

Guidelines for Personal Health & Safety Whilst Working Overseas

Scope

This document aims to provide guidance to Schools and Departments on the assessment of risks to individuals or groups (staff or students) visiting/working overseas. In addition to the hazards of the work, individuals may be exposed to additional non work-related hazards arising from the general conditions within the country being visited. These may be broadly classified as health related (e.g. exposure to tropical diseases), or safety related (e.g. threat of violence associated with endemic crime levels or political instability).

These guidelines will be equally applicable to groups going overseas on field trips where the trip organiser should follow the [University Code of Practice for Fieldwork](#).

This document should be read in conjunction with the University Policy Documents on Business Travel, see the Commercial Services website for full details:

http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/commercial-services/insurance_files/local/business_travel.php

Planning Requirements for Overseas Work

There are a number of key issues that should be considered during the planning of any overseas work:

Risk assessment

The planning process should include consideration of the need to carry out a risk assessment. A risk assessment should be carried out if the nature of the work/visit and/or the nature of the location present specific hazards to University individuals or groups.

Typical scenarios where a risk assessment is not essential include staff attending overseas meetings or conferences in low risk countries (e.g. Western Europe).

Typical scenarios where a risk assessment should be carried out include staff and/or students travelling to higher risk countries (threat of violence, health related, remote location) and/or carrying out work of a more hazardous nature. Reference to the [Fieldwork guidance](#) must be made in these cases.

Health Matters

There are a number of infection risks which may be encountered and for which immunisations are available. The necessity for immunisation depends on the country to be visited, sometimes the part of the country (e.g. rural areas as opposed to suburban), the reason for the visit and the type of accommodation.

When planning an overseas trip, the organiser or individual should consult the MASTA Travel Health website at www.masta-travel-health.com/ which has comprehensive health

advice for travellers and also contact either their GP or local Travel Clinic (available at Cripps Health Centre and in Nottingham City Centre) at the earliest opportunity to identify and organise the vaccinations they require.

Advance planning is crucial as many vaccinations require at least three weeks to give protection and some require more than one dose. In addition some vaccinations can cause the individual to feel unwell for a short time. Others, such as Hepatitis B, give some protection after the second dose but immunity cannot be guaranteed for six months when the full course is completed and a blood sample taken.

It should be noted that in a few cases, illness does not manifest itself until after the traveller returns home. If someone, on their return to the UK, shows signs of illness, they should consult their GP immediately.

Individual travellers are advised to consult with their GPs concerning any health issues they have in terms of travel abroad. Trip organisers should highlight this with participants.

Food and drinks

The trip organiser or individual traveller should check on any food safety issues for the country they are visiting. The foreign office website and others will offer general advice on the safety of drinking water and other health tips. Trip organisers or individual travellers should ensure that those with food allergies will be adequately catered for.

Personal safety

There are two sources of information on the physical dangers associated with visiting various countries: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office [FCO] and ACE Businessclass Assistance [ACE - see below for details and links]. FCO information is published as travel advice notices on the Internet. It may be accessed directly as follows or via the Safety Office Web Site.

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/>

These notices are regularly updated and highlight particular problems which will be of assistance in deciding whether the visit can be justified and if so, in planning travel arrangements to minimise the risks. No obligation will be placed on members of the University to visit unsafe destinations. Where there are concerns then it will be for the individual and Head of School/Department to decide whether the visit should proceed.

The address, telephone number and opening hours of the British Embassy or consulate for the country is also listed on the FCO web site. This information should be noted and taken on the trip in case of difficulties.

When planning to visit countries which are known to be unstable or dangerous or where there is some uncertainty, it is advised that the FCO and /or ISOS web sites are consulted in the first instance. The travel agent dealing with the booking will also be able to provide information. This aspect must be covered by a risk assessment.

Some general tips for personal safety are contained in the appended checklist. This is also available in leaflet format for personal issue. Copies of this leaflet can be obtained from the Safety Office and Occupational Health.

