Higher Education and the Travel Risk Paradox: 
The need for pragmatism

In an increasingly interconnected world, more and more University students are looking to broaden their experiences, and spend time overseas to gain a competitive edge as they enter an increasingly globalised economy.

Whether students and academics are conducting cutting edge research in difficult places, improving their academic performance though foreign language immersion or gaining deeper cultural understanding of their chosen study areas, inherent risk exists, not just for the travellers themselves, but for the Universities that enable and support them.

As the higher education sector grapples with the risks, and the potential impacts of them, there needs to be pause to ensure that the risks are being managed in an appropriate and considered way. This is because there is a critical balance that needs to be struck; the balance between the management of risk and academic freedom.

Protecting Academic Freedoms

In recent years there has been a lot of conversation, quite rightly, about the legislative demands for greater risk management around overseas travel (principally driven by the Corporate Manslaughter Act 2007 and Health and Safety at Work Act (1974) in the UK). However, not enough of that conversation has focussed on the need for pragmatism; to empower students and staff to undertake their travel in a safe way, that enables their research and does not impede their learning opportunity.

We have reached this point because the financial and reputational risks to HEIs, their management and their academic supervisors is very real. In the past 18 months alone we have seen the conclusion of one major test case against an education institution in the US, with the Connecticut Supreme Court upholding a $41.5 million verdict in favour of a high school student who was infected with tick-bourne encephalitis on a school-led trip to China. Meanwhile, Italian magistrates probing the murder in Cairo of Cambridge University student Giulio Regeni issued a European Investigation Order against his academic supervisor at the University, suggesting that Regeni was unduly pressured to conduct his sensitive research. This raises the prospect of findings against not just the institutions themselves, but key members of staff within academic departments.

The wrong type of risk management?

Inevitably, a threat like this leads to strong responses, but these can run the risk of stifling the academic community’s ability to deliver great work. Travel Risk Management in the HEI sector has not reached the level of maturity it has in other arenas, such as the humanitarian and media sectors. As a result, Universities have looked to large corporate security companies to provide very expensive ‘off the peg’ travel risk products. These products are expensive, largely because they were developed for corporate or governmental clients, tend not to consider or understand the nuances of academia. So, with seemingly limited options, Universities are buying “one size fits all” products which inevitably create restrictions on overseas work, which often leads to resentment between academic departments and health and safety advisors.
Developing a Unique Approach

We don’t believe that this situation is carrying the sector in the direction it needs to travel. We believe that HEIs need to develop their own approaches to travel risk management in the same way that the media and humanitarian communities have done over the past 20 years or so.

Based on our work within the Higher Education Sector we recognize the following challenges facing Universities today:

- HEIs, as global organisations with extensive international travel profiles, have very complex Duty of Care obligations
- The sheer volume of travel makes tracking and monitoring very difficult
- Budgetary pressures pose a consistent challenge
- There is often limited integration of safety and security into research design and ethics approval
- Insurance is often being used as a risk appetite decision-maker
- Responsibility for travel risk is often siloed
- There is a wide variation in perception of risk across the staff and student body
- It is increasingly difficult of define 'safe environments' in the light of terrorist incidents in countries previously considered to be safe
- Students and researchers can easily circumvent travel management processes without consequences
- Travel Safety measures are often seen as bureaucratic hurdles that impede travel and overseas study
- The ability to support students in a crisis is often weak
We have developed ‘10 Easy Wins’ for our HEI clients to follow in order to build a pragmatic and supportive travel safety culture.

- Centralise your travel booking
- Utilise Intelli-TRIP
- Offer workshops to build support
- Create user-friendly systems
- Be pragmatic: enable, don’t inhibit
- Setup a safety and security review group
- Convene a cross-departmental panel
- Consider ‘Activity’ Risk
- Consider ‘Profile’ Risk
- Adopt a 2-tier approach to risk management

ILS’ 10 Easy Wins
10 Easy Wins’ to build a pragmatic and supportive travel safety culture.

1. Centralise your travel booking. Select one or two travel management companies (TMCs) and establish an institutional policy that ensures the vast majority of travel is booked through these service providers. This means you will have oversight of who is travelling where, and when. This will allow you to implement a travel approval system that can be tied to risk management.

2. Utilise ILS’ cloud-based Travel Risk Management Platform, Intelli-TRIP. This simple to use risk management dashboard and smartphone app has been designed specifically for educational institutions to cost effectively measure, manage and reduce institutional travel risk.

3. Remember, whilst the perceived threat rating of the destination is an important consideration, so too are the activities that the traveller will be undertaking. For example, they may be conducting contentious research in a benign environment, which could place them in as much or more danger than a traveller going to a high risk environment and attending meetings.

4. The personal profile of the traveller also plays a critical role in risk management. Their age, health, ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc. may be important factors to consider.

5. Adopt a two-tier approach to travel. This should aim to simplify processes for lower risk travel, whilst allowing enhanced support and risk control processes for higher risk travel.

6. Convene a cross-departmental panel that includes research design and ethics stakeholders, as well as Health and Safety, so that safety and security risks within research projects can be considered at the design stage.

7. Set up a collaborative safety and security review group to ensure that high risk travel is being assessed and managed in the right way. This group’s decisions should be governed by the HEI’s stated threshold of acceptable risk, should ensure that the Safety and Security Policy is being adhered to, and support the Health and Safety team (or Travel Risk Managers), as the focal points for safety and security at the university.

8. Adopt a pragmatic approach: travel risk management needs to be seen as an enabler, not and inhibitor of work. Incentivise staff and students to comply with the systems and processes. Make it clear that by adhering to these staff and students increase the likelihood that their research will go ahead, reducing risks to them and their research subjects.

9. Make your systems and processes straightforward and user-friendly, remember no one wants to fill in a 12 page risk assessment! Remove any sense that this will be an arduous or bureaucratic process. Create tools and resources that will genuinely help your users to comply with your systems.

10. Run regular short workshops to engage your users and implement your systems so that when they need to travel they know how to engage with the process, and why they are doing it.
About Intelli-TRIP

Intelli-TRIP is a groundbreaking smartphone app that enables HEIs to adopt a pragmatic, systematic and academic specific approach to managing all travel. It offers:

- **Individual Travel Risk Assessment**
  - Based upon the destination, planned activities, personal profile and risk appetite of the organisation.

- **Secure I.M. Communications Portal**
  - Allowing instant contact with individuals or groups of travellers.

- **Next Generation Traveller Check-in Functionality**
  - Either through a timed schedule, or on demand, so you can account for everyone at the click of a button.

- **Travel Risk Management Dashboard**
  - So that you can see how many travellers you have, where they are, those at risk and those in need of assistance.

Intelli-TRIP will provide your university with:

- Risk appropriate travel management for every overseas trip
- Automated risk assessments and travel safety guidance for every overseas trip
- An institution specific risk tolerance setting, against which all travel is measured
- Notification of any high risk travel
- A communication portal that allows you to instantly message travellers
- The ability to rapidly locate large numbers of travellers in a crisis
- A traveller check-in function so you know that everyone is safe at the click of a button
- A demonstrable risk audit trail
- Improved compliance with travel protocols
- Travel risk integration with TMC processes for travel approval
- A free 1-day workshop with our HEI Travel Risk Advisor Team

To find out more, visit [www.locationsafety.com/intelli-trip](http://www.locationsafety.com/intelli-trip) or email [intelli-trip@locationsafety.com](mailto:intelli-trip@locationsafety.com) now, for an online demo.