

# **YOUTH EXCHANGES**

## **METHOD and RESOURCE HANDBOOK**

### **FOR YOUTH WORK PRACTITIONERS IN WALES**

**June 2012**

# Handbook Overview

This handbook has been developed to introduce, explain or expand on existing knowledge and experience in relation to youth exchange projects and cultural experiences. In seeking to meet the outcomes for young people focussed upon in the 'Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes' document which is about to replace the Curriculum Statement for Youth Work in Wales and the National Youth Service Strategy for Wales, it encourages the development of opportunities to broaden the knowledge, understanding and life experience of young people who engage with youth service provision in Wales.

Good youth work practice expects practitioners to adapt any model to best meet the needs of young people so the ideas and opinions expressed are not a prescriptive way of developing youth exchange and cultural activities but suggested methods and approaches. The handbook provides practical suggestions that encourage groups of all sizes to explore activities from the single session to a week or more in another country.

The 'Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes' document states one of the purposes of Youth Work as that it: *"encourages young people as local, national and global citizens to exercise their responsibilities"* Cultural experiences and exchanges can have a huge impact on the thinking and perceptions of young people and lead to new directions in education, employment and volunteering activities and change how they see their life.

The handbook describes youth work methods for Youth Exchanges, including their potential outcomes, and ensures that organisations have the information to fulfil their legal obligations and follow their own policies and procedures. Examples are provided but, as British, European and wider International law and policy are subject to change, part of all planning, preparation and delivery must include research into the current situation.

This document is part of a library of Good Practice Method and Resource Handbooks for Youth Work in Wales. You are encouraged to delve into others for a plethora of practical resources which enhance youth work practice and deliver the best possible outcomes for young people in Wales.

## Acknowledgements

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# Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Youth and Cultural Exchanges</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>The Purpose of a Youth Exchange</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Education for Sustainable Development &amp; Global Citizenship</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Millennium Development Goals</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Learning through Youth and Cultural Exchanges</b>	<b>9</b>
	• Identity	9
	• Faith	11
	• Equality	11
	• Challenging perceptions and assumptions	12
	• Media portrayal	13
	• Food	15
	• Money, wealth and consumerism	16
	• Environmental awareness	18
	• Informed choices	19
<b>7.</b>	<b>Types of Youth Exchange Activity</b>	<b>20</b>
	• Sessions “at home”	20
	• Day trips away from home	21
	• Residential exchanges in Wales/UK	21
	• International Youth Exchanges	22
	• European Voluntary Service	22
	• International Work camps	23
	• Living in an Exchange Partner’s Home	23
<b>8.</b>	<b>Practical aspects of Cultural Exchange Activity</b>	<b>24</b>
	• <b>Planning &amp; Preparation</b>	<b>24</b>
	Aims & Objectives	24
	Funding	24
	Pre-visits	24
	Times & dates	25
	Documentation	25
	Accommodation	25
	Activities	26
	Activity Providers	26
	Resources & Kit	27

•	<b>Staffing</b>	<b>27</b>
	Staff-young person ratio	27
	Home Contact Person	27
	Nationality of staff & young people	28
	Care Orders & Wards of Court	28
	Age of staff & young people	28
	Group composition	28
	Special Needs	28
•	<b>Health, Safety &amp; Wellbeing</b>	<b>29</b>
	Insurance	29
	EHIC (European Health Insurance Card)	29
	Risk Assessments	30
	Emergency arrangements	30
	Child Protection	31
	Code of Conduct	31
	Panic Cards	31
	ID Cards	31
	Medical	32
	Food & drink	32
	Toilet issues	32
•	<b>Travel, transport &amp; finance</b>	<b>33</b>
	Advice & Information	33
	Luggage	33
	Guides & Maps	33
	Finances	34
•	<b>Cultural considerations</b>	<b>34</b>
	Language	34
	Cultural differences	34
	Gender & sexuality	34
	Religion	35
	Knowledge of own identity	35
	Gifts for your Hosts	35
	Communication	35
<b>9.</b>	<b>After the Youth Exchange or Experience</b>	<b>37</b>
	Learning	37
	Evaluation	37
	Appreciation	37
	Sharing	38
	Your Future	38

## **1. Introduction**

The 'Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes' supports the development of young people into adulthood through the provision of choices and opportunities. It recognises the importance of youth work providing young people with a framework to understand their rights and responsibilities as global citizens.

Activities which enable participants to encounter and explore cultures which are distinct and different from their own provide a rich and dynamic range of opportunities from which young people learn. Such activities are an essential tool in youth work, not a luxury or add-on. Good quality experiences bring many gains for the individuals taking part; gains in personal and social development that in time will impact on their wider communities. Young people who have journeyed away from their homes have their future prospects greatly enhanced through engagement with their peers from other regions/countries and are better equipped for an increasingly globalised world.

The Youth Exchange is a traditional, well-established and well-known tool for sharing and learning about different cultures. A typical Youth Exchange is a very demanding project, costly in time and money, which, with adequate resources, will bear fruit long after the passports have been put away. However, a Youth Exchange is not always possible and the handbook includes a range of other intercultural activities which can contribute to young people's development.

Organisations and websites with many examples of existing work and resources are included. They offer opportunities for intercultural learning, even if they are not designed for this purpose or currently recognised as such.

The handbook gives pointers of what outcomes for young people can be achieved through Cultural Exchanges and Experiences It sets out some of the practicalities to consider when going away from home, especially to another country.

## 2. Youth and Cultural Exchanges

Cultural Exchange refers to activities which enable us to deepen our experiences of and relationships with those who are different from us. In one respect, that means everybody other than oneself. It is used here to mean experiences of and relationships with those who have a different set of values from our own by virtue of their nationality, cultural background, ethnicity, faith, etc.

### Youth Work Outcomes of Youth or Cultural Exchanges

#### What can be gained?

- Confronting differences
- Engaging with the outside world
- Meeting new cultures, ways & traditions
- Realising own cultures, ways & traditions
- Self-expression
- Respect/care for self/others
- Sharing, giving & taking
- Taking responsibility
- Confidence & motivation
- Communication skills
- Negotiation skills
- Being part of a (new) group
- Independence from family
- Routine & purpose
- Achieving a task
- Problem solving
- Decision making
- Leadership & social skills
- Forming relationships
- Fun & enjoyment
- Living, working & playing with others
- Language awareness & acquisition
- Travelling & practicalities
- Money-management

A Cultural Exchange can be a process which happens alongside or underneath another activity with a different, key focus. In some respects the focus through which it happens is irrelevant, so long as we can recognise and value the opportunities it provides. A sport activity may bring together teams from different countries and give an ideal opportunity to explore and appreciate cultural differences. The Olympics is one of the greatest examples of a vast intercultural celebration.

A key factor in a 'process' of Cultural Exchange is that it requires us to meet, confront, explore, appreciate and ultimately respect DIFFERENCE. Throughout such a process of discovery we inevitably hold a mirror in front of ourselves, and learn as much about our own identity and culture as those we encounter.

There are many types of Cultural Exchange activity of which a Youth Exchange is one. This will depend heavily on a project's aims and its available resources. It takes different forms, such as where young people can stay, since it is about people from different communities and backgrounds. It can involve young people from different parts of Wales or UK or have European or wider international impact. It may involve two or many groups. Whatever the type of Exchange, similar themes can be introduced and learning outcomes gained.