Emergency Contacts

Schools/Departments should ensure they are able to identify and contact their members who are overseas in case of issues at home or in the country being visited. It is essential therefore that the School/Department has certain details on record for the individuals taking part. This information should include

- next of kin details
- an itinerary for the trip with relevant contact details
- any relating documentation such as the risk assessment
- insurance details
- medical details where they may have an impact upon the individual whilst they are overseas (important for groups where trip leaders should be aware of specific medical needs/conditions. Confidentiality must be maintained and any information is at the individual's discretion to disclose.)

To ensure such information is gathered, there should be someone responsible for co-ordinating this so that it can be easily accessed during the trip.

ACE Business class Assistance [ACE]

Personnel travelling on University Business should ensure that they carry an ACE Businessclass Assistance Card obtainable from the School or Commercial Services.

ACE also provide a web-based solution for pre-travel, destination services, and travel security information. This can be accessed at

<https://www.red24.com/affiliate/acebusinessclass/> and use the access code 7796 to enter the site.

The 24hr emergency assistance number is +44(0)20 7173 7796

Insurance

In general, arrangements are in place to provide travel insurance whilst travelling abroad on University business. The cover provided includes personal accidents, medical and emergency travel expenses, cancellations, delays etc. Details of this are contained in the University Travel Policy which is arranged by Commercial Services. For trips of a higher risk or unusual nature, the trip organiser or individual traveller is responsible for ensuring with the Insurance Officer in Commercial Services that suitable insurance arrangements are in place.

For high risk trips where a risk assessment is required, this should be copied to the Insurance Officer well in advance of the intended date of travel.

Personal safety check list for travel on University business

The following checklist should be of some assistance to individuals involved in travel to distant locations.

Health Protection

- Check the FCO website for information about any risks at the destination. If it is thought that there could be problems then find out as much as possible when planning the trip. Keep a check on the situation. For all trips it is advisable, and generally useful, to check shortly before departing.
- Check the MASTA website for vaccination information well in advance (some need a few weeks to become effective and may cause a brief illness in themselves by way of reaction).
- Contact your GP for health advice in relation to your trip.

Important information to take with you

- Have you got the address and phone numbers of the local British Embassy to hand? (See Safety Office Web site for details).
- Have you got details of local contacts to hand?
- Ensure that the School/Department have a copy of your itinerary and contact details. Keep them informed of any changes.
- Have you got the numbers needed to cancel credit cards or travellers cheques in the event of loss?
- Take a photocopy of the details of your passport, visas, tickets and keep them separate from your wallet, purse etc.

In higher risk countries:

- At the planning stage, carry out a risk assessment
- Take some local currency with you to avoid having to change money at the airport,
- Wherever possible dress casually for your flight
- Arrange to be met in a discreet way

Personal Safety

On Arrival

- Avoid using airport porters and ensure that you carry all items of luggage yourself. Be aware of what is going on around you as bogus taxi drivers, pickpockets and thieves may be operating.

At the hotel

- When checking in to a hotel in a higher risk area do not disclose your occupation, position, employer or the name of the organisation you are visiting. Give a shortened form of your address.
- Avoid ground floor rooms if possible - rooms on the second floor upwards, near a fire exit but not fronting onto roofs or trees that might provide access are best. Check the fire escape routes - some may be blocked or locked.
- Use the security chain on the door.
- Use hotel safes for valuables and documents.

Out and About

- Does anyone know where you are? What time do you expect to return?
- If your travel plans change, have you told your local contact (and contact at Nottingham if appropriate).
- Have you made sure that you can be contacted?
- Do you know exactly where you are going and how to get there?
- If you are returning home after dark, have you considered possible risks (e.g. where you parked the car, the availability of public transport, etc.)?
- Have you asked your hosts for help and information? Take note of advice from your hosts. In particular which areas should be avoided locally?
- Are you likely to be carrying valuable items? Is this necessary?
- Are valuable, easily stolen items too visible or accessible (e.g. laptop or portable computer, mobile telephone, tools, briefcase or handbag)?
- Carry money and valuables safely.
- Carry the following items separately: number for cancelling credit cards, phone card, travel card or small change, keys.
- Do you carry a personal alarm?
- Obtain a good map.
- Carry the telephone number of your local contact, police, hotel, embassy and carry coins for payphones.

