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Travelling, Working
and Studying Overseas
Safety, Health and Environment Unit

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this standard is to outline the steps which should be taken by staff and students to ensure their personal safety when travelling, working or studying outside of the United Kingdom. Individual Schools and Departments may have additional local rules and guidance. These should comply with the principles laid out in this document.

The standard applies to:

- all overseas travel and work by UK-based staff undertaken on behalf of the University
- all travel and work undertaken on behalf of the University by staff permanently based at the University’s European Centres, where travel takes them outside the country where the Centre is based, except travel to the UK
- all overseas travel and study by students, whether supervised or unsupervised, as a group or by individuals, where the travel is part of a course of study or is organised by the University. For students studying at one of the University’s European Centres who are nationals of the country where the Centre is located, overseas travel is defined as travel outside of their country of origin, with the exception of travel to the UK
- student overseas placements

2. Risk Assessment

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 University has a responsibility to ensure it has management arrangements in place designed to protect the health and safety of its staff and students on overseas trips but responsibility for ensuring that the health and safety arrangements set out in risk assessments are followed sits with individual travellers or, in the case of group travel, the designated group leader. In all cases every person has a responsibility to conduct themselves in a reasonable manner and to cooperate with the University in the execution of its responsibilities through following the risk controls contained within the risk assessment.

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.
2.1 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, as this is not always the case, it is important to check the advice pages carefully. Travel to destinations within such areas is considered higher risk and requires use of the Overseas Travel Risk Assessment Form for Higher Risk Destinations. 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.

2.2 Overseas Travel Risk Assessment form 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. It includes space for the traveller to add information about additional hazards and the associated risk controls where required, for example where the government travel advice indicates there are additional hazards not covered by the generic assessment. 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.

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. For staff it is the traveller or designated group leader 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.

2.3 Overseas Travel Risk Assessment form for higher risk destinations

There are three parts to this risk assessment form. The first is for information and signatures. The second is for the justification for travel. Travel to destinations where the current government travel advice is against travel, either essential travel or all travel, must be justified and that justification approved. The justification must demonstrate that the benefits to the University outweigh the increased risk to the traveller(s). Where the advice is against all but essential travel this justification must be submitted to the travellers’ Head of School for
approval. Where advice is against all travel it must be submitted to the relevant Dean for approval. Approval must be obtained before travel can be booked. Note that no trips to such restricted destinations that involve undergraduate students will be approved.

The third part of the form represents the travel risk assessment. It is pre-filled with a set of generic travel hazards and risk controls. It is highly likely that extensive additional travel risk controls will need to be added to the form, the specifics of which will depend on an understanding of the situation on the ground. Examples of such controls may include maintaining regular defined contact with the University, Hostile Environment training or even use of a security detail. Travel to such destinations will require detailed Emergency Preparedness and Contingency plans.

Risk assessments must be carried out by the individual travelling or, with respect to group travel, by the designated leader of the group. The only exceptions to this rule are when the traveller is an individual postgraduate student, in which case the risk assessment should be carried out by the student in conjunction with the relevant academic supervisor. In this case both should sign off the risk assessment.

Copies of completed risk assessment forms for higher risk destinations together with a detailed travel itinerary, including all in-country travel and accommodation, details of in-country contacts and appointments, traveller contact details and details of next of kin should be submitted to the School / Departmental Travel Planner. An additional copy of the risk assessment must be submitted to the Safety, Health and Environment Unit who will review the risk assessment. It is envisioned that in the majority of cases the assistance of external specialist travel risk consultants may be necessary to determine whether the risk assessment is suitable and sufficient. As such it is essential that the risk assessment be submitted at least three weeks prior to travel. The cost of specialist travel risk consultants will be recharged to the specific project or relevant School or Department.

2.4 Activity risk assessment
All activities that will be carried out as part of an overseas trip must be risk assessed, including laboratory and fieldwork, and this includes activities to be undertaken during downtime or any personal time taken as part of a trip. Only activities that encompass risks above those of the normal everyday need to be included, i.e. no additional assessment is needed for activities such as attending meetings, conferences, sightseeing, etc. Activity risk assessments can be added to the relevant section of the Overseas Travel Risk Assessment form or can be completed using the standard University risk assessment form. Note that there is an expectation from the University that no extracurricular recreational / leisure time activities beyond the simple everyday such as going to dinner, will take place in higher risk destinations.

Any training requirements for participants should be identified in the risk assessment and arrangements made to provide the necessary instruction and information. Copies of completed risk assessment forms should be submitted to the School / Departmental Travel Planner.