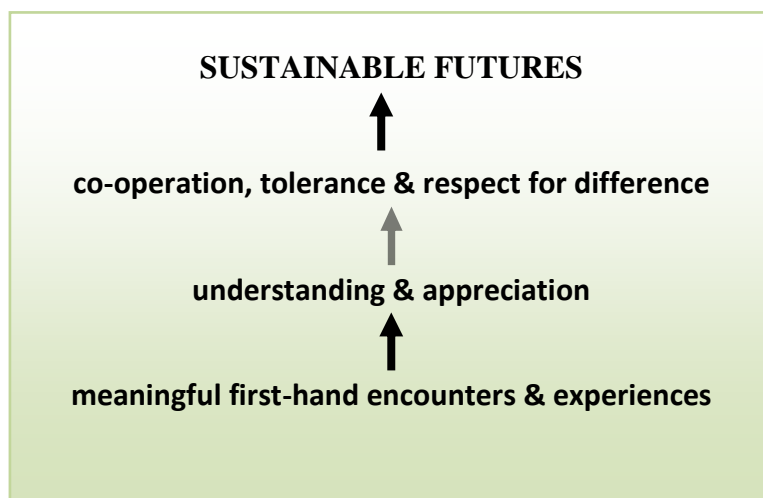
Where there is not the capacity or resources to take a group away from its home community, a Cultural Exchange is still possible. Many elements can be approached in smaller segments such as in evening sessions, local trips, or bringing in visitors.

### 3. The Purpose of a Youth Exchange

The overarching aim of Youth Exchanges and Cultural Experiences is to enable young people to become responsible and responsive global citizens. Recognition, appreciation and respect for difference and diversity which are gained through first hand experiences, provide a firm foundation for this. Through personal experiences young people are supported to recognise and challenge injustice and discrimination and make informed choices as to how they live their lives.

Fear or ignorance of difference is often what drives negative, confrontational or defensive behaviour towards anything which is not the same as us. By enabling people to encounter difference in supported, positive and constructive ways a more inquisitive and appreciative approach to difference can be developed.

Despite a world which is increasingly globalised and interdependent, people everywhere are at risk of becoming marginalised and remote from the forces which influence even the detail of their day-to-day lives. Although in communication and information terms the world seems closer than ever before in its history, the distance people feel from the institutions of power and wealth can be very disempowering. When young people are given opportunities to engage with those from different cultural backgrounds, most especially with their peers from different countries, some of that distance can be shortened. They begin to feel they have a part to play as global citizens and that their actions do have a bearing on the world.



A society based on understanding the values of co-operation, tolerance and respect for difference will result in more sustainable futures and environments and the avoidance of conflict. Youth Exchanges with cultural themes offer young people opportunities to encounter the experiences which enable them to reach these levels of understanding.

#### **4. Education for Sustainable Development & Global Citizenship**

The policy context in which the youth service operates, and to which the Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales (2007) refers, includes that of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC). The importance of young people understanding their rights and responsibilities as global (as well as local and national) citizens is highlighted as something that youth work should promote and facilitate.

“A Common Understanding for the Youth Work Sector” (DCELLS, 2008) provides information and pointers to aid delivery of ESDGC in the youth work sector.

#### **5. Millennium Development Goals**

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 189 world leaders agreed to meet a set of eight ambitious targets aimed at tackling world poverty. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the most broadly supported, comprehensive and specific development goals the world has ever agreed. These eight time-bound goals provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty in its many dimensions. They include goals and targets on income, poverty, hunger, maternal and child mortality, disease, inadequate shelter, gender inequality, environmental degradation and the Global Partnership for Development.



The MDGs were set to be achieved by 2015. They are both global and local and tailored by each country to suit specific development needs. They provide a framework for the entire international community to work together towards a common end, ensuring that human development reaches everyone, everywhere. If these goals are achieved, world poverty will be cut by half, tens of millions of lives will be saved, and billions more people will have the opportunity to benefit from the global economy.

The MDGs provide an excellent framework for Youth Exchanges to underpin, design and structure activities which raise young people’s awareness and encourage their active involvement in working towards them.

For more information visit [www.endpoverty2015.org](http://www.endpoverty2015.org).



## 6. Learning through Youth and Cultural Exchanges

The elements and issues included in this section provide a stimulation or basis for work to carry out with young people. They are valuable in themselves, regardless of your activity, or can form a useful part of a preparatory process for a bigger exchange visit. The better young people understand their own person and the culture they come from, the better they will learn from their Youth Exchange the cultural experiences they encounter.

No list of elements and issues is exhaustive and others will present themselves. All are inter-related so, for example, looking at media portrayals of environmental issues in other countries can be related to food stereotypes of their diverse cultures. Be imaginative and jump in there! There are bags of online resources or organisations across Wales that can support youth work. Your job is to facilitate the processes and learning, not to be the font of all knowledge!

### Identity

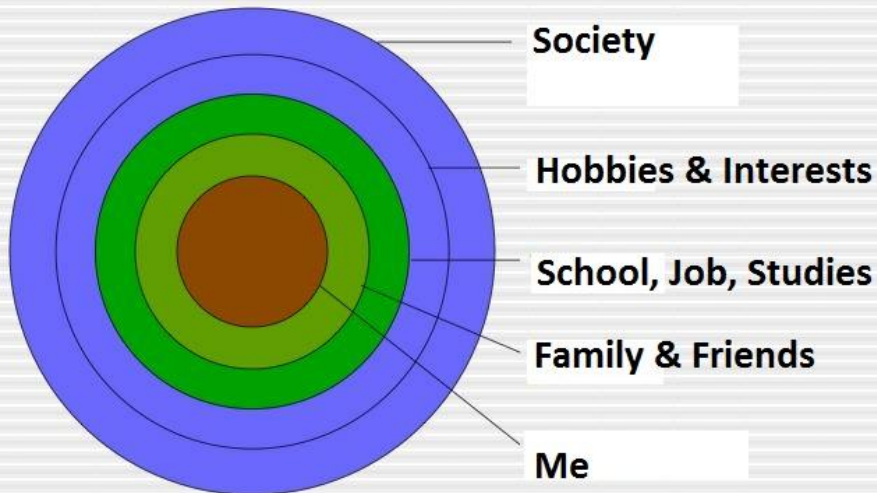
The more a young person can develop their self-awareness and understanding of their own personal identity, the greater their confidence will be in venturing out to explore other cultures different to their own. A great sense of security of “where I come from” will lead to a healthy and non-judgemental curiosity towards others. It therefore makes a lot of sense to explore notions of identity in the lead up to any exchange activities.

Undertaking some form of cultural exchange work with young people will inevitably lead to encounters with and explorations of identities of the self, and of those with whom they engage. This aspect of holding a mirror to our own identity (workers and young people alike) can be one of the most important and valuable parts of the process. Recognising and realising one’s own values, heritage, traditions and culture can be the start of a huge journey for some and will be an important step in an exchange process for everyone. Greater awareness of who I am and where I come from should lead to greater confidence which in turn helps to break down barriers and reduce fears of the unknown.

Exploring personal culture has its’ own value and is preparation for an away-from-home exchange visit. A very good and straightforward session called the “Culture Onion” looks at what influences & determines cultural identity, how it affects behaviour and whether certain attributes are individual or societal. Googling <culture onion> will net plenty of results for this exercise. Cambridge University Press has a good, two-page, photocopiable Culture Onion exercise in their “Intercultural Resource Pack”, the whole of which is very useful for this kind of work.

Using the onion metaphor in others ways can start exploration of the ‘layers’ of personal identity from the very local to Welsh, British, European and global. Preparation for a cultural or exchange activity, whatever type it is, can benefit from this to open up discussion on the way young people present their culture/identity as well as supporting them to be open to the differences they will encounter.

## Significant Conversations Onion Model of Culture



The **Iceberg Metaphor** is an excellent tool for preparing for a 'cultural encounter'. It helps us recognise that certain cultural attributes are readily visible or recognisable, while others stay concealed and possibly mysterious. The US Peace Corps have a good Iceberg lesson plan that you could easily adapt for your group on the webpage <http://www.peacecorps.gov/wvs/educators/lessonplans/lesson.cfm?lpid=347>. It is also found on the Culture at Work website as part of a discussion on cross cultural work at <http://www.culture-at-work.com/iceberg.html>



## Faith

Building an understanding of other people's faiths and the beliefs and values they embody is really important in developing a greater openness to difference and diversity. In all parts of the world, faith has an incredibly important part to play in the rituals, traditions and lifestyles of people and usually underpins the structures and systems of a culture. The more young people can be supported to learn about faiths, the greater ability they will have to interpret behaviour very different to their own.

