

DCSF guidance on new exchange regulations

In response to ALL enquiries, the DCSF has issued a statement and further information on the new legislation which applies to anyone hosting a child under 18 in their home as part of an exchange visit or any other activity.

DCSF guidance on exchanges and visits

"From October 2009, anyone who provides care and accommodation for children under 18 will be engaging in regulated activity and will need to be registered with the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). It will be the responsibility of the exchange's organising body to check that host families are ISA registered and it will be a criminal offence for anyone to engage in regulated activity of this kind, if they are not registered with the ISA or are barred from it.

It may encourage you to know that for the vast majority (estimated over 90%) of people with no known police or criminal background information held, registering with the ISA could take as little as 7 days. Also, although there is a registration fee for those involved in paid regulated activity, because host families for the type of school exchange you are referring to are unpaid, they are classed as volunteers, and will therefore be able to register with the ISA scheme free of charge.

Friends and relations of the host family who may visit, or be visited by, the host family and the exchange student, do not need to be ISA registered or CRB checked. Neither is there a requirement for members of the host family under 16 to be CRB checked or ISA registered.

For more information on the ISA scheme, please visit www.isa-gov.org

Every time new guidance is introduced that affects host families we do get a small number of people voicing their concerns that it will be the end of exchanges - but this hasn't been the case. We recognise that the number of exchanges staying with host families may have reduced over the years for a variety of reasons e.g. foreign travel is now much more widespread, increased access to the internet etc. At the same time, other types of educational visits have become more popular, with groups staying in hotels or hostels.

Regarding what checks need to be made when English children go on exchange trips abroad, you may like to download 'Health and Safety of Pupils on Educational Visits' (HSPV 2) from [Teachernet](http://www.teachernet.org.uk) It is a good source of information and guidance for anyone arranging international school visits, and provides advice on the vetting of host families abroad (Chapter 9, paragraphs 238/9):

"Exchange or home stay visits can be arranged through agencies, in which case the agency should have some responsibility for vetting the host families. Group leaders making their own arrangements need to be clear about procedures in the relevant country for vetting the suitability of host families including criminal background checks insofar as these are available. If the host school or placing agency does not have appropriate measures in place for carrying out checks to ensure the health, safety and welfare of exchange or home stay pupils, the group leader should seek further assurances and/or reconsider whether the visit should take place."

This places responsibility with the group leader to check with the arranging agency (if there is one) or the host school."

'We are grateful to ALL for their permission to reproduce this from their website and warmly recommend the ALL membership for schools'

Nick Mair June 2009