Some work and study activities may be controlled by organisations other than the University. This will certainly be the case for placement students. In such cases the health and safety regulations of the overseas country will apply. It is expected that host organisations will have produced risk assessments for work that they control and that visiting University staff and students will be required to adhere to these. Where possible, any such risk assessments should be obtained in advance so that they can be assessed for suitability and the University’s duty of care be assured.
Where activities include fieldwork, the risk assessment should be carried out by someone, normally the academic leading the fieldwork, but it could be a student’s academic supervisor, who has experience of the activities and the conditions likely to be encountered. Risk assessments should preferably be carried out with the participation of those undertaking the fieldwork and the salient findings must be communicated to them.

2.5 Dynamic review of risk assessments
Where necessary overseas travel and activity risk assessments should be reviewed on arrival at an overseas location to take into account local hazards or issues which were not apparent at the time of production. Equally the risk assessment must be updated if any new, originally unplanned activities, including leisure time activities, are undertaken during the trip.

3. Overseas Travel Health Assessments
When travelling overseas on behalf of the University it is essential that any medical conditions that you may have are taken account of, particularly if they could be affected by the hazards associated with travel or certain locations. If you travel with an undeclared medical condition or in opposition to medical advice you may not be covered by the University’s travel insurance if you fall ill abroad. As such all travellers, whether staff or students, are required to complete one of the Overseas Travel Health Questionnaires. The type and extent of the health assessment required very much on the nature of your trip and what it will involve.

There are two different levels of health assessment and associated Overseas Travel Health Questionnaires

3.1 Full health assessment questionnaire
Full health clearance is required for trips that fulfil one or more of the following criteria:

- Travel to any tropical country or a country where vaccinations or prophylactic medication (i.e. anti-malarials) are recommended
- Travel to remote locations where you will be more than 24 hours from the nearest medical facility
- Any trip abroad lasting for more than four weeks
- Travel that involves activities posing high risk in the event of sudden illness or incapacity, e.g. working at altitude, working at sea, technical climbing, abseiling, diving, caving, archaeological digs, etc.

The aim is to ensure that those travelling receive recommended vaccinations and use appropriate protection against malaria and that health problems which may affect safety or require treatment in the field will be managed appropriately. Health clearance will only be withheld in exceptional circumstances where there is clear danger to the individual or others, should the person become incapacitated whilst abroad. Staff need to submit the form to the University Occupational Health Service, students need to submit the form to the University Medical Centre.

3.2 Basic health assessment questionnaire
A basic health assessment is required for all overseas travel that does not fall within the criteria for a full health assessment. Where there is an existing health condition staff must forward the form to Occupational Health and students to the University Medical Centre. Where there is no pre-existing condition the form should be forwarded to the Travel Planner. Basic health assessments for staff are valid for a six-month period from the date first signed as long as the criteria for using the form are still met, and for each additional journey the traveller initials the
form to confirm there has been no change in their health status. If there has been a change in the travellers’ health status between initial completion of the questionnaire and the start of the trip (or for staff any subsequent trip in the six-month period of validity) the Travel Planner must be notified. In these circumstances the traveller must provide further information regarding the change in their health status to either Occupational Health (staff) or the University Medical Centre (students).

4. Roles

4.1 Group Leader
This role should normally be undertaken by the most experienced person in the group. This person is responsible for completing a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for the trip, disseminating the findings of the risk assessment to all members of the group, and leading the group when overseas. They are responsible for making decisions about whether the work being undertaken by the group is safe and, if not, for stopping all work until the risk assessment has been revised and any appropriate additional control measures have been put into place. They must ensure that any necessary training required by group members has been undertaken.

They should hold the full trip itinerary, including expected return times for individuals or splinter groups working in different locations, as well as the contact details, emergency contacts and next of kin in formation for all members of the group. They are responsible for formulating appropriate emergency and contingency plans and initiating them when necessary.

4.2 Travel Planner
The role of the Travel Planner is essentially an administrative one. They are responsible for:

- Ensuring that appropriate Travel and Activity risk assessments are in place for each trip
- Ensuring that any special needs of the staff or students travelling are considered in the risk assessment
- Holding copies of the risk assessments for at least the duration of the trip
- Ensuring that all travellers have completed the appropriate Occupational Health travel health questionnaire
- Ensuring that any changes in health status are communicated to Occupational Health (for staff travellers) or the University Medical Centre (for student travellers) and, where relevant, updating Group leaders
- Holding itinerary information for the trip and contact, emergency contact and next of kin details for all travellers for at least the duration of the trip
- Ensuring that all travellers have registered their travel on the University’s Insurance Office website and so ensuring that they have appropriate insurance cover
- Acting as an office hours contact for travellers
- Passing on details of any serious incidents that occur during overseas trips to the School / Department Head.