Faith is extremely diverse and differs greatly in importance to different people. Most parts of Wales/the UK are fortunate to live in very mixed communities so gaining access to different faiths is quite easy if we look for them. Given that faiths are underpinned by belief and value systems, they are great vehicles for encountering, understanding and appreciating difference.

When planning a youth exchange it is quite possible that a partner group will have quite different attitudes to faith. Exploring it can be an important part of the group preparation.



Depending on local access, local faith leaders can be invited to talk to young people, and visits can be made to different places of worship. Another important aspect can be to investigate how faiths are represented and treated by the media.

## Equality

In 1995 the Council of Europe launched the **all different all equal** campaign, aimed at reinforcing the fight against racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism and intolerance. Activities organised under the banner of the campaign focused on celebrating difference, thereby raising awareness of diversity in all its forms. The higher goal is to recognise the rights of all citizens to equality of opportunity, regardless of any 'box' in which they might be put, or into which they put themselves. Without equality, fairness or justice cannot be ensured in any society.



Views on human rights can be wildly different in different cultures, or even amongst individuals from the same cultural background and, depending on the nature of your exchange, this could be something you have to confront as part of your project. Attitudes, for example, towards the role of women, or towards homosexuality could prove very challenging to manage with your group. As with most of the other elements being presented here, if you are prepared, this can be a constructive opportunity to hold up a mirror and explore/reflect on personal views and values as well as those being encountered. You will almost certainly unearth views which may be controversial or unpopular, but that is the point of understanding difference.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission website, [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com), is a good starting place for ideas on how to raise awareness of equality rights with your group.

### Challenging perceptions and assumptions

According to our own backgrounds and values, we all have pre-conceptions and make judgements of and assumptions about others, on a daily basis. These are not necessarily negative, nor do they necessarily stay the same; they are a part of normal, everyday life. What we do with them and if or how we act on them may have more or less positive impacts on our relationships. There is nothing wrong with noticing differences as recognising our own pre-conceptions, and those that others might have of us, is a constructive way of promoting a healthy awareness of difference. It is a starting point in **appreciating** ways different to our own.



Is this a young, well dressed woman or an elderly woman dressed up against the cold? The perception is yours and it can change by the second.

Stereotypes of others exist in all cultures, and exploring them can be a great (and fun) way to open up discussion and raise awareness. It is perfectly reasonable, even desirable, to question and challenge people's preconceptions of others – how they have been formed, whether simply absorbed from elsewhere (eg. family, the media), or if they are rational or fair and so on. Stereotypes may not always be bad, but they are usually gross generalisations.

It is equally important to look at stereotypes others may have of your group as individuals and as a group. These may come from being young, Welsh, British, unemployed etc. This can then be used to demonstrate the risks and weaknesses of generalisations.

A purpose of a Youth or Cultural Exchange is to de-mystify the unknown, to put a human face to it and thereby reduce fears or anxieties. That needs to happen to enable appreciation and enjoyment of the differences to follow.

In order to explore and challenge perceptions, introduce young people to activities with other groups close to your own, so they can examine their differences on their own terms and in their own environment. For example, are there any services or organisations working with young people from different ethnic backgrounds with whom you could arrange a joint sport or social activity? Are there students or workers from other countries in your area who you could invite to introduce their countries and cultures? Doing only this is already undertaking a form of Cultural Exchange.

### **Activity idea**

Aim: Explore ideas of cultural stereotyping and appropriate clothing in different countries.

Method: organise a fancy dress evening where young people represent different countries through their clothing (don't forget to include Wales/UK). This will inevitably lead to cultural stereotyping and discussions around our views of different customs. You can also use this to explore what might be most appropriate and inappropriate forms of dress in different situations, particularly if the group is travelling abroad or may be going to a religious venue.

### **Media portrayal**

The media plays a huge role in a young person's understanding of the world around them, and the development of their own views. Young people need opportunities to try out interpreting and deciphering information in order to challenge and develop their own opinions so they do not simply absorb what the papers, tv, internet, radio tells them. This is as true for issues surrounding cultural awareness as for anything else. In an increasingly globalised world the ability to develop informed opinion and make choices becomes more important.





The UK media presents vastly differing views of other cultures and can provide a good vehicle for looking at different perspectives on or representations of the same issue. You could take a big news story and look at it from the different perspectives of how people are being portrayed, what impressions they give readers, what kind of language or terminology is being used. Does the local media report things differently to the national or international media?

Raising awareness of how views are influenced by the media is a really valuable exercise. How we 'receive' news, whether by searching for it through specific publications or by absorbing it more passively, it affects our views and opinions. Young people who grow up in households that buy a newspaper may have views which are consistent with it. Whichever one it is, there will equally usually be ongoing themes or threads in its reporting. In certain cases. In its reporting of certain people such as asylum seekers or migrant workers, the style can be very negative and inflammatory. These issues can be explored by the group by inviting people with first-hand knowledge to put a human face to the stories. The group can then take the opportunity to make up its own mind based on its own direct experience.

### **Activity idea**

Aim: Demonstrate the different ways in which the same story can be presented by different media.

Method: Carry out a survey of a major news story. Young people search in printed media, online and on tv for the same story and note the headlines or key elements in the reporting. Pick an issue that is likely to be contentious or polarised, such as immigration or asylum seekers in the UK. The young people will be amazed at how different the reporting can be, and the consequent influence on them as a group.

## Food

The one thing all cultures have in common is eating! Food and dietary preferences have a massive part to play in raising cultural awareness. It can also be one of the most challenging parts of a cultural exchange for young people and workers alike. It is also a fantastic vehicle through which to experience and appreciate differences. When carrying out an exchange in another country, giving some consideration to eating habits will be a vital part of the preparation. You can use different food cultures as a vehicle for exploring difference, bringing in local differences as well as more global ones.



Explore the importance or significance of food in different cultures, and the traditions attached to it, for example, a Japanese tea ceremony or typical US Thanksgiving dinner. We have food rituals too such as Harvest Festivals or Pancake Day. Does the group know what lies behind these traditions or why are we eat certain foods at these times?

If you are carrying out an exchange visit to another country it will pay for the group to work on the issue of food as part of its preparations. Having sufficient amounts of food (that one is prepared to eat) is vital to daily functioning – inadequate diet can create a lot of practical and emotional problems. An exchange visit is about taking young people out of their comfort zones but there must be sensitivity as to how far they can be pushed in this respect. Before the visit takes place, make sure you have discussed food arrangements with your partner group or host so you are equipped to support your young people in this respect.

The 'typical' UK diet is increasingly being seen as a poor one, with fast food eaten on the go becoming more the norm. Obesity is also a known, growing problem that we face as a society. Working with young people on food as part of a Cultural Exchange project can be part of a much wider initiative working on healthy living and basic skills and so so can play an important role in more than just the exchange activity. Your organisation may work on life skills in which case other colleagues may help with this part of your preparation.

One of the classic stereotypical images of the Mediterranean countries concerns food! Think of the great importance that food plays in the French, Italian, Greek lifestyles – long mealtimes, large groups eating together, several courses at each meal. This approach to food and eating places importance on the social aspects with people coming together to share their time over good food. While some might find this very appealing, others who are not accustomed to it or who are unaccustomed to being seen while they are eating may be quite intimidated.

Group members and their families will have different approaches to and experiences of eating which could be a divider. Food can, however, be great for developing social skills so give it a go. It will bring huge benefits if it is done sensitively and creatively and with some practice before joining the other group.

### **Activity idea**

Aim: Help the group feel comfortable with, and enjoy, sharing food (maybe strange food!) with each other and with new friends.

Method: organise a meal where everybody brings one dish (eg. it could be around a theme, or a country) to share with the group. The meal is then 'silent', so nobody is allowed to ask for something but should share the different plates and communicate in different ways, eg. to ask for the salt.

