risk destinations includes a generic risk assessment that is intended to cover the likely hazards that may arise from overseas travel. For each trip undertaken the UK Government Foreign Travel Advice web page for the country / countries to be visited must be checked. The advice contained within should be compared to the risk controls described on the form and where the current advice suggests that additional controls are necessary they should be added to the risk assessment in the space provided. This is most likely to be necessary where the visit is to a territory labelled green on a colour-coded country map, meaning that travellers should take note of the government travel advice. Other sources
of information, for example from the travel provider or their associate travel app are also likely to be useful.

There are three versions of the form, one for staff travel, one for staff-supervised student trips, and one for unsupervised student travel where the trip is either connected to the student’s programme of study or has been organised by the University. These differ in who is required to sign the declaration at the end of the form stating that the traveller(s) understand and will follow the controls detailed within the risk assessment. For staff it is the traveller or designated group leader who must sign and, if required by local School / Departmental protocol, their line manager. For staff-supervised student trips it is the designated group leader. For unsupervised student travel it is the student and their academic supervisor or where students are travelling on a non-academic trip that has been organised by the University, the student and the manager responsible for the trip. For student placements the form should be signed by the student and the placement organiser.

For staff travel the risk assessment is considered valid for a six month period from the date first signed, as long as for each additional journey to any other lower risk destination the risk assessment and the relevant Foreign Travel Advice webpages are checked and it is determined that the risk assessment is still suitable and sufficient. The traveller must initial the form to confirm this.

Copies of completed risk assessment forms for lower risk destinations together with at least a basic trip itinerary, traveller contact and next of kin details should be submitted to the School / Departmental Travel Planner.

**Activity risk assessment for low risk destinations**

Most travel on behalf of the University is for straightforward reasons, to a conference, for academic meetings, to visit academic or cultural institutions and collaborators, to student recruitment events, etc. No additional risk assessment is required for such every day activities. Trips that involve more complex activities, for example laboratory or field work, or even where manual handling of equipment is required, will need an additional specific activity risk assessment. Recreational activities planned for the trip that are beyond the everyday should also be risk assessed. These can be competed using the University’s basic risk assessment form: [https://www.kent.ac.uk/safety/hs/pages/Riskassessment/risk-assessment.html](https://www.kent.ac.uk/safety/hs/pages/Riskassessment/risk-assessment.html)

**Overseas Travel Risk Assessment form for higher risk destinations**

For trips to destinations where the UK Government has current Travel Advisories against all but essential travel or against all travel advice (normally indicated by orange and red regions on a colour coded map on the relevant country page on the Foreign Travel Advice website) a more detailed risk assessment should be carried out using this form. The form is in three sections. The first is simply for information box and risk assessor signatures. The second considers whether the trip is justified in light of current travel advisories. The main body of the form is another generic travel risk assessment, but contains space to add additional risk controls where they are needed.

The destination risk should be determined by consulting the UK government foreign travel advice website ([https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)). Information on all the countries being visited on a trip should be considered and this should be done even if you are familiar with or are a national of those countries. Some situations, particularly political, health and
crime risks, may have changed since your last visit. Other sources of information, for example from the travel provider or their associate travel app, are also likely to be useful.

**Trip justification and approval**

Travel to higher risk destinations must be justified and a written justification approved by the appropriate person. For travel to areas where the government advice is against all but essential travel then approval for the trip must be sought from the Head of School / Department. For travel to areas where advice is against all travel, approval must be sought from the relevant Dean. In both cases the justification for travel must demonstrate that the benefits of the trip to the University outweigh the increased travel risk. Potential justifications could include the development of important new partnerships for the University, development or continuation of valuable, high profile research or work that will result in the award of high value funding to the University.

It should be emphasized that Heads / Deans are not approving the risk assessment. They may not have the relevant experience or knowledge to be assured that the risk assessment is adequate. What they are doing is accepting the risk associated with the trip is justified and are accepting that risk on behalf of the University. Heads and Deans should be willing to refuse approval if they feel that the justification is not adequate.

**Travel risk assessment**

The travel risk assessment section of the form is pre-filled with travel hazards and generic risk controls. There is space to add additional controls in each hazard section. Travel to destinations with current travel advisories will require additional risk controls. Again the Government travel advice must be read. The additional risk controls should detail the steps to be taken to mitigate the increased risks faced. Such mitigation is highly likely to require such things as risk awareness training and additional physical security, and possibly the hiring of external security contractors. The costs of such mitigation measures will have to be borne by the relevant project, School or Department. The completed risk assessment should be filed with your School / Department Travel Planner and must also be sent to the Safety, Health and Environment Unit for review and comment. Where deemed necessary the SHE Unit will send the risk assessment out to specialist external suppliers for review. Again, the cost of which will be recovered from the relevant project, School or Department.

**Activity risk assessment**

Again the activities to be carried out on the trip must also be risk assessed using the standard University form. Note that even straightforward activities such as undertaking meetings or interviewing individuals may carry higher levels of risk than normal if they are taking place in areas where travel advisories are in place. For example, the kidnap risk may well be higher in such areas. As before activities such as fieldwork will require a rigorous risk assessment. All recreational activities planned for the trip also need to be risk assessed.