



## Exchange Visits

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### KEY PRINCIPLES AND SUMMARY OF GUIDANCE

#### *Key Principles*

Exchange Visits provide valuable and often unique experiences for young people to experience other cultures, develop new friendships and thus broaden their horizons and knowledge.

Staying with a host family gives young people a first-hand opportunity to use their language skills in a real context.

By following national best practice and these guidelines it will be possible to establish, manage and maintain safe and productive exchange visits.

Please view the Pupil Exchange Visits Mindmap - see [Appendix B](#) - focusing on the considerations when planning an exchange visit.

#### *Summary of Guidance*

Expectations and assurances should be established for all parties involved (young people, teachers, host families and schools/establishments) and these must be fair and reciprocal as far as is reasonably practicable.

Specific guidance should be provided for host families about your expectations.

Specific guidance should be provided for young people covering personal safety.

Exchange visits differ from other visits in that young people are not directly supervised by teachers/youth workers etc whilst they are with host families; therefore, careful planning is required to ensure that everyone involved has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities during an exchange visit. This is assessed in further detail in the Risk Management section below

Careful matching of exchange partners is central to successful visits.

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## PREPARATION AND PLANNING

### *Legal and Cultural Differences*

The legal definitions of what constitutes a ‘child’ and a ‘criminal offence’ vary across European countries, not to mention global differences in such definitions. Crossing the road without using pedestrian crossing points or dropping litter are two examples of offences punishable by spot fines in some countries, behaviour which some young people may think of as acceptable in the UK. Young people must be made aware of these differences and the consequences of such actions abroad.

Research prior to the visit in this respect will pay dividends whilst in the host country. A consideration of what constitutes good manners will help with acceptance in host family homes.

### *Risk Management*

Leaders should follow the detailed guidance on risk assessment covered within this guidance.

In addition to assessing risks inherent in any external visit, there are additional risks relating to exchange visits that will require extra consideration. In order to reduce the possibility of harm it will be necessary to consider additional control measures, some of which may be considered best by answering the following questions:

- Have you arranged to remotely supervise the young person or has it been agreed for the host family to supervise the young person(s).
- Are families and young people carefully matched with due regard to gender, diet, religious belief, special needs etc?
- Are families known to the host school/establishment, have they been affirmed as suitable, and is there a hosting agreement form which includes a question regarding criminal convictions or other contra-indicators?
- Has consideration been given to the safety and well-being of the young people during travel, and does this include appropriate drivers and transport whilst with the host family?
- Are young people and host families aware of a 24 hour contact number and fully briefed as to procedures should problems arise?
- Do leaders have daily contact with all young people and do young people have an agreed ‘keyword’ that they can use which means ‘*I want you to visit me immediately*’?
- Will young people have access to a phone and/or can they use a mobile phone if necessary to call or text messages to staff?
- Have young people been briefed about personal safety?
- Does work experience feature as part of the exchange and if so, has an assessment been made by an appropriate person about any significant hazards the work environment may present? Recent legislation has made work experience on exchange visits difficult to organise safely within the law.
- Have acceptable and unacceptable activities on ‘family days’ been discussed and if necessary has parental agreement been sought prior to the visit? For example: is there an opportunity to go skiing, cycling or horse riding with the host family, or a visit to a beach and thus swimming? If so, parental consent is required.

- Do you have a Contingency plan in place that considers unforeseen events, such as emergencies, severe weather or the requirement to find alternative accommodation if it becomes necessary to move a young person from their host family?

### *Pre-visits*

Where a visit is arranged for the first time or involves a significant number of new staff, a preliminary visit is strongly recommended and may reassure all parties and provide details and photographs for a presentation to parents.

This will serve as a control measure in itself as well as being an opportunity to consider a specific risk assessment first hand.

The issues raised in ‘Risk Management’ (see above) should be considered during a preliminary visit and discussed with colleagues on both sides of exchange.

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## **STAFFING**

### **LEADER AND STAFF COMPETENCE**

#### *Language Capability*

The majority of the exchange visits involving schools/establishments are language based and thus normally include language staff as group leaders.

It is important that there is someone who can act in the interests of the group who is available 24 hours and able to communicate fluently.

Visit leaders should ensure this is in place prior to the visit.

#### *Experience*

Host family visits are usually led by colleagues with considerable experience and expertise and it is important that this experience is shared.

Previous exchange visit leaders may be promoted, move schools or retire, etc, and thus a wealth of experience and expertise may be lost.