### **Money, wealth and consumerism**

A majority of young people growing up in today's society have more power as consumers than those of any generation before them. They are at the same time part of a more globalised world wherein many of the goods, products and services they are consuming could come from any part of the globe. Supporting them to understand and respond to their expectations, choices and responsibilities can be approached from different angles, but there are many ways of translating a potentially heavy subject like trade justice into perfectly manageable and fun activities.





When embarking on a youth exchange to another country you may encounter very different standards of living, in either direction, to those of the home community. Expect it! The chances are that your exchange is with another country in the developed world, so the differences will be marginal compared to the developing world. You could prepare for this by comparing different standards of living from very local to Wales-wide, UK-wide, European and globally giving consideration to what determines those standards.

The Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) website, [www.risc.org.uk](http://www.risc.org.uk), has some fantastic resources for introducing issues of trade justice with young people in really interactive, fun and enlightening ways. For example the **Choc-a-Lot** game (which will appeal to most young people and workers!) explores the global trade in cocoa, successfully translating pretty heavy-weight issues such as trade justice into digestible activities. **Growing Bananas**, also available on the RISC website, raises awareness of the issues faced by growers in developing countries and introduces the concept of Fairtrade.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are focused on actions which aim to tackle world poverty, in all its forms. This can be a useful vehicle through which to look at a wide range of issues such as perceptions of poverty where there are obvious links to media portrayals. These can be compared to issues of poverty within our own communities, the impacts of poverty, injustice and inequalities etc. Organisations such as Oxfam ([www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)) and Christian Aid ([www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)) are well represented across the country and have educational resources, materials and activities. This could seem a very heavy subject to introduce in an informal setting, but they have a multitude of interactive and enjoyable activities which can be really eye-opening and powerful tools.

Young people are becoming much more aware of and concerned about environmental issues than their peers in previous decades. Issues surrounding consumption of resources, raw materials and energy are inextricably linked to the environment and poverty. In our part of the world today we are used to a multitude of cheap goods being freely available, and affordable by a large majority. What are the consequences of this availability for those making t-shirts in Indonesia for just one pound or growing beans in Kenya for our dinner plates?

When travelling abroad find easy ways to convert local currency into pounds. This will be difficult for some in the group so equivalent amounts for £1, £5 and £10, at least, need to be easily converted. Underestimation of the value of euros is usual.

### **Activity idea**

Aim: Develop understanding in different currencies of the value of everyday items.

Method: make a list of different items such as a loaf of bread, pair of trainers, pint of milk, bar of chocolate etc. Compare the cost to your group locally and that of the country you are visiting. Or make a comparison with vastly different parts of the world. Compare their average incomes to make this worthwhile. Use [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com) to convert pounds into any world currency.

## Environmental awareness

Relationships between people and their environments can be hugely different in different parts of the world, and amongst different cultures. This is hardly surprising when we realise the dependence that many people have on the environment (for making a living, for their lifestyles, for food and shelter, etc.). Concern and care for the environment is inextricably linked to the creation of (more) sustainable futures for all of us. Young people in most countries have a keen awareness of environmental issues, albeit to differing degrees, that make it a great topic or vehicle for Cultural Exchange work.



The cultures of Native Americans or Aboriginal Australians can be a fascinating subject to explore with young people – both are rich with traditions, rituals, symbols and a deep respect for and relationship with nature. The beliefs and values of both these cultures, and many others, are completely interwoven with the environment.

Take a look at the relationship with and impact of nature in different parts of the world. In autumn 2010, the news was full of the catastrophic oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the equally disastrous floods in Pakistan, the 33 men rescued from a copper & gold mine in Chile. Any day of the year the environment in different parts of the world is in the news. A wealth of resources is available.

Focusing on the environment is a very good example of a topic/theme you could adopt which can also lead to a lot of individual and group activities, or behavioural changes. There are plenty of organisations that can help you set up an environmental initiative, for example, a community clean-up, a recycling project, an environmental audit of your centre, a waste reduction project. Young people are never short of ideas and motivation for this kind of activity.

When thinking about some form of residential project for the youth exchange, the environment is a great theme which incorporates visits, volunteering in the community, meeting local 'experts', carrying out surveys with local people, etc.

## **Informed choices**

The Youth Work Curriculum Statement for Wales (2007) states that Youth Work through its practice should, “recognise that citizenship encompasses responsibilities and rights as global as well as local and national citizens”. All activities which fall under the banner of Youth Exchanges & Cultural Experiences should aim to support young people to fulfil such responsibilities by providing them with opportunities to understand, appreciate and relate to global issues. Aspirations of global proportions!

At the same time, these aspirations are not beyond us. The world is in the here and now, we are a part of it, are influenced by it and have an impact on it. With some thought and preparation issues can be broken down into digestible portions.

To enable young people to be responsible, they need to be aware, informed and have knowledge to make good choices and decisions. They can only make choices if they know what the options are through exploring their meaning and possible consequences. Such understanding enables young people to feel empowered as a member of the world and not just part of an audience watching it.

## **7. Types of Youth Exchange Activity**

A Youth Exchange is simply one form or approach to a Cultural Exchange and vice versa. There are many ways through which you can work on a range of related issues which will enable young people to learn more about and appreciate the world of which they are a part. This handbook is intended to encourage and empower youth workers to feel motivated and confident to dip their toes in the water.

Successful Youth Exchanges are fantastic activities for workers and young people alike. The amount of ground that can be covered and personal development achieved in a relatively short space of time is incredible. Significant resources of funds, staff, preparation and time are necessary and they must be available to the group and it must be ready for such a project. If any of these are not available, the group may prefer to focus on a smaller scale cultural exchange or cultural awareness activity.

The following items can be useful as preparatory steps to include if you are planning a Youth Exchange, e.g. to another country. The learning the group gains, as suggested in the box on page 7, will be considerable. How this learning will be collected, reported and accredited, either formally or informally, will need to be agreed at the preparatory or planning stage.

### **Sessions at home**

All the elements of exchanges in section 6 are issues with which you can engage on a variety of levels and to different depths. You could fill every session of a weekly youth club for a year with an exploration of global citizenship and cultural exchange, or you could dip in and out according to the group's interests.

There is a countless number of activities and resources available online that you can use to explore these issues. The National Curriculum for schools now includes Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (EDSGC) and, as an underpinning approach rather than a subject on which young people are to be examined, support for its delivery incorporates very hands-on and experiential learning. This is great for more informal education as a majority of the resources are transferable. Equally, all of the Non Governmental Organisations (such as Christian Aid, Oxfam, Action Aid, etc.) involved in international development have created dynamic and imaginative education programmes.

All communities in Wales now include people from different cultural backgrounds, whether they have moved from different parts of the UK or are from further afield. In certain areas, this may even be a source of community tension: in such cases, confronting issues of difference and diversity can have even more meaning and purpose. Use ways to engage with different sections of your own community by inviting people to introduce their cultures, or to share some of their food. Organise a community event to raise awareness of the different backgrounds and cultures in which your young people are already living. You may well have different faith groups who have their own places of worship whose leaders could be invited along with some of their young people to do activities with your group.

There are organisations across Wales such as UNA Volunteering across the World ([www.unaexchange.org](http://www.unaexchange.org)), ICP Partneriaith ([www.icpwales.org](http://www.icpwales.org)), and Community Service Volunteers ([www.csv.org.uk](http://www.csv.org.uk)) that co-ordinate youth volunteering programmes which bring young people from other countries to work in Wales. One of the aims of such programmes is to facilitate and support cross-cultural communication and engagement so contact them to explore possible collaboration.

### **Day trips away from home**

If you plan to take your group away from home, even for a day, this will naturally require certain procedures and plans to be in place – please see Section 2 for more information and tips in this respect.

As mentioned in 7a), a good start might be to establish contact with others in your own community that represent different cultural perspectives to those of your group – places of worship, ethnic minority groups, workers from other countries, etc. They will probably be equally happy to bridge gaps and differences between young people and will welcome the opportunity to work with you to develop ideas and activities. You could organise visits to different places of worship try to work with local restaurants to organise food tastings.

