

Travel Risk Management and Best Practices for Higher Education Establishments

White Paper

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The subject of study abroad is an inherently risky one. However it's difficult to pinpoint exactly how risky it has become over the years, as reporting mandates vary widely when a student is not physically on campus.

Study abroad programmes can offer students some of the greatest experiences and memories of their young lives; they get to meet new people, learn new languages and experience different cultures in a way that few opportunities afford. These types of interactions can prepare students for the workforce in a diverse global economy. It's also important for them to live with the degree of independence that studying abroad affords them.

One could argue that simply being alive brings a degree of risk, and young adults have to develop the skills necessary to maintain awareness, make sound decisions and avoid potentially harmful scenarios wherever possible. The bottom line is life skills are important, and cannot necessarily be taught in a lecture hall. Study abroad opportunities offer the chance to develop those skills in a multitude of ways.

But what are the risks? Who is responsible for mitigating them? And what are best practices for risk management that colleges and universities can, and should, have in place?

To help higher education establishments navigate the maze of travel risk management options available, we, as leading experts in this field, have put together a white paper discussing the evolution of risk and various duty of care provisions that could be implemented to provide you and your students studying overseas with a robust support system.

The evolution of risk

In terms of risk, the global landscape has changed over time. Travellers face the threat of terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and health epidemics in a way that may have been inconceivable a few decades ago.

The visualisation below shows the annual number of terrorist attacks globally since 1970.¹

Total number of terrorism-related incidents

The source defines a terrorist attack as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation.”



Figure one: “Terrorism incidents over time” sourced from the Global Terrorism Database.

The past few years alone have shown that terrorists are targeting tourist-rich locations like holiday markets, concerts, national day celebrations, or city parks. These incidents are occurring in locations that were once considered extremely low-risk for travellers.

In 2016, a total of 142 failed, foiled and completed attacks were reported by eight EU Member States. More than half (76) of them were reported by the United Kingdom. France reported 23 attacks, Italy 17, Spain 10, Greece 6, Germany 5, Belgium 4 and the Netherlands 1 attack. 142 victims died in terrorist attacks, and 379 were injured in the EU.²

In addition to the less likely but higher impact events such as terrorist attacks, it's important to remember that there are risks that exist on a smaller scale as well. Road traffic accidents, petty crime and incidents involving alcohol occur more frequently and are just as likely to end in disaster.

Travelling students and faculty also have to consider their health while abroad. If they have the unfortunate experience of falling ill, how do they know which facilities are safe or equipped to deal with their specific condition? Sheryl Hill's 16-year-old son, Tyler, fell ill and died while studying in Japan in 2007. She said he had Type 1 diabetes and died from dehydration when he did not receive medical attention in time.³ This may be an extreme example, but it highlights the importance of access to adequate medical advice and care while travelling to foreign destinations.

The risk landscape and factors mentioned above should not deter students from the opportunity to study abroad. However, it should encourage colleges and universities to prepare and equip travelling students and faculty through the provision of training and the tools necessary to maximise awareness, safety, and overall wellbeing as they travel the globe.

What is duty of care?

Simply put, duty of care is the duty of a person or business to act toward others and the public with vigilance, caution, and prudence. Someone whose actions breach the duty of care is considered negligent and may be sued for resulting damages.⁴ This essentially means that higher education organisations have a duty to act reasonably to foresee and limit exposures to risks that are known or should be known. This includes but is not limited to: known or expected political, social and/or terrorist risks, crime, health risks and road, traffic and vehicle conditions.

Duty of care best practices

At Healix we have developed a list of the 10 most important elements of a comprehensive risk management programme. These items cover all facets of duty of care for organisations and higher education institutions.



24/7/365 Medical and Security Assistance

Travelling students and faculty need to have access to a 24/7 Operations Centre with extensive medical and security capabilities. This ensures a direct line to doctors, nurses and security professionals as needed, as well as a trusted source of global support and advice. An ideal scenario would include an integrated solution; one in which the medical and security teams are co-located or work together to provide services. Also, in the event of a critical medical or security event, the provision of evacuation should be readily available. This affords the opportunity for a student or faculty member to be evacuated from their accommodation, worksite or point of incident to a safe port of departure for onward travel to an international safe haven.

24/7/365 Travel Assistance

Things can go wrong during travel abroad. A comprehensive risk management programme provides access to experts that can assist with items such as travel and visa advice, embassy referral and visa assistance, emergency document delivery, and arrangement of interpreters.

Global Security Intelligence

Given the security risks that today's global travellers face, it is of the utmost importance that higher education institutions are able to provide security intelligence to the individual traveller as well as resident risk managers. Travelling students and faculty members require succinct, informative and timely updates on incidents that pose a potential risk while they are travelling in unfamiliar environments without their usual support network. In contrast, risk managers require analysis into the causes and effects of risks, as well as the longer-term implications for their operations in an evolving risk environment.

Pre-trip Information

In order to prepare people and arm them with critical knowledge, colleges and universities should provide proactive, relevant medical and security information to their students and faculty prior to departure from their home country. This can be done effectively with pre-trip advisories that are automatically provided upon booking their travel. These types of advisories are most impactful when paired with additional information that is readily accessible via links to a customised travel website.

