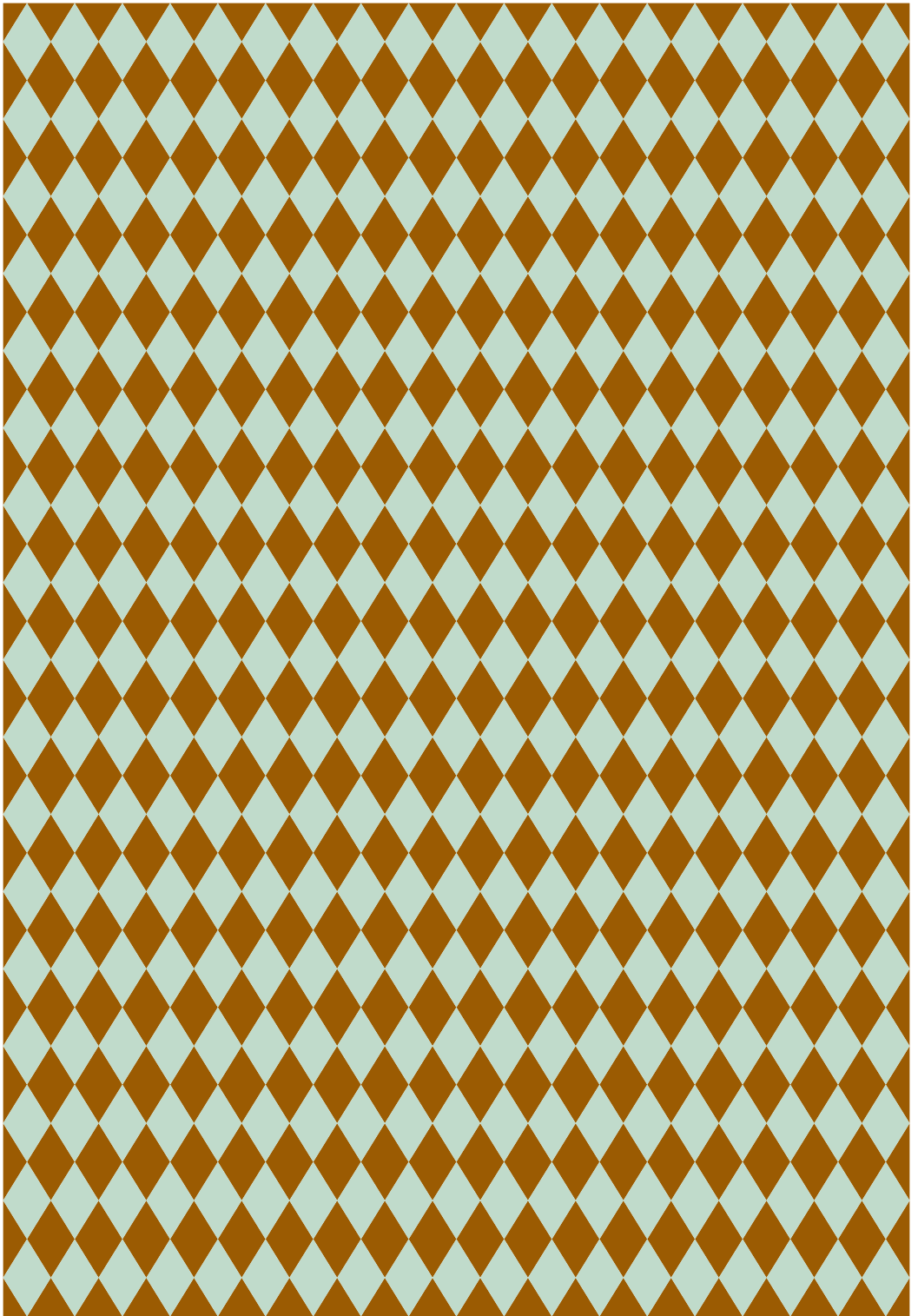


Ethical aspects relating to studies abroad

LUND UNIVERSITY ETHICS COUNCIL | PUBLICATION NO 1 | 2019





General guidance for ethical considerations relating to studies, placements, field studies and degree projects abroad

Cooperation is increasing between Lund University and higher education institutions abroad. More and more students are thus being given the opportunity to undertake valuable stays abroad for studies, placements, field studies and degree projects. Lund University's responsibilities include providing students with guidance prior to studies abroad. We therefore need a continuous discussion about what the "right" decision is in situations that may arise in connection with studies abroad. It is not possible to foresee all situations, but we have an obligation to obtain the best possible relevant knowledge. The guidance is intended to provide support in obtaining the knowledge required for planning studies abroad and provide guidelines for students in first and second cycle education.

