



Parents Handbook

Welcome to Scottish Overseas Guardianship Association

This Handbook has been produced for parents of students from abroad and contains information on Scottish Overseas Guardianship Association, Known as SOGA. Organisation, Policies and Procedures.

This Handbook gives information on Guardianship,

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Guardianship and UK Law

The UK law requires that all boarding schools “promote and safeguard” the welfare of every boarding student, including those over the age of 18.

The Home Office, responsible for issuing VISAs, must also have regard to the need to safeguard children and to promote their welfare. All children studying in the UK must therefore have suitable care arrangements in place for their travel, reception on arrival and living arrangements whilst in the UK.

This is a compulsory requirement. During the term time, boarding schools must comply with the “Boarding Schools National Minimum Standards” in the care of their students, and they are regularly inspected. However, there are times when the school is closed and as sponsors of the (Child Student) VISA, a boarding school must also be able to hand over parental responsibilities to another adult.

These times include Fixed “Exeat” weekends, Half Terms, suspensions, exclusions, medical emergencies, weather extremes and other unforeseen circumstances. Guardian Requirements of a Boarding School

It is a condition of entry to a school that a parent nominates a guardian who will meet the following minimum requirements:

1. Be over 25 years of age
2. Always reside in the UK and be able to reach the school within 2 hours travelling time
3. Be a 24-hour point of contact for the school
4. Act with delegated parental authority in the case of emergency
5. Provide both pastoral and educational support
6. Liaise with the school over holiday and exeat weekend arrangements, including informing the school about travel and accommodation, which must be appropriate depending on the age of the student.
7. Provide appropriate overnight full board accommodation and care Types of Guardianship.

A guardian can be a family friend or relative who can comply with the above requirements, but the guardian cannot be:

8. Under the age of 25 years’ old
9. A full time student living in accommodation provided by another educational institution

There are several Guardian Agencies, although there is much variation on reliability. If you are considering a guardian agency you should ensure the organisation is fully accredited by the recognised national umbrella organisation, AEGIS, the Association for the Education and Guardianship of International Students (please see www.aegisuk.net). SOGA Guardians are members of AEGIS.



The Guardian

Mrs Pamela Keracher is your child's named Guardian.(Educational Guardian) She is the director, acts as the educational guardian to all students registered with SOGA, and will take ultimate responsibility for any decision that needs to be made.

She herself is always available but also assisted by a small number of SOGA Members, who are here for administration work and communicating with the host family with whom your child will stay with. yourself, the parents, your child/the student, school staff members oversee all arrangements and requests promptly and effectively.

SOGA Members

Soga members. are self-employed and work with SOGA, all members are PVG (Police) checked.

SOGA Host Families

SOGA has an established network of Host Families with whom we place our students when schools are closed for Half Terms and Exeat weekends.

We try to match the family to the student in terms of interests, location, and outlook on life. It is our aim to arrange for our students to return to the same host family for all their stays, as this gives students a "home from home" experience, but changes can occur, when requested by the parent, student, or the family.

Frequently, more than one student of a similar age will be staying with a host family at any one time. In our experience, students prefer this as it offers them additional company and friendship during what is essentially a holiday period.



Some students form long-term friendships with other students and indeed with the Host Family themselves. Students are expected to respect their host family's home and way of life in return for being accepted as a family member.

Some hosts will apply house rules to help understanding routines. Your child's Host Families can range from a couple or single parent with young children to retired grandparents, whose own children have grown up.

All have a kind and caring disposition toward children from overseas, offering a "home away from home". Host Families are inspected once a year by a SOGA member, who will also give advice and training on best practice and checks are made on the accommodation.

SOGA also undertakes rigorous checks on each family member over the age of 16 and over, including the PVG (Scottish Disclosure and Barring System – which includes checks on the police and social services databases). Hosts formally undertake to protect and care for the students in their charge, but please remember that the responsibility for the student remains with the educational guardian, SOGA during a host family stay. Any concerns about a child's host family should be made through the SOGA office, not directly to the host.

Hosts are encouraged to include students in family life and to offer activities and excursions. Hosts have an expenses account and an allowance of up to GBP 35 per trip unless a higher amount is requested from the SOGA office to be spent, to cover extra expenses in addition to associated mileage.

Holiday programmes are forwarded to parents before each holiday so you can decide if you wish to have your child opt-out of any activities.

Receipts are required and, if claimed by the host, this expense will be added to the parent's Student Expenses Deposit. Please note, the booking of host family stays **MUST** be made via the office and not direct to the family. Hosts and students should note the "non-negotiables".

These are drugs, smoking, alcohol, hair dying and body piercing.

