

# Staff Handbook

## Chapter 15

# Overseas Travel and Subsistence

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# Staff Handbook

## Chapter 15

# Overseas Travel and Subsistence

### OFFICIAL SHORT-TERM VISITS ABROAD ON SUBSISTENCE TERMS

#### Scope of rules

15000 These paragraphs set out the rules governing short term visits (not exceeding 4 months) outside the United Kingdom on subsistence terms. The rules are intended to provide for reimbursement of extra expenses incurred in carrying out official duties. For more information on overseas visits, please refer to the [Overseas Travel](#) page on e-Connect.

15001 The administration and budgetary control of visits are matters for Country Directors, FR Chief Executive and GB and Shared Services Directors. Guidance on the application and approval procedures for overseas visits is provided in the International Policy Guidance Note - Official Visits Overseas by Forestry Commission Staff, available on eConnect.

#### Passports and Visas

15002 People going abroad on official duty must be in possession of a valid passport. Check that the expiry date of your passport complies with the requirements of the country you are visiting. Some countries require the passport to be valid for 6 months after the date of exit, in others the requirements may be a year or more. When the official visit overseas has been approved, anyone who does not hold a current passport can reclaim the fees involved by completing a T&S claim.

15003 You should check with the travel agent or the Foreign & Commonwealth Office website to see if a visa is required for the particular countries to, or through, which you are travelling.

#### Requirement to Notify International Policy

15004 It is a formal requirement throughout the Forestry Commission that International Policy, Silvan House, be notified of all approvals or cancellations of visits. This allows them to notify embassies of visits where necessary to ensure they are aware in advance of the likelihood of your presence in other countries or involvement with international organisations. Notification to International Policy can be made by forwarding a copy of the Request for Approval of an Official Visit Overseas (link at paragraph 15000 above).

15005 This requirement will apply equally where a visit involves no cost to the FC (e.g. contract with ODA or DTI or expenses paid by host country organisation) or when it is in pursuit of a possible contract (e.g. for research or consultancy work).

#### Commission Charges on Travellers Cheques

15006 You should avoid carrying large sums of sterling and foreign currency on overseas visits. Wherever possible, use traveller's cheques or credit cards. The FC will reimburse commission charges for foreign currency, traveller's cheques, Eurocheques and any similar charges reasonably incurred in obtaining local currency, with a receipt. Any losses due to variations in exchange rates when returning unused foreign currency may also be reimbursed.

#### Air Travel – Overseas

15007 Air travel is regarded as the appropriate method of travel for all overseas visits taking account of official time which would otherwise be lost, travel expenses, subsistence and other costs. The objective in booking flights should be value for money, as with any other Government purchase. The class of ticket that

you can use will depend on the overall cost, relative convenience and duration of the flight. There is no 'right' to a higher standard of ticket. The following table sets out the general approach expected, but it is the responsibility of you, your line manager and cost centre budget holder to ensure that the most appropriate class of ticket is used. You should ask for approval in advance if you plan to use a higher class of ticket.

Duration of Flight	Class of Ticket
Up to 2.5 Hours	Economy
Over 2.5 Hours	Business/Club

15008 Airline 'Club Cards' allow regular travellers to accrue 'air miles'. **These must not be used for personal travel for either you or your family and anyone who does so will be subject to disciplinary action.** However, once sufficient air miles have accrued to cover the cost of a full fare they can be used for Commission business travel.

### Rail Travel – Overseas

15009 The class of rail travel overseas is as follows:

Pay Band 4 and above	1st Class
Pay Band 5 and below	2 <sup>nd</sup> /Tourist Class

You can use first class on routes where the second class or tourist accommodation is substandard or to avoid sharing accommodation.

### Travel by Sea

15010 The class of sea travel to which you are entitled is the same as for rail travel abroad. You may travel in a class higher than your entitlement when it is necessary to travel with another member of staff who is entitled to a higher class of travel, in order to discuss or deal with official business.

### Hovercraft

15011 Hovercraft may be used where this is the most efficient and economic method of travel.

## SUBSISTENCE OVERSEAS

### General

15012 The rules for payment of overseas subsistence allowances for tours of duty overseas not exceeding 4 months differ from the rules for payment of subsistence allowances in the UK. The Foreign & Commonwealth Office supply the subsistence rates used. Rates vary depending on the location visited and the type of accommodation. You should contact your Human Resources contact in Silvan House to obtain up to date rates.