You could try to build links with other youth groups in Wales and plan visits or joint projects. You could use a theme such as sport, volunteering or music for the groups to work together to explore their own ideas of identity. By just staying in Wales, there are distinct differences (and of course similarities!) between people in North, South, East & West Wales. People growing up and living in urban and rural Wales have very different perspectives and experiences. You could imagine a really interesting range of activities and exchanges between such groups, and it could be quite easy to keep the contact going after initial contact. Such initiatives need not cost a lot and funds such as the Millennium Charitable Trust, [www.millenniumstadiumtrust.co.uk](http://www.millenniumstadiumtrust.co.uk) will support themed youth exchanges within Wales. They can be organised at a manageable level for most groups, however small.

### **Residential exchanges in Wales/the UK**

Leading on from the idea of linking with groups in different parts of Wales, a residential project within the UK could be the next stage in your group's development. Such a project will involve most of the steps included in Section 8.

If we include the whole of Wales/the UK in this section, then there are plenty of opportunities for engaging with cultural diversity. You could, for example, bring huge benefits to your group by setting up a four-nations project with Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland, a themed project with young people from farming communities in Mid Wales and Scotland, or a project involving young people from BME communities in different parts of the UK. The possibilities are endless, and establishing contact should be relatively straightforward as the UK youth networks are more easily known. This would be a much easier step than a full (international) Youth Exchange – lower costs, no language problems (well, not so many!), the same currency and similar food, and probably carried out at a lower cost. This in turn could free you up to concentrate on the theme of your project.

## International Youth Exchanges

International Youth Exchanges are projects which bring together groups of young people from two or several, countries, providing them with opportunities to meet and engage with one another and learn about each other's countries and cultures, perhaps focussing on a theme. The intention of an International Youth Exchange is that it will have a reciprocal visit either straight after, which can be demanding, or up to several months later. Section 8 of this Handbook goes into the nuts & bolts of putting a Youth Exchange together.

The European **Youth in Action** programme exists to support the mobility of young people across Europe and, in certain cases, beyond. It has five 'Actions', all with funding and other resources available, and anyone interested in the wider theme of Cultural Exchange should check it out. Action 1.1 is specifically designed to support Youth Exchanges involving two or more partner groups in different countries and can provide a significant portion of the overall costs. In the UK the British Council is the national agency for the Youth in Action programme and is thus the first port of call for information on resources, funding, partner-finding, etc. You can find all the information at <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-ie-youth-exchange.htm>.

If your exchange project is with a country not included in the Youth in Action programme, you may be eligible for funding from the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC). As its name implies, CYEC works with countries that are members of the Commonwealth. It is "a youth development charity, working to enable young people to become active citizens through shared lives, developing friendships, exchanging ideas and working together". The CYEC website has loads of information, ideas and opportunities for global youth work and is well worth a visit – [www.cyec.org.uk](http://www.cyec.org.uk).

A Youth Exchange can work better and make co-operation and friendship easier to generate if it has a theme. This is where you can make the most imaginative headway on enabling understanding of difference and diversity. All of the elements outlined in section 6 above, plus more, affect young people wherever they are from and would make ideal themes for an Exchange. This is something you need to work out in the very earliest stages with your young people and partner group to ensure you are compatible and concerned about similar issues.

## European Voluntary Service

European Voluntary Service (EVS) is the second action of the Youth in Action programme mentioned above. It is designed to provide opportunities for young people (aged 18-30) to spend time volunteering in another country for up to one year. It is a fantastic programme which covers all the costs (travel, board/accommodation, personal allowance) for a young person and a majority for the host project.

Hosting an EVS volunteer in your project/centre could be a great way of building a long-term programme of cultural awareness into your ongoing work. Imagine what could be possible if a member of your team was a young person from another country. A lot of work is involved in this with huge potential rewards.



While the British Council is the UK national agency for the whole Youth in Action programme, including EVS, there are a number of organisations in Wales that provide co-ordinating roles for the hosting of volunteers in Wales, and sending of young people from Wales. ICP Partneriaeth ([www.icpwales.org](http://www.icpwales.org)), based in Lampeter, and UNA Exchange ([www.unaexchange.org](http://www.unaexchange.org)), based in Cardiff, both provide a role for the whole country and can be contacted for further information.

### **International Workcamps**

International Workcamps have been developed over almost 100 years, initially as a tool for peace and reconciliation in Europe following the First World War. Nowadays they are organised in more than 100 countries worldwide, they are not-for-profit and involve groups of young people from different countries coming together to carry out volunteering in a local community. Organisations in Wales such as UNA Exchange ([www.unaexchange.org](http://www.unaexchange.org)) provide a co-ordinating and supporting role for local groups across the country who host young volunteers to work on youth projects, environmental improvements, summer playschemes and community events.

Workcamps provide a great opportunity for your young people to engage with peers from other countries in their own community. They can provide a great platform for cultural exchange on different levels, and for young people to see themselves and their own community through the eyes of visitors. They can also provide inspiration to your young people to participate themselves, either in Wales or further afield.

There may already be Workcamps organised close to you that you could link up with, or you could consider hosting one as a group. Or why not partner up with another local organisation, (eg. Country Park or Communities First group), to set up a Workcamp that could be shared and therefore have a greater impact?

### **Living in an exchange partner's home**

By far the most potentially fulfilling method of undertaking a Youth Exchange is for two young people to visit and stay in each other's home. They get to know about family life, including their food, religion, possibly their schooling, their leisure, arts and sports. It offers a potential for lifelong friendships. It also offers the potential for disaster as the young people may not get on with each other or their families. However, with careful planning, there are more successes than failures.

The main thing to overcome is ensuring that all young people can take part. Not all have a home that can easily accommodate a young visitor. However, usually arrangements can be made even if it means some families take in two. The responsibility for the second young person must still remain with his or her real exchange partner and they need to be together as soon as possible each day.

If possible, one leader of a group needs to have access to transport, either driving it or having a leader from the partner group who will be the driver. This ensures that any problem can be dealt with swiftly. The sooner it is dealt with, the less likely it is to be a lasting one. A common misconception is that a CRB check is needed for people who take a young person on an exchange into their house. While care must always be taken to ensure safety of young visitors, a CRB check is not necessary.

## **8. Practical aspects of a Youth Exchange**

This section provides pointers towards some of the things you will need to consider in planning an activity or exchange. There are a lot of resources available, especially online, which provide comprehensive guidance, information and templates. References are made in this section to specific documents and links are provided where possible. We strongly encourage following these links to ensure you are best equipped for your proposed venture.

### **Planning & Preparation**

Formal planning needs to take place regardless of whether the visit is for an afternoon in a local park or a two-week residential abroad. Most organisations have detailed guidance on planning trips and visits, including undertaking risk assessments, which staff and volunteers must follow. You can also refer to various publications of the Department for Education ([www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)) on the Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits for further information. Your organisation must be satisfied that any visit has been planned effectively and that all risks are minimised before authorisation can take place.

### **Aims & Objectives**

Always have a clear purpose and plan to enable the group to get the most from the experience and to ensure that it is a safe and enjoyable one. Setting clear aims and objectives will help keep everyone motivated, set an appropriate structure, ensure that you match up the right environment and activity with the right young people, and prepare you with the necessary information to decide on the right staffing and resources, including funding requirements.

### **Funding**

There are many ways in which funding or advice for it can be obtained for cultural and Youth Exchange work. These include:

- The European Youth in Action Programme
- British Council
- The local Borough or County Council
- The local Community Council
- In relevant areas, the local Communities First Board
- Children in Need
- Arts or Sports Funds where relevant to the group's activity

### **Pre-visits**

Where possible it is always advisable to undertake a pre-visit check personally. When applying for funding this element should be considered and added into the application. When this is not feasible, information should be gathered from reliable sources and combined together with a risk assessment to make a decision. This will need to meet the requirements of your individual organisation. The information you



have should then be checked out on first arrival at the location to ensure that it is correct. Contingency plans need to be in place to take action should there be any major problems. A list of possible things to consider when undertaking a pre-visit check can be found in the Appendices.

