

DCSF Teachers' International Professional Development Programme:

Guidance for Group Leaders

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>General Responsibilities of the Group Leader</i>	3
<i>Practical Notes</i>	4
<i>Working with the group</i>	5
<i>In case of any questions</i>	6

Introduction

What is a TIPD visit?

TIPD is a Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) funded programme offering exciting opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants to visit other countries, to learn first-hand about education in a different culture. HTI Merganser, as a provider of this programme, enables teachers to see for themselves how classrooms operate elsewhere in the world. Each visit lasts one week and is based on a selected theme.

Every group will have a group leader. Group leaders are usually selected by the LA for their expertise on the theme of the study visit. For many leaders the visit will be their first professional international experience. The challenge of leading a group can be an exciting but daunting experience. Most LAs have a DCSF TIPD co-ordinator who will have experience of the programme and will guide you through the process and liaise with HTI Merganser on your behalf.

Preparing the group thoroughly is essential to the success of the visit just as much as taking the lead overseas. Additionally group leaders need to consider carefully how the visit will be followed up on return and how they can best accomplish this within their LA role.

Each destination offers a very different international experiences and each group has its own character. Bearing this in mind and in order to help you prepare for the role, experienced group leaders have drawn up some general hints and tips below.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the guidance for teachers and all other documentation provided by HTI Merganser.

General Responsibilities of the Group Leader

Working with the LA Coordinator

Group leaders are expected to work closely with the LA Coordinator on the organisation of the TIPD visit: the LA Coordinator is the main point of contact for a group leader, and any liaising with HTI Merganser should go through the LA Coordinator.

Convening at least two pre-visit meetings

These usually take place as “twilight” meetings, with a main aim of refining and objectives and devising research questions. They also enable team members to meet and get to know each other and deal with practical arrangements e.g. health issues. Check all participants have a copy of the teachers’ guidance notes (and contact your LA co-ordinator if they do not).

Making contact with the host

We very strongly recommend making brief contact with the host shortly before the visit to introduce yourself. Contact details will be provided with the visit information.

Supporting the group during their stay

The group leader is expected to convene and manage a short professional meeting at the end of each day’s professional programme to provide an opportunity for support and reflection.

Keeping HTI Merganser informed during the visit

HTI Merganser has a 24 hour emergency line. Group leaders should ensure that they call in to inform HTI Merganser of **any** issues that occur during the visit.

Report Writing

The group leader is responsible for making sure that a report is made available within the DCSF timescale (4 weeks). The most effective way to do this is to fully involve all the team members and to plan the report writing and drafting in the course of the preliminary meetings (the least effective way is to not think about it until you get our reminder two weeks after the visit!).

Co-ordination of follow up meetings

The Group Leader will also need to convene a follow up meeting, at which outcomes and next steps are reviewed. The group may also want to think about follow up to any contacts they have made through school partnerships.

Practical Notes

The following notes arise from considerable experience of running groups. If you are surprised or concerned about any individual point before the visit, do please contact us for more background information.

Before the visit:

- Ensure all participants have an EHIC card if the destination is in Europe (easily obtained from www.ehic.org.uk)
- Exchange mobile phone numbers, e-mails and other important details.
- Have a list of medical conditions or other issues relating to participants – e.g. fear of flying, pregnancy.
- Check tickets and flight details very carefully: ensure all participants receive their tickets as early as possible so they can check the details are correct.
- Ensure room-shares have been agreed and let HTI Merganser know. **Remind the group that the room bookings cannot be changed.**
- Advise participants to ensure they have emergency contact details for their bank and know the policy on using credit/debit cards abroad
- Ensure everyone has the emergency contact details for HTI Merganser, and the insurance contact details.
- Plan how everyone is going to get to the airport. This is not funded through the DCSF TIPD programme. Often hiring a minibus is a good option. Arrange a meeting point at the airport if not all travelling as a group. Let HTI Merganser know what arrangements have been made.
- It is vital to check in as a group, as the booking has been made as a group.
- Warn the group you may not all be able to sit together on the flight: this is not necessary, although it may be preferred.
- **Remind the group that travel arrangements can not be altered in any way.**

During the visit:

- Consider dress code in the schools and other places on the programme. Remember that this is a professional visit and the group is representing their schools, your LA and your country.
- Take one laptop between the group and share out tasks with the group.
- List participants' hotel room numbers and make sure they have yours. Indicate to the group that if an individual is seriously unwell during the night (sufficient to think that they may need a doctor or immediate medical treatment) then they should call your number first. (Our experience is that this happens very rarely indeed).
- Consider inviting the host if going for a group evening meal.