The guidance is aimed at all employees who are responsible for planning and implementation of studies abroad and is therefore general in nature. In order to provide clear advice in concrete situations, the guidance needs to be complemented at faculty or department level, where specific needs and situations that arise within different activities should be taken into consideration.

This text presents a number of issues with recommendations about the information that should be available before a position is taken on studies abroad. This is followed by issues that may arise during and after students' stays abroad.

These issues are based on aims to: protect students and the quality of their studies during stays abroad, safeguard the environment from risks that the students' work may entail, and uphold Lund University's credibility as a prominent university for research and education.

The guidance has been drawn up by Lund University's Ethics Council.

ISSUES THAT MAY ARISE BEFORE DEPARTURE

1 Ensured outcomes

If education is received at higher education institutions abroad, the quality of this education must be ensured. If the student is to participate in activities other than campus-based studies, it is important to provide a correct picture of the student's level of expertise and what they can, or are allowed to, contribute in the host country. In the case of field studies and placements required for degrees, the host must provide the conditions and staff to supervise the student. If the studies are within the framework of Minor Field Studies, the safety aspects, including the host organisation's and supervisor's conditions, are assessed by Lund University's MFS Committee.

Expectations that the student is to carry out duties that they are not yet qualified to undertake, may arise, particularly for students within professional education and training. The duties that a student would not have been allowed to conduct in Sweden should not be conducted at another place of study either. If there is doubt about the student's planned activities – in terms of expertise, ethics or legal aspects – there should be a review to see whether the learning outcomes can be fulfilled in another way instead.

2 Approved project plan

The student should, together with the supervisor, draw up a plan for the project/stay. This is to contain information on the studies that will be conducted, the methods to be used, and how it is to be ensured that data is collected and stored in an ethical and legally correct way. During the project, the student may find new issues and options for data collection. In this situation, the supervisor is to be contacted for an assessment of whether this can be conducted in an ethically correct way. It is important to stress that the use of data that is not included in the plan drawn up for the degree project, or that has been approved in another way, entails a risk of a Fail grade.

3 Knowledge of rules and cultural aspects

In many countries permits are required for permission to undertake material collection for the purpose of a study or research. The student and supervisor have an obligation to inform themselves as far as possible about, and comply with, the laws and regulations that apply for the collection of empirical evidence in the host country. Even though it is not an offence against formal regulations, it can, for example, be inappropriate or actually dangerous to conduct interviews with specific groups of people. This may constitute a risk both for the student and the interviewees. In this case, also, there is an obligation to be sufficiently informed so that the student does not subject themselves or someone else to danger. The syllabi

and learning outcomes that are the basis for the foreign stay must be structured in such a way that the responsible department at Lund University has tools to fail a degree project if the student has failed to comply with good research ethics or scientific practice during their stay abroad.

4 A reasonably safe work environment

Even in countries where a stay may be associated with explicit risks, the university and student campus may sometimes offer good and safe environments. It is therefore important to obtain information on the student's forthcoming housing conditions and possibilities for free movement outside the campus area. The students should in good time inform themselves about such conditions, and follow the host university's recommendations.

5 Discrimination in the host country that may subject students to risk

There may be formal or informal rules in a country which mean that, for example, women, people of a certain ethnicity or LGBT individuals risk being harassed or punished. Based on these perspectives, it may be unsafe for certain students to visit specific countries. If a student is forced to relinquish a place at a university due to discrimination, the place should not be offered to another student. Lund University should not maintain cooperation with universities that victimise students on such grounds that are regulated in the Swedish Discrimination Act.