### **Times & dates**

Many factors need to be taken into consideration when determining the times and dates of visits. These might include:

- Staff and young people's availability, e.g. do you take young people during school/college term time or during holidays?
- The need to fit in with the requirements of the host community;
- Any religious holidays and festivals;
- Costs and funding requirements;
- Weather factors, e.g. high summer in southern Europe or deep winter in northern Europe might be challenging for your group.

### **Documentation**

You should ensure you have completed the necessary paperwork required legally or by your organisation to obtain approval for the visit well in advance. In addition you will need to obtain and take with you the following paperwork as required:

- Travel tickets, passports and visas. A photocopy of all these should be carried separately from the originals;
- All documents relating to accommodation bookings if appropriate;
- Medical documents, such as European Health Information Cards (EHICs) and significant medical histories, for staff and young people;
- A copy of the organisation's required paperwork, eg. consent forms and approval form,;
- Insurance documents and the company's contact numbers;
- Emergency details for the location to be visited, eg. location of hospital and medical services;
- A copy of all of these should be kept by the home contact person.

### **Accommodation**

Good practice states that where possible the following should be adhered to on any residential visit:

- The immediate accommodation area should be exclusively for your group. However, where this is not possible the group should ideally have adjoining rooms with the staff rooms next to the young people, and there must be separate male and female sleeping/bathroom facilities for young people and staff.
- There should be at least one staff member of each sex for mixed groups where possible and there should be sufficient staff to ensure good security where there is no 24-hour reception to stop unauthorised visitors.

- When planning you should ensure that the accommodation meets Health & Safety regulations and the requirements of the group.
- A pre-visit would allow you to assess the accommodation prior to the visit and undertake a risk assessment.
- Upon arrival at the accommodation everyone should be made aware of the layout of the building and be familiar with the fire precautions/exits and the drill in case of fire. If possible carry out a fire drill as soon as possible after arrival at the accommodation.

## Activities

A detailed programme should be established with appropriate supervision at all times. All supervisory staff and young people should be aware of the intended programme, including the possibility that the planned activities may need to be changed if conditions or circumstances require it. The programme should be planned so that all young people can participate. If the activities have been chosen for the group then the young people should be capable of undertaking it, perhaps with some effort. Young people should be encouraged to undertake appropriate challenges during activities but not coerced where they have a genuine fear or objection. This should be discussed at the planning stages of the visit.

Leaders may wish to organise, or permit participation in, ancillary activities that are not central to the visit. If so then leaders must consider carefully the risk associated with such activities and supervise accordingly.

## Activity Providers

When considering what type of activities to engage in you will need to identify the appropriate Activity Provider; this may be an external provider or an internal member of staff. Things to consider when choosing a provider are:

- Is the Provider required to hold a licence for the activities they are providing and, if so, do they have a current valid licence? Licensed providers in the UK are not required to hold a license for all the activities that they offer, but you can find further information about this and any adventurous activity provider on the Adventurous Activities Licensing Authority website ([www.aala.org](http://www.aala.org)).
- International organisations may have a similar system - ask your host or the British Council.
- Not all Providers are required to hold a license: voluntary bodies and schools providing for their own members and pupils respectively are exempt.
- If you are proposing to use a non-licensed provider, the group leader should obtain written assurances:
  - that all risks have been assessed (you can ask for a copy of their risk assessment);
  - that they have the appropriate insurance (a copy of the insurance certificate would ensure that it is in place and up to date);

- that they have the appropriate safety procedures and first aid in place
- that their operating procedures meet the guidelines of the National Governing Body for the activity where this is appropriate.

If a member of staff is to organise, lead and instruct the young people then you should ensure that they are competent to do so. Many organisations have systems in place to assess such competence and maintain records of staff instructors. This can also be demonstrated by the staff member holding the relevant National Governing Body award if applicable. They should also have completed a risk assessment for the activity and have the necessary safety procedures and equipment in place.

### **Resources & Kit**

All parties should be equipped appropriately for the location, weather, and the relevant activity. Prior planning will ensure that you have the necessary clothing, equipment and kit for each stage of the programme. Activity Providers will supply equipment lists if requested and host communities will be able to advise on climate conditions and any equipment required for the visit. Session plans for any activities run by staff members will provide the basis for identifying the required resources.

## **Staffing**

Competent leadership is a key element in the quality and safety of any visit. Employees or volunteers who will lead visits or activities in environments for which approval is required must be confirmed as technically competent to lead by their organisation's senior officer.

### **Staff-young person ratio**

It is important to have an adequate ratio of competent staff to young people for any visit and this should be determined by the group composition, duration of the visit, nature of the activities, requirements of your organisation and the organisation to be visited, and the experience of the staff taking into account any special needs of the group members. You should also bear in mind and plan for the consequences of any staff becoming incapacitated.

### **Home Contact Person**

There must be a designated home contact person who has access to all documentation described previously, including direct access to parents or guardians. If s/he is not a senior officer of management committee member there must be direct 24 hour access to that person. S/he will be the person who a parent contacts if here is information to get to the group leader or the parent's child. The contact should not be directly to the group leader.

## **Nationality of staff & young people**

If a group includes young people or staff whose immigration status or entitlement to a British passport is in doubt, it is advisable to make early enquiries to the UK Border Agency ([www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk)) concerning the immigration rules and right of re-entry. Young people who are not nationals of any EU member state may need a visa to travel from the UK to another member state. They may also be required to use separate passport control channels from the rest of the group so this should be borne in mind when planning with relation to staffing and group composition.

## **Care Orders & Wards of Court**

If a young person is subject to a Care Order, foster parents will need to ensure that the Social Services Department consents to any proposed visit. If a young person is a Ward of Court, the appropriate senior officer within your organisation will need to seek advice (well in advance) from the Court in relation to trips and visits abroad.

## **Age of staff & young people**

The age of the young people will determine the legalities of certain activities such as drinking, smoking and entrance into bars and night clubs. You should include reference to these activities in a Code of Conduct (see later) prior to the visit, as it can be a contentious issue when away from home. You will also need to think about issues that may arise when mixing age groups (eg. 12 year olds with 17 year olds).

In terms of staffing you may need to consider discussing boundaries within your Code of Conduct in particular if any staff are of similar age to the young people participating.

## **Group composition**

Great consideration needs to be given to group composition to ensure the project achieves its Aims and Objectives. Things you may want to take into consideration are: age; sex; maturity of the young people to make the most of the experience; religion; ethnicity, etc. If you are working with the young people over a period of time you will have a greater understanding of each individual, and have formed a relationship with them that will allow you determine which young people would work most effectively together as a group for such an experience. However, there are occasions when it is possible to bring a group together for the first time to undertake a visit and find that they form great friendships and work extremely well together. As an experienced leader you will have an idea if the group could work well together. Group composition may be determined by the funding or by your host partner, eg. a female-only project or a project for black young males.

## **Special Needs**

The Equality Act (2010) gathers legislation from previous disability acts and places duties on organisations not to discriminate against disabled young people for reasons relating to any disabilities. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that all reasonably practicable effort has been made to include young people with disabilities

in educational visits. This must of course be balanced against the safety of the individual and other group members and a reasonable compromise sought. Any limitations or problems a young person may have should be taken into consideration in the planning stages. This may include the administering of medication, accessibility issues, staff training, capability of the young person to cope with the requirements of the visit, insurance details, transport arrangements, etc. Special attention should be given to appropriate supervision ratios and additional safety measure may need to be addressed.

All staff should have the opportunity to talk through any issues they may have to ensure that they can support the young person effectively and safely throughout the visit. This should be done at the early stages of the planning.

