



National
Guidance

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Hiring a Coach

The mode of transport for a visit should be chosen to complement the aims of the visit as well as to fit within the practical constraints of time and itinerary. One option is to hire a coach and this document provides guidance on the selection of a suitable provider.

You can find further guidance in documents 4.5a '*Transport - general considerations*' and 4.5d '*Seat belts and child restraints*'

Safe coach travel

There are four key safety factors when using hired coaches:

- The driver
- The coach and equipment
- The company
- The route or itinerary

Establishments can address some of these in planning, and when selecting the coach provider. However, others will require the ongoing monitoring and involvement of the Visit Leader.

Selecting a provider

Choosing one coach company from another may seem a difficult task for an establishment or Visit Leader with no specialist transport knowledge. However, the following are ways of providing some assurance of suitability.

- Does your establishment have an existing, satisfactory relationship with a provider? Do not underestimate intuition – if your establishment has used a provider before and always felt safe, listened to and well cared for then this is a good reason to use them again.
- Can the operator cope with any special needs your group may have?
- Are the seat belts appropriate for your group and is there, if necessary, appropriate access and securing facilities for a wheelchair?
- Where a provider has a fleet of coaches of varying ages and standards, confirm the specific standard or vehicle you require.
- Does your employer have an approved list?

- Ensure the chosen coach company will not subcontract to another company without your agreement.
- Do not select on price but on value. Price should only become a factor when deciding between very similar or identical offers.

Some research may include:

- Ask for copies of:
 - Current Coach Operators Licence – this will show how many vehicles the provider can operate at any one time and whether they are licensed only for use in the UK or for international travel. Each coach must carry a licence disk on the windscreen when in use.
 - Operator’s Vehicle, Public Liability and Employer’s Liability Insurances.
- Ask for confirmation that:
 - Drivers are correctly licensed and have DBS checks.
 - The provider has a specific health and safety risk assessment for group travel with young people.
 - Drivers have received training to operate with groups of young people.
 - Drivers have an emergency procedure to follow.
 - There is a 24/7 helpline for the duration of your journey.
 - Coaches are equipped with basic safety equipment (first aid and functioning torches).
 - Vehicles undergo four weekly safety checks.
- If travelling abroad, confirm that the driver is experienced:
 - In international driving and the countries to be visited.
 - In driving a coach in all the expected conditions. Examples might be mountain roads and fitting and using snow chains.
- Check if the provider has any external accreditation or audit - e.g. CoachMarque, Guild of British Coach Operators, BUSK Benchmark, Road Operators Safety Council (ROSCO) ‘Safe Driver Awards’, Freight Transport Association (FTA) audits or inspections. These can be useful indicators of a professional approach to safety standards.
- Check reviews from previous customers. Which other establishments use the company and what has their experience been?
- Ask for a copy of the provider’s current Operator Compliance Risk Score (OCRS). The company can obtain this from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA). The score is based on data from vehicle tests and roadside inspections collected over a three-year rolling period. The scores are colour coded red (highest risk), amber or green (lowest risk).
- Ask the provider to confirm the first time pass rate in their vehicles’ annual tests (they can provide this information from DVSA’s online system). In 2014-15 the annual first time pass rate for public service vehicles was 83.5% and you should be looking for something better than this.
- Question the operator about back up. What support is available should the coach allocated to you be unserviceable or unacceptable on the day, or you have an incident on the journey.
- How old are the coaches – are they compliant with UN ECE regulation 66 regarding the strength of the coach roof?

- Is it possible to visit the provider's depot, look at their coach fleet and get a feel for how they do things? If so are they open to let you look at their records of vehicle safety checks and audits?

Once a provider is selected

Having selected a suitable provider, it is good practice to liaise with them over the following:

- Pick up and drop off points.
- Choice of route and timings.
- Planned stops.
- How any special needs will be met.
- The respective responsibilities of the driver and the leadership team.
- Expected behaviour standards and coach 'rules'.

On the day of the visit

Before departure the Visit Leader should:

- Introduce themselves to the driver(s) and check that the driver is aware of and happy with previously agreed plans in terms of routes, stops, timings etc.
- Check the coach for cleanliness.
- Check the location of emergency exits and that they are clear and clearly signed (these may include rear door, windows and roof hatches).
- Check the location of any emergency equipment.
- Ensure Leaders are appropriately positioned around the coach, specifically adjacent to emergency exits.

Longer journeys and overnight travel

When planning the visit, you should consider the advisability of overnight travel - it should not be undertaken simply to reduce visit costs. Your decision should take into account fatigue, probable weather conditions, traffic density etc. Where you consider an overnight journey to be necessary, you should agree with the operator what will be required in order to provide suitable rest arrangements and facilities for the driver(s) during the previous day. You should also consider whether it would be prudent to monitor drivers during the overnight part of the journey, especially if it involves long, tedious motorway sections.