6 Cooperation with universities and institutions in countries with authoritarian regimes

Lund University cooperates with universities in many countries and not all of these can be defined as democracies. Lund University does not divide its contacts with countries into "approved" and "non-approved" governments. The suitability of a collaboration must be assessed in each individual case and based on the security and suitability aspects, which, among other things, are discussed in this guidance. For studies covered by central or faculty-specific exchange agreements, the suitability can be considered as approved.

7 War zones and other dangerous areas

If the environment in the host country can be considered dangerous, students should be advised to avoid the study destination. The recommendations of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are always to be followed. However, a special risk assessment must be conducted for students who are not Swedish citizens. As within many disciplines there is an interest in geographical regions that are dangerous to visit, it does happen that students wish to undertake study trips even though managers at Lund University have advised against it. If the student, despite such recommendations, still undertakes such field studies that are to be the basis for a degree at Lund University,

there should be deliberations on whether the work can be assessed, as the focus of the work has not been approved in advance.

8 Funding

Exchanges and stays abroad that are partly or wholly funded by external parties raise questions about the funder's requirements and expectations. If these demands entail problems for the student, or are incompatible with the University's requirement for objectivity and a scientific approach, the cooperation should not be initiated. The same applies if the funder, for other reasons, can be considered questionable – for example if their activities regularly violate human rights.

9 Ethical review of student work

Even if the student's work is legal in the host country, it may contravene Swedish legislation or good scientific practice. In this situation, the issue is divided into two parts. The first relates to requirements for approval in the host country, while the other relates to a review procedure for such cases that do not require authorisation in the host country, but are prohibited in Sweden.

ISSUES THAT MAY ARISE DURING THE STAY

1 Information about contact details

In order to respond to sudden situations, the student and person in charge at Lund University should be very familiar with the existing procedures for such situations. The person in charge at Lund University must have information about contact details for the student and the relevant contact person in the host country.

2 Security and welfare deficiencies

If a security-related problem arises during the stay, it may be unclear who is responsible for making the situation secure. Regardless of the formal and insurance-related responsibilities, Lund University should consider what can be done for the person concerned. If it is a matter of individual students in a situation where other public authorities do not have a reason to respond, the staff in charge at Lund University should investigate possibilities to assist in the acute situation, such as bring those affected home or paying for travel out of the country.

3 Prohibited duties

Students may be expected to carry out duties in, for example, healthcare or medicine, that they do not have the expertise or authorisation to carry out according to Swedish regulations. The students are not permitted to carry out such duties without the requisite training and expert supervision. It is important that student is

to be clearly informed about the option to refuse such prohibited duties, and that there is a supervisor in charge at Lund University for students to refer to.

4 Unethical duties

If students are requested to apply methods that do not have a scientific basis or are not conducted in accordance with proven experience, they are not obliged to carry these out. It is important that the student is not exploited or badly treated as a result of this. The student is to be clearly informed about the option to refuse such duties, and there is to be someone with responsibility for this issue at Lund University for students to refer to.

ISSUES THAT MAY ARISE AFTER RETURNING

1 Interruption of a stay abroad

Unexpected events, such as harassment, natural disasters or ill health may compel the student to interrupt their stay. The department therefore needs to have a contingency plan for how these events are to be managed in terms of support through counselling and guidance on how missed credits are to be gained.

2 Processing of data

Data is to be processed in accordance with the current rules and regulations for data processing. When it is of great importance, for example to protect vulnerable groups in the host country, there may be a need for special deliberations regarding data that can represent a danger for individuals or groups. Incorrect processing of data collected in another country may not only entail problems for those affected, but may also present obstacles to sending students to the same area in the future.

3 Externally funded scholarships

There are examples of students who have received external scholarships for which the funder subsequently set requirements regarding access or publication of data. The department should have a policy to regulate how this is managed.

Lund University Ethics Council

The council works to increase understanding of the importance of an ethical approach to the University's activities, stimulate discussion and debate on ethical issues, as well as promote the development of knowledge in the area of ethics.

The Ethics Council acts in an advisory capacity to the Vice-Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor's Management Council on ethical issues.

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