## **Health, Safety & Well Being**

Under the **Health & Safety at Work Act 1974** employers are responsible for the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. Employers are also under a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of anyone who may be affected by their activities. This includes participants in educational visits. Leaders have delegated responsibility for the supervision and conduct of a visit (overall responsibility lies with the employer) and must ensure that:

- They have obtained written approval in accordance with their organisation's policy;
- They and any accompanying adults have the level of competence and training to be able to lead and control the young people involved in the visit;
- They have planned and risk assessed the visit, any related activities and the group that are undertaking them, and are satisfied that everything can be managed appropriately;
- They are competent enough to carry out dynamic risk assessments while the visit is taking place and can stop or change activities should they consider any risk to the health and safety of the young people or accompanying staff to be unacceptable.

### **Insurance**

You must ensure, well before the group departs, that adequate insurance arrangements have been made for the travel, visit and any related activities. This may be done through your organisation, a travel agent, an insurance company, or the organisation to be visited. Check with your organisation to see what policies are already available prior to purchasing new insurance and, if purchasing a new policy, check to see that it is appropriate for the activities you will be undertaking. Insurance policies are legal documents - they will impose conditions and exclude certain activities so make certain you have the cover required.

### **EHIC (European Health Insurance Card)**

UK residents may be entitled to free medical treatment, or at a reduced cost, when temporarily visiting a European Union (EU) Country. To obtain treatment, each

young person and leader will need to take a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Information is available at your local Post Office or online at: [www.travelhealth.co.uk](http://www.travelhealth.co.uk).

It is advisable to have access to a contingency fund as sometimes treatment must be paid for in advance and money has to be claimed back later.

## **Risk Assessments**

Time at the beginning of the planning process needs to be given to undertaking a detailed list of all the risks associated with the experience. A pre-visit check will offer the ideal opportunity to identify hazards and risks associated with the journey, venues, and activities. You will also need to consider the individuals who make up the group, including the staff, and the risks associated with them, eg. behaviour, special needs, abilities, previous experiences.

Ensuring that visits/activities are appropriately risk assessed is the responsibility of the employer. However, to ensure that the risk assessment and safety measures are fully understood and implemented by those undertaking the visit/activities then it is good practice for the person leading the group to undertake the written risk assessment. But ultimately it is the employer who has legal responsibility for ensuring that the measures taken to ensure everyone's safety are suitable and sufficient. An example of a risk assessment can be found in the Appendices.

Due to the many variables associated with visits and activities, it is often necessary to undertake dynamic risk assessments (ie. on the spot). These involve leaders making decisions on situations that arise during the visit or activity, eg. adverse weather conditions, illness, cancellation of transport, etc. The ability to re-assess and manage changing risks while the visit is taking place is a key element of the competence for leaders of educational visits. Organisations should take this into consideration when planning and may need to train staff and/or volunteers appropriately.

Contingency plans should be in place to allow the educational aims to be achieved even if the original plans have to be abandoned for any reason. Leaders should never feel pressured to stick to original plans as this is when accidents can happen.

## **Emergency arrangements**

Leaders in charge of young people during any visit have a duty of care to ensure that the young people are safe and healthy. They also have a common law duty to act as a reasonably prudent parent would and should not hesitate to act in the case of an emergency. Emergency procedures are an essential part of planning a visit and the group leader must ensure that all members of the group know what action to take if there is a problem.

At least one member of staff shall be sufficiently competent and qualified at First Aid for the level of activity that the group is undertaking. This person should also be aware of the medication that any young person has to take on a regular basis and, in

the event of injury or illness, the medication that can be applied without the presence of a qualified medical person.

#### *Emergency Facilities Abroad*

All staff should know where the nearest British Embassy or Consulate is located and the telephone number.

#### *Register with British Council*

You can find the contact details of the British Council in any country by checking out their website [www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org).

#### *Dangers of War Torn Areas and political issues within countries*

Advice regarding travel in foreign countries that may be deemed a risk can be found via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk). This should be checked out in the planning stages and ongoing throughout the whole process right up to the time of departure, as things can change. You should also check this site if you are simply travelling through a particular country and not leaving the airport, as the airport may be at risk.

### **Child Protection**

For residential visits, all staff and volunteers must be CRB checked. Staff should avoid being alone, wherever possible, at any time with a young person and staffing should be structured to avoid this. Staff should remain vigilant at all times during the visit in their maintenance and protection of the young people. They should also be familiar with and adhere to child protection guidelines as stipulated by their organisation.

### **Code of Conduct**

It is good practice to discuss and agree a written Code of Conduct or Behaviour Contract with young people and their parents/carers prior to the visit. This should set out acceptable and unacceptable standards of behaviour and the actions/sanctions that may be taken as a result of a breach of this agreement, including the arrangements and costs for returning a young person home early as a result of bad behaviour. Involving young people in this is a useful element of group development.

### **Panic Cards**

You may find it good practice when travelling abroad to supply your young people with Panic Cards. These usually state that this person is lost and needs help. They can contain information about where you are staying, the group leaders contact details, and any other information you think may be useful in such a situation. These should obviously be in the language of the country that you are visiting!

### **ID Cards**

When travelling abroad it is always advisable to carry some form of identification with you at all times, eg. passport or ID card. This may be required just to prove age in certain establishments, but in many countries is a legal requirement to prove your

identity. Always check the legalities of the country you are visiting before departing the UK.

## **Medical**

### *Vaccines & Inoculations*

If in doubt as to whether any vaccination is required, consult a GP at least four months prior to your visit, as many inoculations need to be administered several weeks in advance of arrival in the country.

### *Medication*

Ensure that all staff and young people who require any form of medication take with them sufficient supplies to last the duration of the trip and also take extra supplies in case of delays when returning home. In some foreign countries it is possible for you to have your home GP dispatch prescriptions to your nearest pharmacy but it is advisable to check this facility out prior to your trip.

### *Alcohol, Drugs & Smoking*

As part of the planning process for an educational visit, the visit leader should carefully consider issues connected with medicine use and substance misuse. It is good practice to agree rules and sanctions relating to drug issues where appropriate and to include this in the Code of Conduct. Issues to consider include young people and adult:

- use of medicines;
- use of tobacco;
- consumption of alcohol;
- use of drugs which are illegal in the UK and abroad.

## **Food & drink**

Food can become an issue in many countries, as young people (and adults!) can be reluctant to try the unfamiliar. This is something that will need to be discussed during planning as the main purpose of the visit is to experience different cultures which includes the food. However, to avoid young people suffering through inadequate nutrition for the duration it may be necessary to source alternative food that may be more acceptable to the young people. You may also need to take into consideration the needs of vegetarians or those whose diet is affected by religious beliefs and those with food allergies or intolerances.

Be vigilant of the young people in your care and ensure that they are taking in sufficient water/fluids. If water is not readily available there is a risk that young people will suffer from dehydration. Always err on the side of caution and drink bottled water in foreign countries and you may want to avoid food such as salads that have been washed in tap water.

## **Toilet issues**

This can be a major health problem and is something that should be discussed with the group and individuals well in advance of the planned visit, as many young people have problems with using any toilets other than their own. This issue can be made



worse by the differences in toilet facilities throughout the world. Many young people will hide the issue by not drinking or eating during the visit, or drinking very little, which can have a detrimental effect on their health.

## **Travel, transport & finance**

The group leader must give careful thought to planning transport and must follow their organisations policies. The main factors to consider when planning are:

- Safety and supervision while on any form of transport. Young people should be made aware of the dangers and be clear about what to do in case of an emergency.
- The competence and training of the people who will be driving any proposed vehicle(s), and whether they hold the necessary licence to drive such a vehicle. This may be a mini bus or coach that is organised by yourself or a tour operator. Thought should also be given to the journey conditions, traffic, weather and contingency plans should there be any emergencies or breakdowns.
- When booking any form of transport, leaders should arrange for seats to be booked well in advance so that the group can be seated together. This will allow for appropriate supervision and management of the group.

Further information on travel and transport can be found in the Department for Education document “Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits”

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/h/hspv2.pdf>

### **Advice & Information**

This will depend on your destination, mode of transport and means of organising the visit. Information can be obtained from your host country, your tour operator and the airline, ferry or coach company that you are using, along with tourist information offices, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) and the government website [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).

