

# University Policy on Study Abroad

## 1. Introduction and Context

This policy refers to arrangements made for students to undertake a period of study abroad as part of a programme of study. This policy is mandatory for all study abroad contributing to University of Southampton programmes although it is recognised that how it is implemented will vary depending on local circumstances. It is informed by the Chapter B10 of the QAA Quality Code *Managing higher education provision with others* and supersedes the University's previous *Practice Placement Guidelines*. It is designed to support, rather than replace, individual Faculties' policies for study abroad.

Chapter B10 includes, amongst other issues, the following requirements:

- Degree awarding bodies commit the necessary staff and other resources to arrangements.
- The central locus of responsibility for arrangements to deliver learning opportunities with others is clear, as are the delegated responsibilities at different levels of the organisation.
- The risks of each arrangement are assessed at the outset and reviewed subsequently on a periodic basis.
- Degree awarding bodies ensure that they have thoroughly considered the financial standing of prospective delivery organisations or support providers.
- Provision is made to suspend or withdraw from an arrangement if the other organisation does not fulfil its obligations or if its ownership or status changes in such a way as to jeopardise the arrangements.
- Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others are reviewed periodically.
- Appropriate and proportionate due diligence procedures are determined for each proposed arrangement for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations.
- There is a written and legally binding agreement, or other document, setting out the rights and obligations of the parties.
- Mechanisms are put in place to monitor and ensure that the terms, conditions, and expectations that were originally approved have been, and continue to be, met.
- Degree awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that students admitted to a programme who wish to complete it under their awarding authority can do so in the event that a placement fails due to circumstances outside of the student's control.
- An assessment is made of the appropriateness of the staff at the placement provider to deliver the type of learning or support involved on the relevant modules, for example mentoring or supervising skills.
- Degree awarding bodies need to consider the appropriateness of physical learning resources and the learning environment provided by a placement provider.

Periods of studying abroad (through Erasmus or other links with institutions) broaden a student's learning experience and contribute to the University's aim of producing global graduates. The University believes that study abroad benefits students in their future careers and therefore encourages students to partake of opportunities offered to them.

## 2. Principles for studying abroad

### a) In general

All Faculties where students engage in studying abroad with a host institution should ensure there is:

- Sufficient capacity (in number and quality) of study abroad opportunities to meet the needs of students
- Designated, permanent staff responsible for the approval, organisation and evaluation of study abroad opportunities.

- Appropriate training for University of Southampton staff directly involved in study abroad activity. This should include guidance on identifying suitable studying abroad opportunities, how to brief outgoing students, what contact should be made with students during their time abroad, and how the period of study abroad is evaluated.
- A clear and transparent approval process to approve prospective partners (see below, on implications on the Equalities Act).
- An agreed timetable to review study abroad opportunities, and an appropriate review mechanism.
- An up to date list of all students on study abroad
- A list which contains the name and address of host institutions. A central list of all host institutions, provided by the international office, will be noted by AQSC annually.

**b) Setting up a period of study abroad with a new host institution**

When a study abroad arrangement with a new host institution is set up for the first time, the University is responsible for ensuring that:

- Checks have been made (and records kept) on the hosting institution to ensure that it is an appropriate host for University of Southampton students. This may include site visits and/or checks on a Higher Education Institution's standing in its own country, including that suitably qualified staff are involved teaching and assessment.
- Students studying at the partner institution will be able to undertake study which will contribute to the learning outcomes of the programme.
- There is a written and legally binding agreement/document in place setting out the rights and responsibilities of the host institution, the University of Southampton, and any student hosted by the host institution.
- There is a named individual within the academic unit responsible for approving study abroad placements.

**c) Before a student starts on a period of study abroad**

Before a student embarks on a period of study abroad, the Faculty is responsible for:

- Completing a risk assessment of each period of study abroad, including checking the host country against [Foreign and Commonwealth Travel Advice](#)
- Reviewing background checks undertaken when the arrangement with the host institution was first set up, and renewing if there has been a known change of circumstances.
- Briefing students about the period of study abroad. Depending on the arrangement, this may include:
  - Details on what they should study when abroad (subject, level of study, number of credits)
  - Details of how the student will be able to evaluate their study abroad
  - A description of the contact the student should expect with the University of Southampton during their time at the partner institution
  - Any roles or responsibilities required of the student in the written agreement between the University and the host institution
  - Guidance on how to raise any concerns with the period of study abroad with the Faculty
  - Details of how to contact the University of Southampton in an emergency
  - Full information on health & safety matters
  - Full information on any professional requirements.
- Briefing students –through a clear, published statement – on the consequences if a student fails or does not complete their period of study abroad.
- Ensuring that the host institution is provided with information about individual students' needs (for example, a disability) which is may be relevant. This should only be done after receiving the student's explicit permission.
- Working with the student to ensure that any conditions connected with their UK Tier 4 visa (for international students) have been met. The University's Tier 4 Points Based Compliance Officer may be able to assist with queries.

**d) During the period of study abroad**

During the time the student is away, the Faculty is responsible for:

- Maintaining contact with the student, as outlined to the student before they left Southampton. This may vary between regular site visits to an occasional email communication, depending on the nature of the period away from the University of Southampton.