Travel by car

If driving, before you set off:

- Try to establish whether the car is regularly serviced, and check tyres, oil, fuel, water, lights and wipers - especially before a long journey.
- Know how to obtain breakdown assistance.
- Plan your route in advance.
- Tell people at your destination what time you expect to arrive?
- Carry change and a phone card for a pay-phone in an emergency; mobile telephones may be useful - depends on type and country.

On the road:

- Keep bags, mobile telephone, etc. out of sight.
- Keep the doors locked, windows and sunroof closed as far as possible, especially in stop/go traffic.
- Do not pick up hitchhikers.
- Keep an up-to-date map handy so that you won't need to stop and ask for directions.

Leaving the car:

- Always lock your car and put anything valuable in the boot.
- After dark, or if you will be returning to the car after dark, park in a well lit place. Park as close to your destination as possible.
- In a multi-storey car park, reverse your car; leave it as close to the exit as you can, near ground level and away from pillars.

Travel by train or bus

- Wait where it is well-lit and there are other people.
- Stand well back on the platform.
- Avoid compartments which have no access to corridors or other parts of the train.
- Try to sit with other people and avoid empty carriages or buses.
- If you feel uneasy, don't be afraid to move to another seat or carriage, or get off at the next stop - on buses, sit within sight of the driver.
- If the carriage/bus is crowded and someone molests you, make a fuss straight away -remember it's more embarrassing for them than for you.
- If you feel threatened or there is an incident, act immediately:
- Alert the driver, guard or conductor by making as much noise as possible;
 - Pull the emergency alarm;
 - Look for station staff.
- Know where you are going and which stop you need.
- When getting off public transport at night or in an unfamiliar area, attach yourself to groups of people and walk purposefully to your destination OR arrange for someone to meet you.

When taking taxis

- If you cannot hail a licensed cab, carry the telephone number of a reputable car company, or ask a friend or your hosts for a recommendation.
- Whenever possible, book by telephone and ask for the driver's name and make and colour of car.
- Don't get into any cab that you have not asked for.

Health Protection

General

- Contaminated food and water can cause gastro-intestinal illness. Use good personal hygiene and avoid uncooked foods (unless you can peel it), ice in drinks , ice cream and seafood.
- Avoid overexposure to the sun. Cover exposed skin, increase exposure slowly. Drink plenty of bottled water to prevent dehydration.
- Are you taking any medicines? Have you enough for the duration of the trip? Keep them safe.
- If you are diabetic, epileptic or have an allergic condition, can you tell someone accompanying you?
- Where there is a particular risk in a country of infection through medical supplies of doubtful sterility consult Occupational Health before you go.

Insect Borne Diseases

- Have you sought advice from Occupational Health for protection against insect borne diseases, eg. Malaria?
- As well as prophylactic medicines, use repellents, cover exposed skin between dusk and dawn, use bed nets checking for holes or insects inside and tuck in.

- Shut windows at dusk and use mosquito screens - check for holes. Also use pyrethroid or pyrethrum mosquito coils, sprays or vapourisers.
- If you feel unwell after you return, consult your General Practitioner.

Air travel / Jet lag

- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) has been implicated as a risk of long duration air travel but there is, as yet, no scientific evidence to confirm or deny any association. The University has issued [guidance](#) on this.
- The symptoms of jet lag decline after a few days as the body clock synchronises with the new time clock. The following regime will help to speed this up:
 - Adopt the new local hours for sleeping, for being awake and for being active.
 - Rest in a quiet darkened room when it is bed time, even if you do not feel tired.
 - Start the new day with gentle exercise even if you feel sleepy.
 - Avoid taking naps, they will mislead the body and delay the adaptation process.
 - Exposure to natural daylight should be carefully controlled immediately after the journey.
 - Having the right meal at the right local time may also be important.
 - At the moment drugs that are given for jet lag are usually linked to promoting sleep, but can prolong synchronisation if their effects are carried over into the next day.
- Try to avoid driving cars or using dangerous machinery whilst suffering from jet lag.