It is important that visits include ‘succession planning’ and any future visit leader has the opportunity in the first instance to learn as much as possible by acting as an assistant leader.

Visit leaders should ensure that 24-hour access is available to a competent person who has all necessary background knowledge of the host culture.

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#### *Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks.*

The Disclosure and Barring Service is designed to support employers make safer recruitment decisions and prevent potential offenders from working with young and vulnerable young people. The DBS was created in December 2012 following a merger between the Criminal Records Bureau and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) (UK.Gov, 2014).

Further guidance on the definition of ‘regulated activity’ can be found from the Outdoor Education National Panel DBS guidance: <http://oeapng.info/downloads/download-info/3-2g-vetting-and-disclosure-and-barring-service-dbs-checks/>

For Further information on the DBS guidance and procedures in Somerset please contact: The SC Disclosure Department Tel. 01823 356723.

DBS checks cannot be made to assess criminal records held overseas, and a similar vetting system is unlikely to be available in all countries, therefore the visit leader in this case must ensure that the host school or agency has a vetting procedure in place to assess the suitability of home placements and obtain confirmation of this in writing.

Further guidance on Disclosure and barring can be found from the Outdoor Education National Panel DBS guidance: [OEAP - DBS Guidance](#) or from the Home Office (Gov.uk): <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

## PREPARATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE, PARENTS AND STAFF

### *Host Families*

There is clearly a need to take every reasonable step to ensure the safety and well-being of visiting young people when they stay with families in our country. Vetting of host families is crucial to ensuring the safety and protection of young people.

The LA recommends that individuals engaged in regulated activity with young people should undergo an enhanced DBS check. Schools, Academies, PRUs or educational establishment who seek guidance from the Local Authority should inform the host family adults that DBS checks may be made. This is a control measure so that unsuitable host families are not hosting young people.

**In the UK** - If the host family is simply providing bed and board for young people with supervision coming from establishment staff and the placement is less than 28 days, there is no requirement for a DBS application to be completed. However, where a host family provides care and supervision, this may be considered a 'regulated activity under supervision' (see the Disclosure and Barring Service passage under item 2, page 5 of [Your Application for an External Visit Guidance](#)). In most cases it is unlikely that the school or educational establishment will deem a DBS application necessary even though the host family is providing care and supervision as the school will know the family well and have an arrangement to regularly visit the home.

Beyond 28 days and the arrangement becomes known as a 'private fostering arrangement' and the Local Authority must be notified, together with the completion of a DBS application.

**Abroad** - Where young people from the UK are travelling abroad to stay with a host family, schools and educational establishments should highlight to parents that many overseas nations do not have a system equivalent to DBS. Contact with the relevant Foreign Embassy or High Commission is strongly recommended to identify whether a DBS or equivalent vetting system is in place in that state or country. Additionally, schools and educational establishments should work closely with the partner school/agency to gain assurance that a robust host family checking process has been completed prior to the exchange. The checks/reassurance you are looking for includes:

- DBS Checks or similar vetting system if abroad
- Verification of family structure
- Code of Conduct
- House rules
- Home visit checks
- Information sharing and gathering
- Sleeping arrangements
- Family activities
- Transportation including drivers

The [form EV8](#): Exchange/Home Stay Visits: Host Family Information should be used to gather information about the host families.

The [form EV9](#): Exchange/Home Visits Organisers Checklist can be used by Heads/EVCs (page 1), Visit Leaders (page 2), the young people involved and the parents/carers (page 3).

(Download these forms from the [Templates and Forms](#) page from the [Start Here](#) section of the Outdoor Education and External Visits website.)

### **Parents Evening**

It is important that parents are fully informed about the visit in order to make their consent decisions including 'plan B' arrangements. This should include:

Expectations regarding behaviour of young people, including circumstances in which parents should be prepared for their children to be sent home early, or to be responsible for the collection of their children (Code of Conduct?)

A detailed programme of the entire visit, including family days and acceptable activities that may be provided by host families, e.g. skiing, swimming, night clubs, etc.

A document that explains how and when young people may, or may not be directly supervised by accompanying staff and how they can communicate with those staff.

Expectations regarding, downtime, 'curfew' times, bed times, alcohol, smoking, etc.

Procedures in case young people are not happy in their host family homes.

Frequently asked questions at parents' evenings include the following:

Who is hosting my son/daughter and what checks have been made on the accommodation?

