

Preparing for EU Departure – Visits after March 29 2019

Over the recent months the Brexit debate has continued to dominate for obvious reasons, and we are now receiving requests for advice from schools regarding travel and school visits to the EU after departure, and particularly in the event of no agreement between the UK and EU.

As things stand, the UK is set to leave the European Union on 29th March 2019 but with the detailed outcome, at this stage, still unknown.

However, the Government have started to release a series of briefing documents which at least raise awareness of the potential issues. Below we have highlighted some of the more 'factual' based advice that is available.

Passports: guidance is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/passport-rules-for-travel-to-europe-after-brex...> This suggests that passports will still be immediately useable as long as they have at least 6 months remaining before their expiry date. We would recommend that schools inform parents to check their children's passports, and to apply now for renewal if there would be less than 6 months left on a passport.

Group Passports: It is now confirmed that the Collective Passport service will continue as normal. It is always recommended before you apply to check the website www.gov.uk follow the link for Collective (group) passports, for any updates or changes to the service or procedures.

Please also see the following link for adults and children using their own individual passports www.gov.uk/guidance/passport-rules-for-travel-to-europe-after-brex...

British Council List of Travellers: This is the documentation you currently use if you have a child enrolled at school who is a non-EU passport holder to enable them to travel within the Schengen Area Agreement. For example, a Nigerian, or Syrian child, with no UK or other EU passport, who is formally enrolled at your school can travel on their own passport. This is likely to come to an end, at least in the short /medium term in the event of 'no deal'.

Driving: If school staff are likely to drive using their own licence, then this will not be affected if there is agreement. If there is no agreement, then UK Licences may no longer be valid. The government have issued guidance at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/no-deal-driving-in-the-eu> which explains what staff will need to have in order to drive in the EU, post departure. This may require buying an International driving Permit (IDP).

Travel: There are some suggestions that even after an initial 'no deal' departure, that flights will generally be unaffected as most airlines do have European business centres. That does not necessarily apply to all, so if you are flying soon after March 29, you should check and confirm any potential issues with your carrier.

There is, however, the potential for coach traffic to be impacted. Delays at Channel ports are forecast in the event of 'no deal'. More significantly, School travel Forum (STF) travel companies are getting indications that ferry carriers may be required to prioritise freight transport over passenger transport, which could see significant delay or even cancellation for coaches. In the event that a school visit fails to happen because of such a situation, it is unclear whether travel insurance will cover such costs. Schools are advised to contact their travel provider in advance to determine what contingencies the company has in place in such an eventuality.

Beyond that, there is no real information or clarity concerning other potential issues – flights, coach transport, travel delays at ports, etc. However, it is understood that some airlines (Jet2, Thomas Cook and others) are now re-writing their cancellation policies to exclude pay-outs where flights are delayed or cancelled due to “the inability of airlines to operate as a result of the UK’s decision to leave the EU”.

Travel Insurance: School travel policies currently in place should be unaffected, *although EHIC cards are likely to become invalid*. As most insurance policies are renewed on April 1st, schools providing their own Insurance should contact their insurance companies to confirm arrangements and policies post policy renewal. Policy costs may rise. Details of the HCC Insurance scheme will be unlikely to be available until early 2019 at the earliest.

Communications: It is unclear whether roaming charges for mobile phone use in the EU will change. The suggestion is that it may well end, although some companies (EG: Three) are *currently* saying they have no plans to re-introduce roaming charges. However, we would recommend that prior to departure, you check with your own provider as to whether there will be network communication issues for the phones you carry. In an Emergency situation abroad, you need to be confident that communication with your Base Contacts or ourselves are possible. Equally, do warn parents and children to check for them-selves, in case they start to rack up significant charges for data and call use whilst abroad.

We would recommend that schools planning visits to the EU just before and immediately following March 29 keep in touch with the Government’s preparation website at <https://www.gov.uk/government/brexit> where you can sign up for notifications as new information is released.

Where you are working with a travel provider, ensure you remain in touch with them as events unfold over the coming months.

Where possible, we would advise schools planning visits after March 29 to do so in conjunction with an STF accredited travel provider, as this will give you greater support and financial protection in the event of significant issues post departure.

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