4.3 Head of School or Department
The Head of School or Department must ensure that:-

- An appropriate member of staff is appointed as the Travel Planner
- Adequate risk assessments are in place for all travel and associated activities
- Group leaders have appropriate experience, are competent and have any necessary qualifications
- Proper communication arrangements between travellers and the School / Department are in place
Any group is as well prepared as is reasonably practicable

5. Supervision of students

5.1 Staff-supervised student groups
Where staff are supervising student groups overseas it is important to ensure that they have appropriate levels of experience and the relevant skills and competency to fulfil the duty of care required from them. Any staff training and instruction that may be necessary should be provided by the School prior to travel. It is strongly recommended that at least one member of staff attending an overseas trip involving five or more persons is First Aid trained and holds a valid First Aid at Work Certificate. It is recommended that others, such as group leaders should be trained in Emergency First Aid.

Fully supervised courses
These normally take place in low hazard environments and associated activities may need little in the way of risk assessment. Safety instructions, for example information about fire evacuation in both study locations and accommodation, must be provided to participating staff and students. In addition, some control should be exercised over the leisure time pursuits of all trip participants, even if this is simply guidance as to expected behaviour and conduct during the trip.

Maximum group size should be set depending upon the work / study environment overseas, the activities to be undertaken, the likelihood of foreseeable emergencies and the number of supervising staff. Recommended levels of supervision are one staff member per ten students, with a minimum of two members of staff on any one course.

Expeditions / Field work
These are likely to be more challenging environments and may be in environments which are remote and potentially hazardous. Expeditions to remote areas or in arduous conditions should follow BS8848:2014 ‘Specification for the provision of visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventurous activities outside the United Kingdom’ or equivalent. Staff acting as Group Leader should have experience of the work to be undertaken and the location, or at least experience of work in a similar environment. They should have experience of likely local conditions and hazards, and, as appropriate, sufficient knowledge of survival, communication and navigation techniques. A second experienced member of the group should be appointed as deputy, with the authority to take over should the Group Leader become incapacitated.

All participants should receive appropriate training, where possible prior to travel, and be informed of all local safety practices and procedures. The information and instruction given may need to cover areas other than those concerned directly with the work activity itself. For example, there may be a need to maintain security of personnel, materials and equipment or minimise intestinal upsets. In addition, some control should be exercised over the leisure time pursuits of all trip participants

5.2 Indirectly supervised students
All students travelling independently on a placement, as part of their course of study or on trips organised by the University, are still owed a duty of care by the University. For placements that duty sits with the placement organiser, for academic trips the duty sits with the students’ academic supervisor, for University organised trips its sits with the manager who organised the trip. In each case the placement organiser, academic supervisor or manager will have been
involved in developing the trip risk assessment which should have addressed the local safety arrangements both at the work/study site and in the local area. In all cases an appropriate level of indirect supervision must be provided through regular communication with and feedback from students, including where necessary “distance” checks made on on-site practices.

6. Emergency Action

Where deemed necessary by the travel risk assessment emergency protocols and contingency plans should be drawn up. These may be as simple as how to deal with lost travel documents, to more serious situations such as actions to take if a trip participant is missing or if an accident causing serious injury occurs. All incidents should be reported as soon as possible to the School/Department via the Travel Planner and, where necessary, to the University Insurance Office.

7. Monitoring and Review

Effective management of overseas work and study requires feedback and review. It is important to learn from experiences and a debriefing session should follow each and every trip overseas. The information learned can then be used to improve arrangements for future trips. Students should be encouraged to use log books in which they can record their observations.

Certain matters which should be given consideration during the debriefing include:

- Would the work have progressed more smoothly at a different time of year, in a different location, with different personnel, with better preparation, etc.?
- Were the anticipated hazards encountered?
- Were adequate precautions adopted to counter the associated risks?
- In hindsight could risk controls have been improved upon?
- Would the travellers, School or Department repeat the trip?
- Would changes be needed for any future similar work overseas?

8. Relevant documents and addition information sources

The following general Health and Safety documents apply: the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (Sections 2 and 3), the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the University’s Health and Safety Policy.

Sector guidance
UCEA Health and Safety Guidelines for Working Overseas
UCEA Health and Safety – Guidance on Health and Safety in Fieldwork
UCEA Health and Safety Guidance for the placement of HE students

Personal safety
https://www.suzylamplugh.org/Pages/FAQs/Category/personal-safety, Suzy Lamplugh Trust

Health
https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries
https://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk/home.aspx

British Standard
BS8848:2014 Specification for the provision of visits, fieldwork, expeditions and adventurous activities outside the United Kingdom