- Maintaining records of students on study abroad, including contact details, the address of their hosts, and dates of the time to be spent away from the University
  - Ensuring that the student continues to have an appropriate learning environment and/or working with the student to find a solution in the event of an issue beyond the student or university's control (civil disturbance, natural disaster, etc.) which may prematurely terminate the study abroad.
  - Maintaining a student's record on Banner using the [appropriate coding](#) [internal link]
- e) **After the period of study abroad**  
Once a student has returned to Southampton after a period of study abroad, the Faculty is responsible for:
- Responding to the student's evaluation of their time away from Southampton
  - Translating marks gained during study abroad into an equivalent at Southampton where applicable (this must be done according to the University's Translation of Marks policy).
- f) **Reviewing placements**  
Placement providers should be reviewed on a regular basis in line with the requirements for setting up placements set out in this policy. Records of this review should be kept by the Faculty.

### 3. Health and Safety

Universities have a statutory duty to ensure, in-so-far as is reasonably practical, the health, safety and welfare of their employees, students and study abroad partners. With regard to the welfare of this latter group, the responsibility lies in not willingly placing a student whom they know, or suspect, may pose a risk to the institution, its customers, clients, pupils or patients.

There should be suitable local documented management arrangements in place within faculties that describe how placements are organised and implemented with specific roles and responsibilities of key personnel clearly identified. A risk assessment should be carried out which would identify key hazards of all aspects of the placement from travel and accommodation to local work that is to be undertaken at the time. Often other organisations will require a risk assessment to be completed, but the University still has the responsibility for ensuring that the risk assessment is suitable and sufficient. To assist with this, staff should refer to the [UCEA/USHA Health and Safety Guidance for the placement of students](#). The risk assessment should be reviewed as part of the placement evaluation process on a regular basis.

As part of training, faculties should ensure that their students are given briefings and information on the outcomes of the placement risk assessment which in effect becomes the code of practice. Students should also go through a checklist of actions developed by the Faculty that identifies what the student needs to do and be aware of.

It is particularly important that risk assessments are carried out for students studying abroad and the University Risk Assessment template should be used. This could be given to the host institution should they wish. The sign off process of risk assessments should be approved through Faculties. Particular attention to the information provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for a country or region they are going to. This information should be included within the risk assessment.

It is important to ensure that if any incidents or accidents occur whilst studying abroad that appropriate emergency arrangements are effective and that this is recorded with the University Safety and Occupational Health department and fed back into the evaluation process of the placement that the Faculty has responsibility for.

For further advice on this please contact University of Southampton Safety and Occupational Health department (Health and Safety).

## 4. Equality and Diversity

Any placement that is an integral part of a higher education programme will be covered by both the education and employment provisions of the Equalities Act 2010. In particular it is required that Universities do not:

- Treat a student less favourably than other students;
- Fail to make reasonable adjustments where such failure places students at a substantial disadvantage compared to their peer group. (This applies to all off-site activities including field trips, placements and organised social events.)

Faculties must therefore be pro-active in locating suitable studying abroad opportunities for those students with protected characteristics and vigilant that no discrimination occurs during the course of identifying, providing or assessing placement. Faculties should work with the Student Services (Enabling Services) to identify any equipment and/or assistance that can be provided to help individual students with specific needs.

Host institutions should be provided with information about individual students' needs (with the student's explicit permission) in order to plan for their learning. They must not be allowed to discriminate by refusing to take the student on placement without reasonable grounds or by providing a substantially different experience than that offered to other non-disabled students. The laws for non UK providers may be different, but it is important that the University establishes a position of protecting students enrolled on its programmes from discrimination, and enabling maximum participation. The University should consider whether to terminate a relationship with a provider which is unable to offer placements for all of its students.

## 5. Insurance and Indemnity

During the course of a placement, it is possible that things may go wrong. Generally, the main risks are:

- The student may be injured as a result of placement activity;
- The student may, without intention, cause injury or damage as a result of placement activity;
- The student may deliberately cause injury or damage during placement activity.

Generally, UK liability accepts that students on work experience or placement are deemed as 'employees'. This means that if either the student or a third party makes a claim, it would be dealt with by the employer's (i.e. placement providers) insurers. The University would not normally be involved in any claim.

Students who attend placement in health services and who will be expected to deliver clinical interventions are not covered by the University for any claim linked to medical mal-practice. All Faculties must check that placement providers carry liability insurance which covers this circumstance. If they do not, and the Faculty still wishes to proceed to use the placement, then students will be required to obtain personal cover in their own name. Many professional associations provide this cover at a beneficial rate and so it may be that students should be encouraged to join such associations.

The University may be liable if a student were to claim that the Faculty had not undertaken a proper risk assessment or health & safety check, before placing them in an environment where they subsequently came to harm.

All students attending overseas placements should have appropriate insurance cover. In some cases, this may be provided by the University's Insurers. However, most undergraduate students will need to purchase separate insurance cover, and there is an option to buy cover from the University's insurers, through the University's online store. Full details can be found on the [University's Finance webpages](#). In addition, travellers to EU countries need a Health Insurance Card obtained through the Post Office or [online](#)

## 6. Confidentiality and Data Protection

Confidentiality is an area which may impact on the University's liability for students on placement. Any information given by a student to the Faculty, or known about them, is to be treated as confidential. However, in a situation where the Faculty is aware of information which

might suggest that there is a greater risk of injury to customers, clients, pupils or patients, it may be necessary to disclose that information to the placement provider. This is a complex area and Faculties may need to take advice from legal services on a case-by-case basis. Placements inevitably involve some disclosure about students to the placement provider, but before disclosing information about a student the Faculty should ensure that it complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998. In practice this means gaining the explicit permission of students to disclose such information. This is particularly important when this is 'sensitive' data relating to, for example: health status; disability issues; criminal convictions, cautions or bind-overs. At the start of their programmes, Faculties should inform students of the type of information it is deemed necessary to disclose and to alert them to the fact that they may be prevented from attending placement – and thus from completing programme requirements – if they do not give permission for this disclosure.

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