Security Training and E-learning

Ensuring the preparedness of students and staff for overseas travel is a critical part of duty of care fulfilment. The provision of security training, whether that be in a classroom setting or via an e-learning platform, or a combination of the two, can make a significant difference in this endeavour. The types of useful topics that can be covered in these sessions include, but are not limited to: personal security protocols, travel health risks, navigating one's destination or how to avoid street crime, robbery, carjacking or kidnapping.

Mobile Technology

The world we live in is undoubtedly a mobile one. The students and faculty members that organisations are responsible for need real-time, reliable information at their fingertips - regardless of where on the globe they happen to be.

A mobile app can provide the traveller with an email alert function to a designated emergency contact(s) and a direct line to medical and security assistance 24 hours a day. This technology should also provide access to aforementioned pre-trip advice, as well as specific country profiles for comprehensive travel safety information. Mobile technology should also allow for secure personal travel document storage in the event that original documents are lost or stolen.

Traveller Tracking

Leading-edge technology allows for the automated collection of employee and student travel data. These systems allow organisations to have a comprehensive view of their people and operations around the world in real-time. The most holistic of these solutions also offer a fully integrated mass notification system, to be used for communication with all global travellers.

Medical Screening

In the event that travel to a more remote destination is required, as may be the case with university research teams, it is important to perform in-depth medical screening prior to overseas assignment and subsequently identify an appropriate course of action to minimise any identified health risks. This type of screening ensures that travellers are well prepared for overseas travel. Further, it allows time to vet the ability of host-country healthcare facilities to deal with pre-existing conditions.

Prescription regimes can also be modified to ensure they are viable and legal in the host country. Of equal importance, advanced screenings allow for on-going medical advice, support and second opinions to be received throughout the assignment or travel period.

Infectious Disease Planning

The most progressive higher education institutions have travel risk management policies and programmes in place for the purpose of protecting their students and faculty. At the core, these programmes are about risk mitigation, business continuity and readiness in a crisis. While it may not be the most prevalent concern for employees, students, and parents, universities must also consider how prepared they are in the event of a pandemic, infectious disease or natural disaster.

Within a comprehensive risk management programme, customised policies and plans can be developed to meet an organisation's specific needs. Drills can be staged to engage and prepare stakeholders as well as to test the operational feasibility and the human elements of said plan. Also important to an infectious disease plan is the provision of access to senior public health practitioners who are able to advise on a broad range of issues.

Medical Staffing

Some organisations choose to have on-site medical support for major projects, sporting events and remote work sites. This allows these organisations to plan and resource effectively in order to protect the health, security and wellbeing of employees, students, guests and attendees for the duration of the event.

Physicians, nurses and other medically trained professionals are on-site and available to react instantly in the event of a medical situation. Where traffic due to large crowds can impede the arrival of emergency response vehicles, standby ambulances are available near living quarters. As a part of these support arrangements, hotel rooms can also be converted into clinics for easy access for routine and emergency medical care.

Medical Emergency Response Plans (MERPS)

These comprehensive reports provide clients with a bespoke and highly detailed overview of the availability, quality and capability of the best medical providers for a given location. They include expert commentary regarding the existence, suitability, and efficacy of the national emergency services and other facilities.

The reports provide insight into the logistics, feasibility and challenges of medical provision, including evacuation services and the measures needed to address any shortfall where relevant or possible.

Enhance these best practices with technology

When faced with a travelling student body and faculty members located around the globe, technology and the communication it enables, is critical to any higher education institution. An institution may wish to invest in a software platform in order to meet the needs dictated by its travelling population.

A web-based solution accessible through a web browser, as well as web-enabled mobile devices can be particularly effective. This type of service enables stakeholders and risk managers to confirm the location of all travelling students and faculty within the platform and communicate with them during both routine and unplanned events, as well as critical incidents. In order to maximise technological investment, the visibility and tracking of all travellers should ideally be integrated into one holistic system. Consolidation in this regard lowers transaction costs and eliminates redundancies that can be caused by a multi-platform or multi-vendor strategy.

We exist in a mobile world. This is particularly true in reference to the young adults that make up a large part of the higher education population. In many cases, these individuals rely on their smart phones for all forms of communication. When considering risk management and technological best practices therein, higher education institutions should consider a solution that includes a “check-in” type feature. This allows travellers to check-in at a specific location 24/7 and subsequently appear on the map within the system. The system then registers their exact location, along with any additional notes they may have been sent. It should be noted that the ability to call for emergency help within a “check-in” feature is invaluable.

An ideal platform for tracking travellers should also include a fully integrated mass notification system for communication with all users across the globe. With this kind of capability, the platform can be utilised to push out automated messaging based on a person’s location and/or travel itinerary. The ability to send communications is critical; risk managers may find themselves in a situation where general messages are required, or they may wish to send security advisories for specific locations. In the event of a crisis, messaging capability within a traveller tracking tool is of utmost importance.

