

The University of Melbourne

Policy on Overseas Travel to High Risk Destinations

A. Background

Following recent world events involving terrorism and in particular those of Bali in October 2002, a number of staff and students have sought advice from the University about advisability of travel to certain overseas destinations and the associated insurance implications.

In general, the University acts on advice issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in respect of the level of safety of overseas destinations. DFAT advice about individual countries contains descriptions of the current level of safety and makes recommendations about particular activities, places and circumstances under which varying degrees of caution should be exercised (refer <http://www.dfat.gov.au/travel/index.html>). DFAT offers various advice depending on the level of risk that has been assessed, ranging from a reminder to be aware of personal safety, to a recommendation not to travel at all for countries with the highest level of risk.

Current DFAT advice about travel to certain countries continues to recommend that Australians defer non-essential travel. This has given rise to a number of requests from staff and students for clarification of what constitutes “essential” travel, the insurance implications of travelling despite a DFAT warning to the contrary, and the circumstances under which an exemption may be granted to travel to countries deemed by DFAT to be high risk.

This paper sets out the University’s policy for making decisions about the advisability of travel by University students and staff for University-related purposes to high risk overseas destinations. This policy should be followed in conjunction with existing off-campus guidelines, risk assessment processes and other travel issues articulated in the University’s Environmental Health and Safety manual.

B. Principles

- All University decisions about whether a student or staff should be permitted to travel to an overseas destination for University-related purposes must be based on advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).
- Determination of whether or not the travel is essential and exemptions from adhering to DFAT advice may only be made by Deans of Faculty for faculty staff, Vice-Principals for central administration staff and the Vice-Principal and Academic Registrar for students.
- Special circumstances may apply to travel undertaken by International students.
- A staff member cannot be required to travel for University-related business to any country for which DFAT has issued advice that Australians should defer all or non-essential travel to that country.
- Students and staff who are overseas for University-related purposes are required immediately to comply with any direction given by the Vice-Chancellor, a Dean or Vice-Principal as a result of a change in the assessment of the level of safety of the particular overseas destination.

- The University will retain current and accurate information regarding the whereabouts and contact details of students and staff members travelling overseas for University-related purposes and this information will be accessible at short notice.
- Deans, Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Vice-Principals are accountable for the implementation and oversight of this policy.

C. Procedures

1. Students

- 1.1 Decisions about whether a student should be permitted to travel to, or remain in, an overseas destination for the purpose of off-shore student exchange, work, study abroad or other University purposes must be based on advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Vice-Principal and Academic Registrar has responsibility for ensuring that decisions are made on this basis.
- 1.2 Except with prior approval of the Academic Registrar students will not be permitted to travel to, or remain in, for offshore work or study conducted under the auspices of the University, any country for which DFAT has issued advice that Australians should *defer all travel* or *defer non-essential travel* to that country.
- 1.3 In the case of a student planning to travel to, or remain in, for offshore work or study conducted under the auspices of the University, any country for which DFAT has issued advice that Australians should *exercise caution* or *exercise extreme caution*, Heads of Departments must ensure that the student takes due note of any DFAT warnings and advice and that an appropriate risk management strategy has been prepared. This strategy should include arrangements to register each student's in-country address and contact details with the nearest Australian diplomatic mission. This will enable Australian officials to provide appropriate advice if warnings are substantially upgraded or evacuation becomes necessary.
- 1.4 The Academic Registrar may approve circumstances for travel for University-related purposes by an International student that is not based on DFAT advice, as follows:
 - a. The travel destination is the student's home country or
 - b. The student has been advised by his/her relevant home-country authority that travel to that destination represents a higher risk for nationals of that country than that indicated by the DFAT advice for Australian nationals.
- 1.5 Heads of Department may approve travel for University-related purposes by an International student under the circumstances outlined in Clause 4.
- 1.6 Faculty General Managers have responsibility for retaining current and accurate information regarding the whereabouts and contact details of students travelling overseas for University-related purposes. This information must be accessible for use by the University at short notice.
- 1.7 Any further queries about travel restrictions and related matters under this policy should be directed to the Vice-Principal and Academic Registrar who will consult with others as required.