### Rates

15013 The rates provided by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office when staying in hotel accommodation are:

<b>Named Hotel Rate</b>	An actual room charge (normally including breakfast) is provided if the hotel is booked and paid in advance. This is also the <b>upper limit</b> when claiming 'actual' hotel costs. You should only book accommodation above this limit if you are unable to find suitable accommodation within the limit.
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<b>Elsewhere Rate</b>	If you don't stay in a FCO named hotel or stay in a different area of the country the 'elsewhere' rate for a hotel room is given which will normally be actuals plus a small daily allowance (home to office element). See also <b>upper limit</b> above.
<b>24 Hour Rate</b>	Includes the cost of the hotel and the residual rate (see below). The hotel element is an upper limit and actual costs should be claimed if these are lower. The residual element is a flat rate allowance and should be claimed in full provided meals weren't provided free.
<b>Residual Rate</b>	Is the flat rate allowance given for the person's meals. It consists of lunch, dinner, 2 extra teas/coffees, hotel to office element and breakfast (where breakfast is not included in the room rate).
<b>10 Hour Rate</b>	Flat rate allowance consisting of lunch, dinner and 2 extra teas/coffees.
<b>5 Hour Rate</b>	Flat rate allowance consisting of lunch and 1 extra tea/coffee.

15014 Rates are provided in the currency of the country visited and should be converted when a claim is submitted. Exchange rates can be obtained from local banks or through currency converters on the Internet.

15015 On overnight journeys, the appropriate rate is determined by where you are at midnight local time. At sea, the country to which you are travelling determines the appropriate rate.

15016 If at any time you incur expenditure substantially higher than the 24 Hour Rate, reimbursement may be made on the basis of actual expenditure on production of satisfactory evidence that it would not have been possible to keep expenditure in line with the rate. Actual reimbursement should cover only those items for which provision is made in the 24 Hour Rate.

15017 The overseas rates are payable when you arrive in the destination overseas (e.g. when you touch down at the airport) and end when you leave the overseas destination (e.g. on take off). Any T&S expenditure incurred outwith this period should be claimed using the normal UK T&S rates (see Staff Notice 16).

### **Incidental Expenses Allowance**

15018 You are also entitled to an allowance for incidental expenses for each night that you are away from home overseas. This is a flat rate allowance intended for sundry items such as telephone calls home, newspapers, laundry etc and no receipts are required. The rate payable is the same as the UK Incidental Expenses Allowance (see Staff Notice 16, available on eConnect).

### **Staying With Family or Friends**

15019 If you choose to stay with family or friends you can claim the UK Non-commercial Accommodation flat rate (see Staff Notice 16 for the current rate) which covers meals as well as any personal incidental costs over a 24 hour period. The Incidental Expenses Allowance cannot be claimed with this rate.

### **Submitting Overseas Claims**

15020 You may apply for a temporary advance, on a travel claim, to meet the expected travel and subsistence costs or where overseas registration/participation is required in advance.

15021 Overseas claims should be submitted on a travel claim which should itemise all expenditure from a single visit and should indicate those items (e.g. registration, participation fees) which have been paid directly and/or in advance.

### **European Community Meetings – Travel Expenses**

15022 The EC usually refunds some of the travel expenses incurred, and on occasion, subsistence. Further details on the procedures involved are provided in the International Policy Guidance Note available on eConnect.

### **Clothing Requirements**

15023 If you have to travel overseas on official business to a location where special clothing not normally worn in the UK is required, you are entitled to reimbursement of the actual costs. You should obtain prior approval for the purchase from the person who has approved the visit.

### **Annual Leave during Overseas Visits**

15024 Subject to the prior approval of your line manager there is no objection to you taking annual leave before, during or after an official visit overseas. Care should be taken that reimbursement of costs are limited only to those strictly necessary for your official visit. All additional costs must be met by you and you should consider the need for insurance at your own expense as you will not be covered by the normal Civil Service rules during the period of annual leave.

15025 -15035 Unallocated

## **HEALTH MATTERS**

### **Advice Prior to Travel**

15036 When you are planning travel outwith Europe or to remote or unusual locations you are advised to seek advice from your GP regarding medical requirements for travel to that country. The [Department of Health website](#) also provides up to date healthcare advice for travellers. The cost of any treatment, vaccinations/medications etc should be reclaimed on a travel claim or paid using a GPC card.

### **Risk Assessment**

15037 You should refer to the FC [risk assessment](#) for overseas visits when planning your travel. This includes checking with the FCO prior to a visit, having a note of the local British Embassy and good practical advice on issues such as security.

### **Medical Cover**

15038 If you are incapacitated during a visit abroad you will receive sick pay under the normal Civil Service rules.

15039 You should ensure that you have sufficient and appropriate medical cover when travelling abroad on official duty (see paragraph 15043 regarding personal travel insurance). This should include the cost of the medical emergency service, dental treatment and travel costs to get back to the UK. Links to a number of travel insurers are provided on the HR eConnect site.

15040 For visits to a country in the European Economic Area (the European Economic Area consist of members states of the European Union plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) for less than 12 months you must take a valid E111. Medical treatment is given on the same terms and conditions as apply to the insured people of that country, which may well be of a standard below that of the NHS as may be other associated provisions. The E111 can be obtained from a Post Office inside the booklet "Health Advice for Travellers". The form must be stamped and signed by the Post Office to be valid and you are advised to keep a photocopy with your passport.