A travel risk management solution should support travellers, as well as organisational operations throughout the duration of the travel lifecycle. This requires the integration of intelligence developed by analysts and experts who monitor the globe 24/7/365. To be effective, this intelligence should be vetted, sourced, and automatically pushed to an institution's travelling students and faculty. This intelligence dataset can include pre-trip briefs, alerts, destination intelligence and a variety of travel risk tools. With this insight, the institution's risk managers and leaders will have the confidence to make the decisions that impact travelling students and faculty on a day-to-day basis and in the event of a critical incident.

Integration of these types of technology will greatly improve a higher education institution's ability to address the objective of managing the hazards associated with international travellers, especially in the event of students or faculty visiting or working in high-risk areas.

Current risk management industry best practice has been developed with the understanding that multiple providers play a role in an organisation's travel risk management strategy. It is preferable, and far more effective, if a symbiotic relationship exists between travel management companies (TMCs), risk and response providers, technology companies and your institution's stakeholders to effectively ensure traveller safety.

The importance of the human element in managing risk

There is no question that technology is of paramount importance when dealing with a travelling population. But technology alone cannot meet a higher education institution's duty of care needs. It doesn't matter how technologically advanced the world becomes; nothing can take the place of human interaction and insight. This is why the first element of the *10 Best Practices* list above is 24/7 Medical and Security Assistance. Travellers, particularly students studying abroad, should have the ability to pick up the phone and talk to an expert. Whether they require advice, assistance or find themselves in danger, the knowledge that they have immediate access to medical and security professionals can make a world of difference.

This human element is also critical for programme managers and other stakeholders. Access to real-time information and guidance on how best to communicate that information to parents and family members of students and travellers can be the deciding factor in whether or not an incident is managed successfully.

Technology and the human element in action: London Bridge terror attack case study

On the evening of Saturday 3rd June, 2017, London was hit by a terror attack right in the heart of the city. At 10:08pm local time, three Islamic State sympathisers drove a rental van south across London Bridge, knocking down pedestrians. The van came to a halt adjacent to the Barrowboy & Banker Pub. The 3 attackers then proceeded to exit the van and continue south on foot to the crowded area of Borough Market, which was full of Saturday night patrons. The attackers began indiscriminately stabbing people in the street and in nearby bars and restaurants. By 10:16pm, police had arrived at the scene and all the attackers had been shot and killed. With unprecedented speed, security forces had ended the incident only 8 minutes after it had begun.

By 10:30pm, reports of the incident had begun to emerge across media outlets. While some of the details remained unclear, there was enough information for the Healix GSOC (Global Security Operations Centre) team to issue a Level 4 alert, which is the highest possible alert level. This alert was sent out via a mobile app and traveller tracking platform. The technology leveraged by the team allowed them to determine that clients of Healix had employees and travellers in the vicinity of the attack.

By 10:47pm, the team was able to use this technology to send a 2-way message via SMS to the dozens of people within the system that were in and around London. These messages had a dual purpose: 1) to inquire as to whether these people were okay and 2) to determine if they were in need of any form of assistance. Responses from the travellers and employees were then received and acted on accordingly.

By 11:05pm—less than an hour after the attack began, all potentially impacted individuals had been communicated with. Of equal importance, relevant risk managers were provided with a comprehensive report of the incident which included their exposure, an assessment of any developments as well as details around the advice given to and responses made by their travellers and employees that were in and around the London area.

Conclusion

An undeniable fact of life is that risk will always exist. The world we live in is constantly evolving and as a result, the risks that people face will evolve as well. This should not deter anyone from taking the opportunity to explore the world and experience the multitude of enrichments that travelling has to offer. However, higher education institutions have an incredible responsibility to fulfil their duty of care obligation to students and faculty, particularly those travelling abroad. While it is impossible to eliminate risk entirely, there are steps that can be taken to mitigate it. Colleges and universities should have a comprehensive travel risk management plan in place that covers a wide array of elements. Assistance should be made available to travellers, particularly young adults who are not used to living in a foreign country. This access to a team of experts can provide travellers with information and advice in situations where they may be required to make decisions that very few people are properly equipped to make. Technology is an important part of travel risk management, but as long as institutions are responsible for the wellbeing of people, there needs to be a significant human element working in conjunction with that technology.

¹ Max Roser, Mohamed Nagdy and Hannah Ritchie, "Terrorism," Published online at *OurWorldInData.org*. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/terrorism> [Online Resource]. Last revised in January 2018.

² Europol, "2017 Euroterrorism Report," Europol, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/2017-eu-terrorism-report-142-failed-foiled-and-completed-attacks-1002-arrests-and-142-victims-died>, 15 June 2017.

³The Associated Press, "When study abroad ends in death, US parents find few answers," ABC News, <http://abcnews.go.com/amp/International/wireStory/study-abroad-ends-death-us-parents-find-answers-48489250>, 7 June 2017.

⁴ Gerald N. Hill, Kathleen Thompson Hill, "*Nolo's Plain-English Law Dictionary*," Shae Irving, ed., 1st ed. (Berkley, CA: NOLO, 2009), 144.