- 1.8 Students at overseas destinations in pursuance of University activities must comply immediately with any direction given in the interests of their safety by the Dean, Faculty General Manager, Vice-Principal and Academic Registrar or other senior University Officer.

2. Staff

- 2.1 Decisions about whether a faculty staff member should be permitted to travel to, or remain in, an overseas destination for the purpose of University-related business, and determination of whether the proposed travel is essential, will be made by the relevant Head of Department (or the Dean in the case of a Head of Department) and must have regard to advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- 2.2 Decisions about whether a central administration staff member should be permitted to travel to, or remain in, an overseas destination for the purpose University-related business, and determination of whether the proposed travel is essential, will be made by the relevant Vice-Principal and must have regard to advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- 2.3 Normally a staff member is not permitted to travel to or remain in for University-related business, any country for which DFAT has issued advice that Australians should *defer all* or *defer all non-essential* travel to that country.
- 2.4 In the case of a staff member planning travel for University-related business to any country for which DFAT has issued advice that Australians should *exercise caution* or *exercise extreme caution* the Head of Department must ensure that the staff member takes due note of any DFAT warnings and ensure that an appropriate risk management strategy has been prepared. Staff are encouraged to register with the nearest Australian diplomatic mission their in-country address and contact details and keep these up to date. This will enable Australian officials to provide appropriate advice if warnings are substantially upgraded or evacuation becomes necessary.
- 2.5 Any exemption being sought by a staff member from the restriction on travel based on DFAT advice, outlined above, must be referred to the relevant Dean of Faculty in the case of faculty staff, to the relevant Vice-Principal in the case of central administration staff, and to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research in the case of Melbourne Research and Innovation Office (MRIO) staff.
- 2.6 When considering the request for an exemption, the relevant Dean of Faculty, Vice-Principal or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor(Research) must take into account whether the staff member requesting the exemption
 - a. has the additional expertise, local networks and support, and language facility to substantially reduce the risks that would apply to other travellers, and
 - b. in the context of the essentiality of the travel (confirmed by the relevant staff member's supervisor/Head of Department), has identified, has undertaken to heed, and has the capacity to implement suitable risk-reduction strategies.
- 2.7 In determining a staff member's eligibility for an exemption from the restriction on travel, the relevant Dean of Faculty, Vice-Principal or the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) may wish to consult with the Vice-Principal, University Development for further advice about the salience of DFAT security warnings in relation to the proposed travel.

- 2.8 Staff at overseas destinations for University-related purposes must comply immediately with any direction given in the interests of their safety by the Dean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Vice-Principals or other senior University officer.

D. Maintaining current records

1. The Director, Risk Management Office has responsibility for maintaining an accurate and current database of DFAT advice for overseas destinations that is accessible to all staff and students and for providing advice about, and communicating any changes in, DFAT advice to students and staff.
2. Heads of Department are responsible for furnishing the relevant Faculty General Manager or Vice-Principal with details of travel itineraries and contact details for faculty staff members travelling overseas for University-related purposes.
3. Faculty General Managers and Vice-Principals are responsible for retaining current and accurate information regarding the whereabouts and contact details of students and faculty staff, or central administrative staff respectively, travelling overseas for University-related purposes. This information must be accessible for use by University staff on a need-to-know basis at short notice.

E. Insurance

1. Currently no country is excluded from the University's insurance policy, regardless of the level of warning issued by DFAT. This position may be subject to change. The Director, Risk Management Office is responsible for providing immediate advice of any change in relation to this.
2. The current University insurance policy excludes claims resulting from "*acts of war*" including civil war. This may include demonstrations or civil protests relating to declarations of war.
3. Staff members should contact the Director, Risk Management Office for further advice regarding insurance. If further advice is required the Senior Vice-Principal should be consulted.

F. Accountability

1. Deans, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Vice-Principals are accountable for the implementation of, and compliance with, this policy in their faculty/administrative unit. Accountability extends to ensuring that travel taken by themselves for a University-related purpose is consistent with the principles and procedures set out above.
2. The Vice-Principal and Academic Registrar is responsible for communicating this policy to students.
3. Heads of Departments are accountable for ensuring that this policy is communicated to students and staff.

Ian Marshman
Senior Vice-Principal