Please Note: The accommodation provider, The Host family and SOGA will not be liable for any damage arising from the conduct and/or behaviour of any student placed with the Host family by the guardianship organisation.

What our host families provide for our students:

Each student will have his or her own room or share with someone of a similar age and of the same gender.

The room will have a comfortable bed, clean bedding, somewhere to put belongings, and a table/desk and chair (with lighting) for working (this may be in another room, such as a dining room or study).

There will be good access to a bathroom with a separate shower cubicle or a shower over the bath. Normally households have limited hot water and some hosts may ask for shower times to be kept to a reasonable period and/or to a particular time of the day.

MEALS *Full Board* Breakfast - teenage students often like to sleep late in the mornings. If so, sometimes students will be asked to help themselves. Cereal and toast are routinely offered, occasionally with bacon and/or eggs. Some families may have a late, cooked breakfast especially at weekends, combining breakfast and lunch (known as “brunch”).

Lunch is normally a light meal of soup and bread, or sandwiches, jacket potato, cheese on toast, or maybe pasta or noodles, with some salad, fruit, or a yoghurt.

Dinner consists of at least two courses, e.g., a main course of chicken, fish or red meat with potatoes and vegetables and a dessert/fruit.

Hosts may be able to cater for Chinese students with rice, noodles, and pasta

Snacks – students should not expect to help themselves, but snacks and beverages will be available students should ask.

Manners

Host families are encouraged to assist students in English, eating customs and manners, such as using a knife and fork, and closing one's mouth when eating. Students are encouraged to cooperate by not leaving the table until everyone has finished and by helping to clear the dishes after the meal. Hosts may encourage students to help a little more in the kitchen, preparation of meals, some parents will send favourite recipes from home.

Internet access

A wireless internet connection is normally available, but speeds can be slow in some parts of the UK, particularly in rural areas. Internet download is often limited and can be very expensive. Students should NOT download large files, such as films, games, and music without asking their host.

SOGA Guardians will advise Hosts to limit access time in the best interests of the student, particularly overnight, when some students stay up very late at night, get no sleep and disturb the household. Many hosts will therefore restrict or switch off the internet overnight. Schools will have similar restrictions. Students should not need to use the host's telephone or computers. We have policies in place for safe usage of the Internet found on our website.

www.scottishoverseasguardianship.co.uk.

Laundry

Particularly over a half-term, hosts will offer to wash some clothes, and explain when and where students can put their laundry.

Laundry should be limited to a reasonable level for the length of stay.

SOGA's Policies on behaviour and staying with hosts Travelling alone, times to be home, and staying away overnight. Can be found on the website

www.scottishoverseasguardianship.co.uk

These policies affect students during the times they are staying with a host family or away from school.

Going out during the day and travelling:

Students aged 17 or 18 may travel alone but should return home no later than 11.00pm, or at a time previously agreed with the Host Family.

Students aged 14 to 16 may travel alone if plans are deemed safe and acceptable by a host family or SOGA Members.

As a guideline, 16-year-olds should be home by no later than 10pm.

14- or 15-year-olds should be home no later than 9.30pm and/or during daylight, whichever is the earlier

Students under the age of 14 should be always accompanied by an adult when away from home.

Saying elsewhere overnight

Students often wish to make alternative arrangements for one or more nights' accommodation during Half Terms and Exeat Weekends.

IMPORTANT

It is a compulsory UK law and VISA requirement that suitable living arrangements are in place for overseas students attending boarding schools.

SOGA has a duty of care to schools and contracts with parents to protect the students and to provide safe host family accommodation.

The following policy has been introduced to clarify what is needed from students and parents when SOGA office is considering a request from a student (or parent) regarding alternative Half Term / Exeat care arrangements.

HOST FAMILIES must refer a request to SOGA Office .

. Students Aged 17 and 18 or over on the start date of Exeat or Half Term Parents need to complete and sign a Consent Form and return this to us by fax or verified email.

The full address must be provided to comply with the rules for a UK Child Student VISA.

Students Aged 16 and over on the start date of Exeat or Half Term As above PLUS we require a named adult, residing in the UK and over 25 years old, who will take responsibility for the student during the stay.

Students Aged 15 or under on the start date of Exeat or Half Term As above PLUS we require full contact with the named adult and arrangement confirmed in writing. The adult will need to confirm that they will be taking full responsibility for the student during the break. An arrangement to stay away is subject to SOGA and/or school staff being satisfied that a child will be safe. **We reserve the right to veto any arrangement if we feel it is unsatisfactory in any way.**

Useful information for Parents

Mobile phones: Students MUST make sure the Host Family and SOGA have their current mobile phone number and to keep their mobile phones charged and switched on when travelling in the UK.

Good communications can save hours of anxiety and time in the event of delay, cancellation or the unforeseen.

