

# World Orthopaedic Concern UK / Subspecialty Global Orthopaedic Units Unified Code of Conduct for Overseas Engagement work



## Ethical Policy for Overseas Surgical, Medical, and Educational Engagement

**Version:** 2.0 (Revised)

**Status:** Approved Policy Document

**Owner:** World Orthopaedic Concern UK (WOC-UK)

**Partners:** British Orthopaedic Foot & Ankle Society (BOFAS), British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH), British Orthopaedic Trainees Association (BOTA), British Society for Children's Orthopaedic Surgery (BSCOS), British Orthopaedic Oncology Society (BOOS)

**Review Cycle:** Every 3 years or following major incidents

**Applies to:** All overseas clinical, surgical, educational, research, and humanitarian activities associated with WOC-UK

---

# 1. Purpose and Scope

This policy provides a comprehensive ethical and operational framework for consultants, trainees, students, and multidisciplinary teams undertaking overseas clinical, surgical, educational, or research activity—particularly within low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This policy supplements rather than replaces existing sub-specialty charters already in place and serves to provide a broader governance framework. The policy remains open to other sub-specialty organisations to adopt upon mutual agreement.

The policy aims to:

- Protect patient safety and welfare.
  - Promote sustainable and equitable partnerships.
  - Ensure high professional, cultural, and legal standards.
  - Support responsible conduct and accountability.
  - Strengthen local health systems through ethical, sustainable engagement.
- 

## 2. Core Ethical Principles

All WOC-UK members must uphold the following principles:

### 2.1 Primacy of Patient Welfare

Activities must *first and foremost* benefit patients and local communities. “Do no harm” underpins all decision-making.

### 2.2 Local Service Focus

Programmes must support locally identified needs and respect host leadership and governance.

### 2.3 Professional Equivalence

Clinical, ethical, and legal standards abroad must match those expected in UK practice, irrespective of local regulatory variation.

### 2.4 Integrity and Altruism

Engagement must never be motivated by personal gain, self-promotion, or career advancement.

### 2.5 Reflective Practice

Volunteers should engage in continuous critical reflection and be open to feedback from host partners.

## 2.6 Cultural Sensitivity and Respect

Maintain respect for local beliefs, customs, language, and political context. Avoid ethnocentric behaviours. ---

# 3. Partnership, Preparation, and Governance

Sustainable collaboration requires strong foundations.

## 3.1 Early Engagement and Communication

- Establish communication with host institutions well in advance.
- Identify local priorities and agree shared objectives.

## 3.2 Partnership or Visitor Agreements

- Develop a memorandum of understanding or visitor's agreement outlining scope, responsibilities, and governance.

## 3.3 Local Permissions and Registration

- Secure all required medical registrations, licenses, and institutional permissions *before* undertaking any clinical activity.

## 3.4 Understanding Local Context and Capacity

Teams must assess:

- Local diagnostic capabilities
- Theatre infrastructure and sterility standards
- Anaesthetic services and monitoring
- Blood transfusion availability
- Postoperative and rehabilitation capacity

## 3.5 Collaborative and Non-Competitive Practice

- Work *with*, not in competition with, local clinicians.
- Prioritise joint case selection and shared clinical decision-making.

## 3.6 Minimising Burden on Host Institutions

- Ensure visiting teams do not strain local infrastructure or disrupt clinical pathways.

## 3.7 Long-Term Partnership Commitment

- Prioritise continuity, repeat visits, and sustained collaboration over short-term missions.
-

## 4. Sustainability and Capacity Building

WOC-UK prioritises strengthening local health systems.

### 4.1 Education and Training

- Focus on practical skills, protocols, and sustainable improvements.
- Prioritise training for local healthcare workers at all levels.
- Trainees especially should not take training and operating opportunities away from local trainees.

### 4.2 Balancing Service Provision and Training

Although service delivery may be necessary, teams must ensure that:

- Local staff are actively involved.
- Skill transfer is embedded.
- Training is not deprioritised for case volume.

### 4.3 Appropriate Technology Transfer

Do not introduce systems, implants, or procedures that cannot be safely maintained or afforded locally.

### 4.4 Monitoring Outcomes and Data Strengthening

- Support local audit, record-keeping, and outcome measurement.
- Use data to advance local capacity and evaluate programme impact.

### 4.5 Independence of Host Services

Long-term aim: develop self-sufficient local orthopaedic and surgical services without dependence on external teams. ---

## 5. Scope of Practice and Clinical Standards

### 5.1 Practising Within Competence

- Clinicians must not perform procedures abroad that exceed the scope of their UK practice.

### 5.2 Trainee Supervision

- Trainees must be supervised by appropriately qualified consultants at all times.

### 5.3 Case Selection and Safety

- Avoid undertaking cases requiring postoperative support beyond local capacity.