15041 If you propose extending an official visit for personal reasons (e.g. for a holiday) you should make your own arrangements to insure for medical cover. Such additional costs will not be reimbursed.

15042 In case of an emergency you should keep your next of kin details up to date along with a contact within your office.

### **Personal Travel Insurance**

15043 The Commission will make a contribution to the cost of travel insurance for overseas business travel in the following circumstances:

- **Insurance cover for the specific business trip** - full costs are reimbursed. You should ensure that the policy covers business travel, medical cover (see paragraph 15039), costs are competitive and consider whether annual travel insurance would be more cost-effective e.g. if further trips are likely.
- **Annual Travel Insurance** - part payment may be made at the discretion of your line manager. The level of contribution will depend on the relative costs of the individual business trip(s) and the annual insurance cost. Those who already have an Annual Travel Insurance policy for personal use should ensure that it covers business travel - if an additional premium payment is required the costs can be reimbursed.

In both circumstances the costs should be claimed in the normal way on a travel claim with a receipt or copy policy.

### **Countries Where Proof of the Ability to Pay is Required Before Treatment is Given**

15044 In some countries, medical treatment may not be provided without clear evidence that the person can meet the cost of treatment (e.g. North Africa). It is therefore vital that evidence of medical insurance is carried at all times. However, many commercial insurance policies do not meet such costs directly but reimburse expenditure. You should therefore ensure that you have the means to meet such expenditure (e.g. credit card with a high enough spending limit), contact your travel insurers if you require treatment and claim reimbursement from the insurers. GPC cardholders can use the card for this type of expenditure but must reimburse the FC once your insurers have met your claim for treatment costs.

### **Injury Benefit Scheme**

15045 The Civil Service Pension scheme provides for the payment of injury benefits to employees or their dependants, who are killed or injured while on duty or who contract a disease to which they are exposed by the nature of their duties. Further details are provided in chapter 19 of the Staff Handbook. The provisions of the injury benefit scheme do not apply in the case of private journeys or holidays taken during/at the end of a business trip. For such journeys, you should consider arranging private insurance arrangements at your own expense.

### **Accidents Abroad**

15046 Guidance on the procedures to be followed in the event of an accident at work are contained in chapter 17 of the Staff Handbook. It would clearly be impracticable for the normal reporting requirements to be met when an accident occurs abroad. However, you must, where possible, follow the spirit of HSM12 and HS19 regarding the collection of relevant evidence and report the matter to your line manager as soon as possible for example by email.

### **Compensation for Personal Injury**

15047 The provisions for compensation for death and personal injury under the Civil Service Pension scheme are set out in the chapter 19 of the Staff Handbook. The provisions apply equally to people injured on duty or on a duty journey overseas, subject to the modifications set out below. Airlines also pay compensation for death and injury, although the amount may differ. Compensation (damages) paid by airlines or under the terms of private insurance which individuals may choose to take out, will be taken into account against any benefits payable under the CSPs.

## **Compensation for Criminal Injuries Suffered Abroad**

15048 Any person who is injured as a result of a criminal action while in Great Britain is eligible to apply for compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. This scheme does not apply where the injuries are sustained when outside the country. Civil Servants who are posted overseas in the course of duty and who suffer injuries as a result of criminal action may be paid compensation under the CSPs equivalent to what HM Treasury consider they would have received had the injuries qualified for compensation under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. This is to prevent people serving overseas being at a disadvantage compared with those serving in Great Britain. You will be regarded as being on duty for the full period of a visit overseas provided that your conduct is not wilfully negligent or criminal.

## **Compensation for Loss of or Damage to Personal Property**

15049 When your personal property is lost or damaged during transit to or from this country, or while you are in receipt of subsistence allowance (but not Cost of Living Addition (COLA)), during your stay overseas, then the Commission may, at its discretion, pay compensation provided that: –

- the loss or damage is not covered by insurance or by any provision for free replacement; and
- you have not been negligent; and
- that it was necessary for the performance of the official duties to have the particular items with you;
- you report the matter to the police and a police report is used to support the claim.

Payment is purely ex-gratia without admission of liability. Claims should be made on a travel claim.

15050 If a short-term period of duty is extended so that Cost of Living Addition becomes payable, you will be expected to insure your property against all risks. The allowance includes an element to provide for this and no claim will therefore be reimbursed.

## **Hours Attracting Premium Payments and Overtime**

15051 The rules governing payment for hours worked in the UK on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays are set out in Chapter 11. These rules apply to people on overseas postings, subject to the Cost of Living Addition not being aggregated with pay in calculating overtime rates. Although you are regarded as being “on duty” for the purposes of the provision of injury/death benefits and cover you will only be paid overtime for hours actually and necessarily worked.

15052 Journeys to and from overseas stations by sea do not qualify for payment of travel time.