Have the family hosted before and what assurances or checks have been made on their suitability?

What is the policy regarding alcohol, smoking, drugs, videos, curfews, bedtimes etc?

Can I contact my son/daughter and can I contact the visit leaders if necessary?

Can they contact me?

If my child has a problem, how do they contact leaders and how long would it be before they were visited?

What experience do the leaders have of this particular visit and visits in general?

What are the travel arrangements and what are the supervision details during travel periods?

## Personal Safety

### Staff

Staff should also be aware of issues relating to personal safety and professional protection, especially in order to avoid situations that could lead to accusations of improper conduct.

### Young People

The [Travel Scenario Cards](#), produced by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, provides some useful scenarios for young people who are planning to travel overseas. The cards are designed to present different scenarios for young people and it is recommended that the scenarios are discussed in line with general personal safety between young people and parents/teaching staff who may also have experience of or are planning to attend the same trip.

Please also refer to the [Travel scenario card answers](#) for guidance and answers to the scenarios posed from the travel scenarios.

### Bilingual Help Cards

It is recommended that young people are supplied with a small pocket sized laminated card with bi-lingual information to include useful phrases in an emergency, for example:

The young person holding this card may need help  
Please contact their leader on the following number  
Or at the following address . . .  
They are staying at . . . . , phone number . . . . , etc

## Issues Relating to Censorship

### Home Entertainment, Theatre and Cinema Visits

Visit leaders will need to establish clear policies regarding acceptable cinema, theatre, DVD, video along with Internet usage and access.

### Work Experience

Any exchange visit that includes work experience should refer to, and be considered in the context of, the LA's own policy for work experience. Where this does not cover work experience abroad, special arrangements may need to be made, in which case organisers are recommended to contact the relevant LA officer at the earliest possible stage of planning.

## Additional Considerations

### Young People with Special Needs

It is now widely recognised that young people with special needs have been more vulnerable to abuse than others and therefore face additional risks whilst visiting abroad. These individuals, however, also have the right to have their horizons expanded through travelling abroad. In order to make such exchanges possible, the same general guidelines apply but in addition the visit leader will have to put into place more stringent checks and balances.

The following additional procedures and advice are recommended over and above those detailed in the previous section:

An advanced planning visit is essential for trips involving young people with SEN.

A higher ratio of adults/carers is required and there must also be an appropriate ratio of male/female adults.

As part of the risk assessment process, it should be considered whether an appropriately trained person be part of the staff team.

All teachers supervising visits should be aware of young peoples medical needs and medical emergency procedures.

Check whether travel insurance covers pre-existing health conditions. If not, insure with a company which specialises in policies for these young people.

Assess suitability of host family - ramps, lifts, wide doorways, adapted toilets etc.

Housekeeping arrangements for disposal of soiled dressings, pads etc.

In some cases bunk beds may not be appropriate.

Contact to be made with young people whilst with host family.

Availability of interpreter and leader trained if required in the appropriate communication medium i.e. sign language.

A suitable social area should be available for group meetings etc.

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#### **APPENDIX A - Internal links and websites**

The Outdoor Education & External Visits website is at

<https://slp.somerset.org.uk/sites/sccoea/SitePages/Home.aspx>.

**EV8 - Exchange/Home Stay Visits: Host Family Information Form** - the EV8 form should be used to gather information about the host families. Download the form from the Templates and Forms page on the Outdoor Education and External Visits website at

<https://staffonly.somerset.org.uk/sites/sccoea/SitePages/Templates%20and%20Forms.aspx>.

**EV9 - Exchange/Home Stay Visits: Organisers Checklist** - the EV9 form can be used by:

- Heads/EVCs (External Visits Coordinators) (page 1)
- Visit Leaders (page 2)
- the participant involved and the parents/carers (page 3)

Download the form from the Templates and Forms page on the Outdoor Education and External Visits website at

<https://staffonly.somerset.org.uk/sites/sccoea/SitePages/Templates%20and%20Forms.aspx>.

