



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", 4.5d "Seat Belts and Child Restraints" and 4.5f "Checklist – Assessing a Coach Hire Provider".

Safe Coach Travel

There are four key safety factors to consider when using hired coaches:

- The driver;
- The coach and equipment;
- The company;
- The route or itinerary, and expected driving conditions.

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. You could use document 4.5f "Checklist – Assessing a Coach Hire Provider".

- If your employer or establishment has an approved list of providers, use it;
- If possible, use a provider with which your establishment has an existing, satisfactory relationship (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);
- Check that the provider can cope with any special needs your group may have;
- Check that there are seat belts appropriate for your group and, if necessary, that there is access and a secure position for a wheelchair;
- Where a provider has a fleet of coaches of varying ages and standards, confirm the specific standard or vehicle you require;

- 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).

Further research may be necessary if you are considering using a provider that is not approved or well known by your employer or establishment. This could include:

- Use the government website www.gov.uk/find-vehicle-operators to check that the provider has a valid Public Service Vehicle Licence – this will show how many vehicles the provider can operate at any one time and whether they are licensed only for national use in the UK, or for international travel;
- Ask for evidence of the provider's Vehicle, Public Liability and Employer's Liability insurances;
- Ask for confirmation that:
 - Drivers are correctly licensed and will carry a valid Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) card which will be available for inspection;
 - The provider has recruitment procedures which ensure that drivers are suitable for working with children;
 - Drivers have DBS checks (these are required for drivers of vehicles conveying children, if they do this frequently or intensively – see document 3.2g);
 - The provider has a health and safety risk assessment for travel with groups similar to yours;
 - Drivers have received training to operate with groups similar to yours;
 - Drivers have an emergency procedure to follow;
 - There is a 24/7 helpline for the duration of your journey;
 - Coaches are equipped with essential safety equipment (e.g. first aid, fire extinguishers, functioning torches);
 - Coaches undergo regular safety checks in line with government guidance (checks should be every 4 to 13 weeks depending upon the age of the vehicle and its operating conditions – see www.gov.uk/government/publications/guide-to-maintaining-roadworthiness);
 - Coaches undergo a daily walkaround check by drivers or a responsible person;
 - Coaches meet your requirements regarding comfort, convenience and contractual terms and conditions.
- 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 whether 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, and evidence that at least some of the above criteria have been met;

- Check reviews from previous customers to see 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), which the company can obtain from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) (the scores are based on data from vehicle tests and roadside inspections collected over a three-year rolling period and are colour coded red (highest risk), amber or green (lowest risk));
- Question the operator about back up: i.e. 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;
- Check the age of the coaches and whether they are compliant with UN ECE regulation 66 regarding the strength of the coach roof;
- If possible, visit the provider's depot, look at their coach fleet and get a feel for how they do things - ask if you can 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 yourself 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 driver's CPC Card;
- 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 emergency equipment;
- Ensure that your leaders' positions in the coach take into account the age, behaviour and needs of the participants, and any support that might be needed to use 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.