Host and Friends: Friends staying with Host Families Friends of students are not allowed to stay overnight with a Host Family UNLESS their parent/guardian has signed a temporary guardianship contract, and paid the fee, in advance.

There could be significant liability on a host for not following this procedure. SOGA Guardians Host Family Cancellation Policy.

Host Accommodation: SOGA has a responsibility to arrange for the student to stay in a Host Family for Half Terms and Exeats UNLESS we have acceptable alternative instructions from the parents, agent, or the student.

Cancelling a host family WITHIN 21 days of the event will lead to a cancellation charge being payable, which is up to 75% of the cost of the stay, unless an alternative student can be placed in the family. Full details are available on the Fee structure information note.

What happens if the student is ill while staying with a host?

If a student is ill or has an accident, Host Families are advised to take the same precautions as they would with their own children. If in doubt, the first course of action is to take the student to the family doctor (as you would your own child). As a visitor /student your child will be registered with the NHS via school and registered with a school doctor. If any illness is more serious and /or hospitalisation is required SOGA must be informed and will liaise with the host family, parents, agent and school on the most appropriate course of action to take.

What happens if the student is suspended from school?

If a student has found themselves being suspended from school, the school will automatically call yourself (parents or legal guardian) the school will contact Mrs Pam Keracher .

Mrs Pam Keracher will liaise with school to arrange transport and accommodation for the period of time the student has been suspended for.

Mrs Keracher will also liaise with parents/legal guardian with regards to the incident causing the suspension.

If returning home is the option, Mrs Keracher will assist in co ordinating the travel arrangements.

If hosting and returning to school is the choice then Mrs Keracher will liaise with all parties and complete with a short report covering the student's wellbeing during this time.

What happens if the student has an accident or medical emergency in school?

Medical staff in school are extremely well trained Accidents on the sports field and accidents around school as anywhere can happen.

Medical departments have the facilities to deal with minor accidents and overnight accommodation if required for high temperatures/colds etc but for a broken limb the school will take your child directly to hospital,contacting you the parent/legal guardian as soon as possible.

School will also contact us, SOGA Mrs. Pam Keracher will assess the situation and will arrange a hospital visit if required or accommodation for the student if not able to return to school.

Mrs. Pam Keracher will liaise with parent/legal guardian and school to ensure the best care is in place for the student.

What to do if you have a concern or complaint or are unsure on what to do?

If there is a concern of any kind about a student or host family, or a parent is unhappy about any aspect of our service, then please ring 07762791805 or email pamkerachersoga@hotmail.co.uk.

If you remain concerned, Mrs Pam Keracher (Director), who will respond to any issue with urgency and in confidence, if required. Child Protection Policy The safety and welfare of children, or Child Protection, means protecting children from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or neglect.

SOGA is committed to the protection of all children in its care. Our aim is to always ensure a caring and secure environment in which students feel safe, respected, and valued. We have a policy of trust, openness and clear communication between students, school and SOGA Members and our Host Families, so that the student's welfare is the top priority.

The full policy is available on our web site – www.scottishoverseasguardianship.co.uk
Host Checks Host Families are visited by a SOGA Office member each year. For existing hosts, any changes in circumstances or family make up noted, the accommodation is inspected, and feedback exchanged.

All members of the host family household over the age of 16 and over are required to have a valid PVG Scottish (DBS) check. Hosts are also required to regularly service gas appliances and have appropriate household and car insurance. The Internet There are dangers to young people of unrestricted access to the internet, but the demand for access makes it impossible for SOGA or Host Families to supervise or police. Therefore, the responsibility for internet use and downloads rests with the student and we cannot accept any liability in this respect. Terms and Conditions and Data Protection Policy - can be found on our website. www.scottishoverseasguardianship.co.uk

Frequently asked questions from parents

Who is the guardian, educational guardian to my child?

Mrs Pamela Keracher is your educational guardian and takes overall responsibility.

Will my child need Pocket Money? Yes, in the form of the deposit paid to SOGA, we can allocate pocket money, also money to the boarding school house master and once settled, we can look into opening a UK bank account for your child. You may wish to supply him/her with a credit/debit card from your own account.

How do you allocate the families?

We take account of your child's interests and preferences, age and the location of the school and will make a choice, accordingly, matching a family as closely as possible.

We regret that it is not practical for parents to make this choice, but we will always take account of what is required and change the family if a parent or a student is unhappy.

What details do you provide on the host family?

We supply a profile to parents to include names, occupations, children ages, interests, pets (and religion/smokers, if applicable) and a description of the property and student accommodation. All families are fully inspected and accredited.

Can I meet the host family?