- In case of ANY issues, inform HTI Merganser on the 24-hour emergency number.
- If provided with a cheque to cover transport costs, ensure that this is used ONLY for the transport, and if any problems arise with finances, contact HTI Merganser as soon as possible.
- Ensure you know where to be, when, the day before, and ask if you are unsure.
- Do not cross any country borders during your free time, even if the opportunity appears unmissable – entry is often single-entry only and you would not be allowed back in.
- Be aware of safety for the whole group – listen to local advice, and try to ensure people don't go out on their own in unfamiliar places, even if they feel safe (Please remember that you have the final say in this. Even if the group member seems to know the local situation, if you are unhappy please say so. You may not be able to physically stop them, but they need to know they are going without your agreement).
- If taking photographs, ask permission first, both to take the photos and to share them with others on your return. In particular – as in the UK – be very careful about taking photos which clearly show children's' faces

Following the visit:

- Write a letter of thanks to the host following the visit. Try to do this as soon as possible on return.
- Complete any evaluations as requested by the host and provider. These should be completed and returned as soon as possible whilst the visit is still fresh in your mind.
- Write to the heads of the UK schools to share the report and feedback, raising the profile of the visit.
- Ensure that the report is with HTI Merganser one month following the visit.

Working with the group

Before the visit:

- Meet at least twice as a group before your visit.
- Build relationships and share information with the group before the visit through these initial meetings and via email.
- Research the education system of the country you are going to visit, and flag up any queries with HTI Merganser.
- Find out information relevant to the destination – are there customs and cultures that the group should be aware of?
- Read reports of previous visits to the destination if there are any – contact HTI Merganser for advice.
- Plan with the group how you are going to disseminate your findings.
- Start to build a relationship with the host before the visit via e-mail.
- If the group would like to take part in keeping a blog before/during the visit, speak to HTI Merganser to discuss how this may best be organised in association with our systems.
- Share aims and objectives clearly with the group.
- The group's expectations and objectives need to be realistic and appropriate, bearing in mind they will only have a few days to explore the education system.
- Explore the theme together with the group so that you have a shared understanding.
- If possible comment on the draft programme and share it with the group as early as possible.
- Ensure all members of the group have received, and read, the visit information – if possible, go through the information during the final meeting before the visit takes place.
- Prepare a presentation with the group before you leave if the programme requires this.

- Offer to do an input and share expertise with your hosts.
- Find out if you will be required to teach any lessons so that you can prepare
- Advise participants to take letters, children's work and gifts from their schools to give to host schools.
- Take gifts for the host. Items that reflect your local area are usually appreciated – e.g. calendars, posters, postcards, prints, mousemats

During the visit:

- Be open minded and flexible.
- Meet every evening as a group to reflect on the day and plan the next day. If possible, as a group, write some notes to assist with the report.
- Inform others at home about the progress of the visit via a blog if you have decided to take this option. If writing a blog, keep the content relevant and professional.
- Share out tasks amongst the group as necessary e.g. thank-you speeches or presentations.
- Think about making school to school links. Further funding could be available – information is available from your provider.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences.

Following the visit:

- Share your experiences with as many LA colleagues as possible.
- Collate photos on one site for all to share as a resource – but do check everyone is happy with the images before sharing them.
- Share the report with your LA co-ordinator before it goes to HTI Merganser.
- Ensure that it is a group report and that all participants contribute. Refer to the guidelines provided.
- Meet at least once for a de-briefing session but consider how the group will stay in contact and continue to develop findings.
- Refer back to your dissemination proposals. Are they working?
- Ask the group for feedback on developments as a result of the visit.
- If possible visit schools to see the impact of the visit.

In case of any questions

In the first instance, contact your LA Co-ordinator.

The HTI Merganser TIPD Administration team can be contacted at:

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Information is also available on the HTI Merganser website: <http://www.tipd.org.uk>