---

## 6. Communication, Consent, and Cultural Safety

### 6.1 Cultural and Linguistic Respect

- Learn key phrases in the local language.
- Use trained interpreters where needed.

### 6.2 Informed Consent

- Ensure consent is culturally and linguistically adapted.
- Address local literacy, belief systems, and consent norms.

### 6.3 Photography and Media

- Obtain explicit consent for all images.
  - Avoid sensational, exploitative, or dehumanising content.
  - Extra care must be taken when photographing children.
- 

## 7. Education and Mutual Learning

### 7.1 Prioritising Local Learners

Teaching should primarily benefit host-country trainees and staff.

### 7.2 Alignment with Local Curricula

Training must complement, not duplicate or undermine, local programmes.

### 7.3 Support for Visiting Students

Students visiting from the UK must learn respectfully alongside local trainees. ---

## 8. Research, Data Governance, and Publication

### 8.1 Ethical Approval

- Secure ethical approval from host-country authorities before starting research.

### 8.2 Data Protection and Confidentiality

- Anonymise patient data and respect local and international data laws.

### 8.3 Fair Authorship

- Ensure equitable authorship and acknowledgement for local collaborators.

### 8.4 Benefit to Host Communities

Research must meaningfully benefit local populations. ---

## 9. Professional Conduct and Ambassadorial Responsibility

### 9.1 Integrity and Professionalism

Maintain the highest standards of behaviour at all times.

### 9.2 Respectful Representation

All participants represent the UK, WOC-UK, and their home institutions.

### 9.3 Sensitivity to Wealth Disparity

Be aware of local economic realities and avoid displays of wealth.

### 9.4 Zero-Tolerance for Sexual Misconduct

No form of sexual harassment, coercion, or misconduct is tolerated. ---

## 10. Equipment and Donations

### 10.1 Appropriate Equipment

Only bring equipment requested by local teams or that you are fully qualified to use.

### 10.2 Avoiding Harm from Donations

- Do not donate expired, unsafe, or unserviceable items.
  - Remove equipment brought for personal use that local teams cannot maintain.
- 

## 11. Personal Health, Wellbeing, and Safety

### 11.1 Vaccinations and Indemnity

Ensure vaccinations, indemnity cover, and emergency plans are up to date.

### 11.2 Insurance and Evacuation Cover

Comprehensive medical and evacuation insurance is strongly recommended.

### 11.3 Stress, Fatigue, and Personal Safety

Working in resource-limited settings can be stressful—seek support where needed. ---

## 12. Indemnity, Legal Registration, and Professional Requirements

### 12.1 Overseas Indemnity

Confirm UK indemnity providers cover overseas work or arrange additional cover.

### 12.2 Local Registration

Allow adequate time to arrange licenses and registrations.

### 12.3 UK Revalidation

Include overseas work in annual appraisal and revalidation activities. ---

## 13. Conflicts of Interest and Financial Conduct

### 13.1 Avoiding Conflicts

Declare and manage all potential conflicts of interest.

### 13.2 No Personal or Private Gain

Personal benefit from LMIC work—financial or otherwise—is unacceptable.

### 13.3 Protection of Vulnerable Patients

Never exploit individuals or systems for experience, image capture, or research. ---

## 14. Additional Ethical Requirements (Aligned with RCS Guidance)

### 14.1 Emergency and Disaster Response

- Humanitarian work should be delivered *only* through established organisations.
- Avoid participating in poorly coordinated independent missions.
- Personal safety and indemnity must be fully assessed.

### 14.2 Collaboration with NGOs and Aid Agencies

- Verify that agency mandates align with UK ethical standards.
- Ensure meaningful engagement with host communities, especially vulnerable groups.

### 14.3 Impact on Local Health Economies

Visiting teams must avoid unintentionally:

- Distorting local systems
- Displacing local clinicians
- Burdening facilities or supply chains

### 14.4 Working with Children

Paediatric care must only be delivered by clinicians with appropriate expertise.

### 14.5 Publicity and Narrative Representation

- Use images and stories only with consent and host-institution approval.
- Avoid sensationalism, poverty porn, or misrepresentation.

### 14.6 Use of Animals in Training/Research

Maintain UK animal welfare standards irrespective of local norms.

### 14.7 Social Media and Public Conduct

Maintain professionalism online at all times.

### 14.8 Local and International Law

Honorary contracts do *not* automatically confer the right to practise. All legal requirements must be met. ---

## 15. Document Control and Governance

- **Owner:** World Orthopaedic Concern UK (WOC-UK)
  - **Version:** 2.0
  - **Status:** Approved
  - **Review Date:** Every 3 years or following major incidents
  - **Applies to:** All WOC-UK overseas activity, including clinical, surgical, educational, research, and humanitarian missions.
- 

End of Policy Document