### **Luggage**

Details of size, shape and weight of luggage you may carry on particular transport can be obtained from the transport provider. Always ensure you are aware of what you can and can't carry within your luggage on particular forms of transport prior to departure. Failure to adhere to luggage regulations can result in excess charges and possible loss of items.

### **Guides & Maps**

These can be obtained from high street book stores or from specialist retailers for most countries. Lonely Planet produce extensive guides for most countries that should give you as much information as you require. In many countries street maps of the local towns and cities can be obtained free at tourist information offices.

Having some prior knowledge of the country before the visit can contribute to a smoother running experience for all concerned.

## **Finances**

Financial planning needs to be a priority in the early stages of organisation in order to give the young people time to raise the funds if they are required to make any contribution towards the visit. Some funding streams will pay the 100% cost of the visit while others will require the organisation or individuals to contribute anything from 30% to 50% towards the overall costs. Consider identifying additional funding for those young people who may need support to ensure they have equal opportunity to participate in the same activities as those from more financially secure backgrounds.

Ensure that money is changed into the correct currency for the country you are visiting. Some countries may require you to convert your money into its currency prior to arriving but not allow you to take home any which is left over (ie. you have to convert any remaining currency before you leave). If taking larger quantities of cash it may be advisable to take a combination of cash and travellers cheques. You should ensure that you have some money set aside for emergencies in both your own and the host country's currency.

## **Cultural considerations**

### **Language**

It is advisable that at least one of the staff members within the group speaks and reads the language of the country to be visited. If this is not feasible then it is strongly recommended that they at least learn enough of the language to hold a basic conversation and what to say in case of an emergency, or have access to a local representative who is bilingual and can speak on their behalf. It is also advisable that young people have a basic knowledge of the local language before the visit, which could be learnt as part of the planning and preparation for the visit.

### **Cultural differences**

The group leader should bear in mind that the main reason for the cultural visit is to explore cultural differences. Be they within your own group or those of a group from a different country, consideration should be made for those differences.

### **Gender & sexuality**

Some countries have different views on equality and the segregation of the sexes in communal areas. This will need to be taken into consideration when planning in terms of staffing, the understanding of such issues by the young people, and even the dress code of any females participating in the visit. Advice should be sought from your host country, the British Council, and/or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. There may be a need for additional staffing of a certain gender to accommodate the cultural needs of certain young people within your group.

Although Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual lifestyles are now more acceptable within our society this is not the case in some countries and communities. This should be taken into consideration when planning a visit and should be discussed with the young people.

## **Religion**

In many countries religion forms a major role within people's lives and this needs to be taken into consideration when undertaking cultural visits. Members of your own group may be practising members of a religion that needs considering and would need to be accommodated within the visit. There are many aspects of religious practice that may be overlooked when planning, eg. the need to wash hands and feet prior to eating or the need to have access to certain facilities for religious prayer at certain times of the day.

## **Knowledge of own identity**

Before embarking on cultural exchanges with foreign countries is it advisable to get to know your own culture and that of your young people. This can be done through engaging in localised activities, exploration and research. Identifying and gaining knowledge of your own culture can enhance the experience of a cultural visit.

## **Gifts for your Hosts**

It is custom within many countries to take gifts for your hosts when visiting another country. It can enhance the visit if you offer gifts that have some meaning within your own culture or are representative of the area from which you come.

## **Communication**

Always maintain good lines of communication between all parties concerned to ensure smooth running of the visit being planned.

### *Links with host community*

Due to modern technologies it has never been easier to communicate with people from all over the world. As part of the preparation process, try to engage the whole group in the communication process. The leader should communicate regularly with the host partner to discuss and inform on issues relating to the visit to ensure that everyone is clear on what is to take place and to try to pre-empt any problems that could arise.

### *Internet/WIFI/Phone access*

Mobile phones can provide a useful link between young people and their parents but can also create difficulties if misused. Clear instructions should be given to young people if the decision is taken for them to take phones; this could be included in the Code of Conduct. The same applies to the use of email and social network site such as Facebook. However, internet sites can be a great communication tool for discussions with the host country prior to and following the visit.

### *Communication with group/individuals*

The whole group should be part of the planning process, which will ensure that they have all the necessary information and are clear about what they are taking part in. Individuals should be clear about their role within the group and the visit as a whole. During the planning stages there should be opportunities for the group to ask questions and discuss the visit, and any decisions they are not happy with.

### *Communication with parents/guardians*

An effective, two-way communication process between your organisation and parents/guardians is important for all visits. Effective communication will ensure that parents/carers are made aware of the purpose and nature of the visit and will ensure that parents/carers inform you about any particular needs and issues of their child relevant to the visit. Information for parents/guardians should be given as far in advance of the visit as is possible and they should be invited in to discuss the visit so as to enable them to ask questions and clarify any details required. During the visit there should be a designated person that parents/guardians can contact in the event of any home emergencies or if there are any incidents during the visit or the group is late arriving home. Contact with the group leader by parents should be through this person and not direct to the group leader.

## 9 After the Youth Exchange or Cultural Experience

Having completed the cultural exchange or experience things will have changed both at home and, more importantly, in each person who took part. If the activity was well planned and delivered then the thoughts, perceptions and/or status quo will have changed and how the participants view things will be different. For some this may be slight and for others it may be very significant.

### Learning

The young people will also need to become aware of the learning they have gained. As with all youth work, the process of a Youth Exchange will have established or affirmed what has been learned. Learning is a circuitous process and going back to the box on page 7, Learning Outcomes shows the learning that could have been gained from the exchange or experience. Give the young people the opportunity to describe for themselves what they think they have gained before using this as a checklist. Each person in the group will have learned differently and should be recorded as such. For some there will be benefit in accrediting the learning through informal, locally derived certification. If formal accreditation is more appropriate, the method of reporting this will have been agreed at the planning stage.

It is important to continue dialogue on a number of levels, and below is an EASY way to do this.

**E**valuate  
**A**ppreciate  
**S**hare  
**Y**our future

### Evaluate

Evaluation of the whole process is vital to inform future activities and ensure that all lessons are learned. This isn't simply about looking at what went wrong, which is in itself important so that the same things don't happen next time. By listening to the young people, staff, volunteers and exchange partners you will be able to assess the planning, preparation, practicalities, and pitfalls. Evaluation should be a positive process by which we learn, grow and develop to make things even better for others.

### Appreciate

Encourage the young people to keep talking about the experience, considering how life and living is better or worse in the situations they have experienced, including their own communities or homes. As we experience new things and the situations other communities and individuals live in that we come to appreciate different things. In the western world many people focus on wealth as a source of satisfaction and happiness, but a cultural experience can often change our view of the world and those who live in it.

## **Share**

Create or encourage opportunities for those who took part in the activity to share their experience with other young people and the wider community. Be creative in sharing by using the media, art, drama, music, dance etc., recognising that some young people will find it very challenging to simply stand before a group of people and talk. Make it clear from the outset that emotions are personal and real and should never be joked about or dismissed, and work hard to create a supportive atmosphere that allows emotions to be expressed where necessary.

## **Your Future**

Significant experiences will inevitably challenge the way we usually live and operate. It is, however, easy sometimes to fall quickly back into doing what we have always done. Spend time exploring with the participants of the exchange or experience what, if anything, they will do differently as a result of the activity. Some may have grand ideas of how they will change the world and this passion can be harnessed through a number of channels. Others may feel helpless to do anything, or able to do relatively little, and it is important that youth workers don't impose their own values and beliefs on a young person. It is right to appropriately challenge in a environment of support and encouragement for the benefit of the individual and the wider context.

The lives of many young people, volunteers and staff have been changed as a result of cultural experiences, leading to positive change for individuals and communities who are caught in poverty, war or a lack of social justice. By undertaking activities outlined in this handbook, be prepared for real and exciting challenges.