#### **USEFUL WEBSITES FOR EXCHANGE VISITS**

**Disclosure and Barring Service** - please see the Disclosure and Barring Service page on the Home Office website at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/agencies-public-bodies/dbs/>.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

<http://www.gov.uk/fco>

Keeping children safe in education - Statutory guidance for schools and colleges

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/741314/Keeping\\_Children\\_Safe\\_in\\_Education\\_3\\_September\\_2018\\_14.09.18.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/741314/Keeping_Children_Safe_in_Education_3_September_2018_14.09.18.pdf)

## REFERENCES

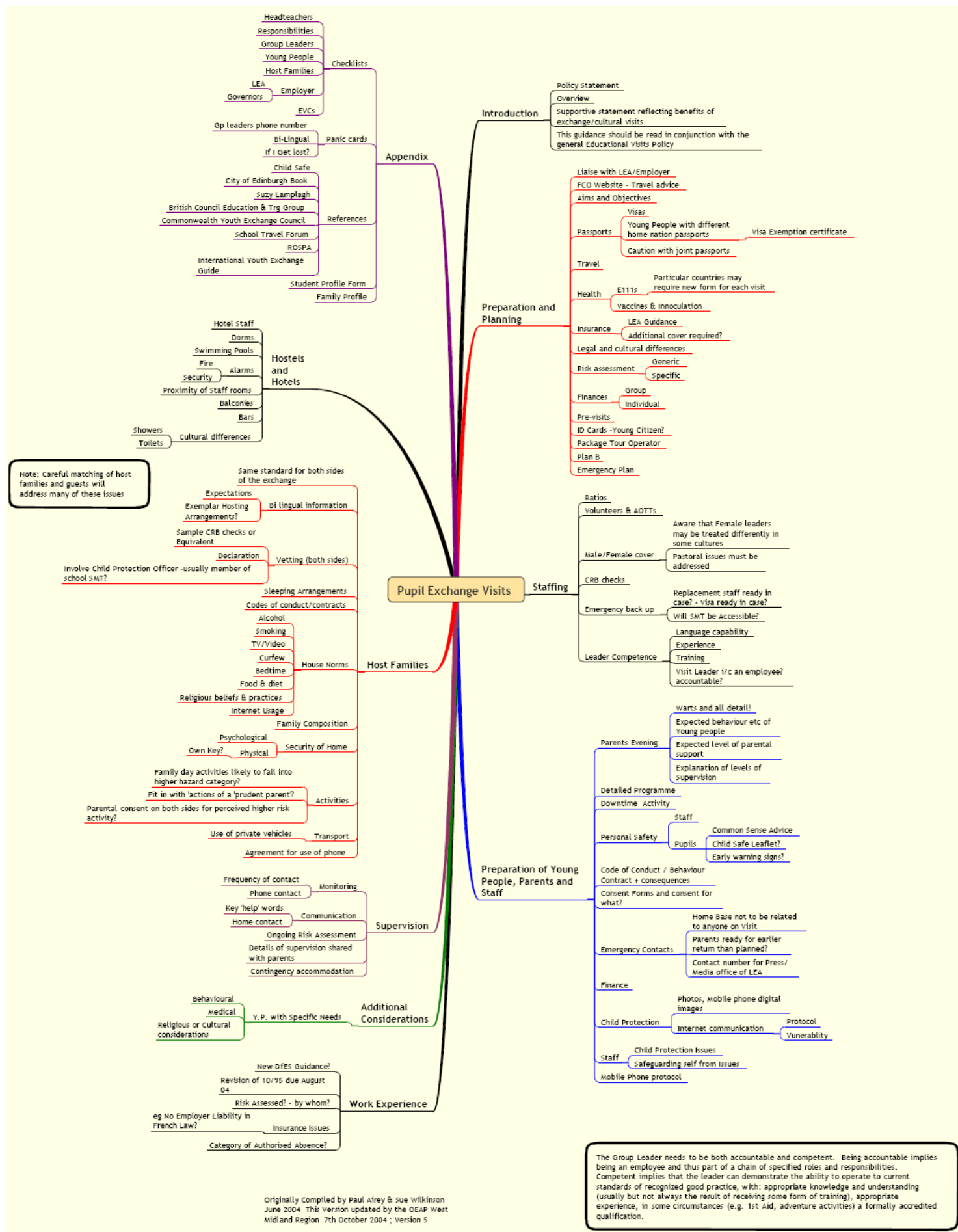
Outdoor Education Advisors Panel National Guidance (2015) Exchange and Home Stays [Online], Available at <http://oeapng.info/download/1212/> (Accessed 21 June 2016).

Outdoor Education Advisors Panel National Guidance (2015) Vetting and DBS Checks [Online], Available at <http://oeapng.info/download/1090/> (Accessed 21 June 2016).

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# Appendix B: Pupil Exchange Visits Mindmap



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