It is not always possible to meet a family, but we will try to accommodate parent's wishes. As they are self-employed, we also cannot 100% guarantee that the family will always be available or will remain the same.

Do you change the host families?

We try to keep the same family for each student, unless a change is requested, or the usual family is unavailable.

Who will meet my child at the Airport?

We arrange for our drivers to be in the Arrivals Hall with clear SOGA signs with the child's full name and school. For younger children, we recommend an Unaccompanied Minor (UM) service when the driver collects directly from the

airline. All drivers are police checked by law.

Who will meet my child at school?

SOGA have a team of SOGA Members who visit the school to see your child.

They will report to you on your child's wellbeing, academic progress, and requirements for future holidays

Who do I contact in an emergency?

SOGA has a 24-hour mobile number, 07762791805 or 07834717879 manned by a senior member of SOGA in case of emergencies.

We can access emails and the database remotely to always ensure the best possible care

Why should I choose SOGA?

We do not promise what cannot be delivered. However, our philosophy is to always do everything we can to ensure the care and welfare of our students.

When should I book Host accommodation?

SOGA will request accommodation to be booked at the beginning of each term, The request will be on the termly email.

What happens if there is another World Health Pandemic or UK Health Scare?

Pandemics can cause major disruption to travel and schooling. It is important at that time for Mrs Pamela Keracher to take advice from the government, Public Health, Scotland/UK, and the World Health Organisation. The Guardianship Governing body AEGIS will also supply guidance for us as members to follow. This will be regularly updated as the situation develops.

Usually in a pandemic it is important to restrict movement so as not to spread the disease further. That would mean boarding school students would normally remain in school.

Mrs Pamela Keracher will work with you to find flights to home countries where and when required. Mrs Pamela Keracher will work with schools to meet students' needs during the pandemic. This may be to assist students to learn remotely or as directed by school. In the event of a pandemic Mrs Pamela Keracher may not be able to provide the normal accommodation, if it was to put host families, students, and the wider community at risk.

Mrs Pamela Keracher will work with you and your child to find suitable quarantine accommodation for students where required.

Living in the UK.

Living in the UK may be quite different to what you expect for your child but please do not worry this is normal.

Every country has its own customs, and it may take you and your child a while to get used to the new way of life.. This is most normal.

Here are a few examples of British customs to help you understand what is expected:

Meeting people:

Sometimes British people come across as being reserved but usually they are kind, helpful and welcoming of visitors. British people usually greet each other with a handshake and use their title and surname, until being invited to use their first names. For example, when meeting a new contact, they may greet saying “Good morning, Mr Harris”. Due to the coronavirus, you may find greetings have changed, and handshakes are not currently being used.

A verbal greeting is perfectly acceptable, whilst maintaining social distancing.

Queues: The British people love queues! When waiting their turn, for example in a shop, bank or for public transport, people form a line one behind the other so that they are served in turn. It is considered rude to push in. Due to the coronavirus, spaces between people waiting in the queue are currently larger, so please be aware of maintaining a suitable distance. In the UK shops may still be limiting the number of people allowed inside at any one time, so you may need to queue more often than in usual times. Some shops and services have clear instructions and markers to show where you should stand. Please respect the instructions given.

Please and thank you: British people greatly appreciate politeness. This means when you would like something you would start a sentence with the word “Please”, for example, “Please may I have a sandwich?” When you have received something, you should always reply with “Thank you”.

Sorry! The British people are often heard to say “Sorry!” This word is used if people accidentally bump into each other or make a mistake. Often people say it even if they were not to blame (for example, a person bumped into them whilst walking in the street).

Mealtimes: It is considered polite to wait for all people at the table to have their meals in front of them before you start to eat. Knives and forks are used to eat the vast majority of main courses, although some British families may use other cutlery to suit the cuisine. Knives and forks are placed together to indicate that the diner has finished. It is not considered polite to eat with your mouth open or speak whilst eating. Similar to the beginning of the meal, diners usually wait until everyone is finished before leaving the table, and often time is spent having a chat around the table.

Scottish Overseas Guardianship Association Contact Information.

S.O.G.A

Office is 52 Glasgow Road,

Perth,
Perthshire,
PH2 0PB

Email:

info@scottishoverseasguardianship.co.uk
pamkerachersoga@hotmail.co.uk

Accounts.

pkcher@outlook.com Tel 07834717879

Telephone: Business 0044 (0)7762791805 (available 24 hours)

WhatsApp, WeChat, Viber, Messenger.

If it is not possible to answer your call (i.e., if I am driving or at a school meeting) please leave a message and text on WhatsApp, WeChat or Viber or Messenger and I /we will return your call.

EMERGENCY NUMBER 24hrs

0044 7762791805 or 0044 7834717879

