



**EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS
WANTED TO KNOW
ABOUT A HAPPY EXCHANGE...**

BUT HADN'T THOUGHT TO ASK!

Guide to a happy exchange

This is a support document for the QETL document
Our Exchange Agreement.

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Introduction

The success of your exchange will depend on your having an open mind, planning your exchange carefully, and adopting a positive attitude. An exchange is a learning experience. Be willing to try different lifestyles and changed circumstances before judging them.

Your first few months are likely to be your most difficult. You may be welcomed by the neighbours or friends/relatives of your exchange, or left to your own devices. The same may happen at school. You may be accepted more quickly in the school if you offer to help out in a non-teaching activity. In short, work hard and don't whinge.

The success of the exchange program depends on the ethics and responsibilities of both exchangees: in the professional sphere and with respect to house, cars and appliances. Above all, be honest with each other.

Queensland Exchange Teachers' League

History

In 1981, a group of teachers formed the Queensland Exchange Teachers' League (QETL). Members of this group had all recently returned from exchange and wanted to establish a support network for teachers on exchange in Queensland.

Composition

Similar exchange teacher bodies exist in most Australian states. The Queensland Exchange Teachers' League has about 70 members, representing education professionals who are working for Education Queensland, Queensland independent schools and Catholic schools. Membership is divided into various categories incorporating founding life members, life members, ordinary members and corporate members. Teachers currently on exchange are eligible to subscribe as associate members.

Organisation

The QETL is an incorporated body represented by a Management Committee elected from the membership. The group is committed to supporting the Queensland exchange teacher program, enhancing the professional and social opportunities of current exchange teachers and liaising with education authorities locally. Additionally, the QETL is an apolitical, voluntary, self-funding organisation.

The Management Committee

President	Helen Leben	07 3901 6850	hlebe1@eq.edu.au
Vice President	Pauline Tatham	07 3397 2505	
Secretary	Ros Curtis	07 5546 6703	rcurt13@eq.edu.au
Treasurer	Liz Davis	07 3352 6609	lizdavis2@bigpond.com

Functions

The primary aim of the QETL is to assist teachers to maximise the professional and cultural benefits of the exchange program. This aim is pursued through a number of educational and social functions.

Aims

The QETL aims to:

- support the Queensland exchange teacher program,
- assist current exchange teachers to derive the maximum professional and cultural benefit from their experiences, and
- liaise with the education authorities responsible for organising exchanges, Education Queensland and the Queensland Independent Education Union.

Queensland Exchange Teachers' League

continued

Activities

Major activities conducted are:

- **Preparation Conferences** in August for teachers going on exchange the following year. In recent years, the Brisbane Conference has been held at the Brisbane School of Distance Education and the North Queensland Conference in Mackay or Townsville.
- **Welcome Conferences** in early February for newly arrived overseas and interstate exchange teachers. The venues are as for the Preparation Conferences.
- **A range of travel and social activities** including day and weekend trips, restaurant outings, visits to sporting fixtures, and barbecues.

Communication

The QETL publishes a newsletter each semester and uses e-mail for interim updates. The web address for the QETL is <http://qetl.eq.edu.au/Index.htm>.

Financial Support

The QETL is mainly funded by membership subscriptions. Diploma Travel generously funds the printing and mailing of the QETL newsletter, and was the major sponsor for the QETL's silver anniversary celebrations in 2006.

Commitment to your exchange

Preparation

Although you have probably spent many anxious and busy months applying and being accepted for an exchange, you now have to face weeks of hard work in completing personal and professional arrangements before you leave Australia.

Expect to feel like a first year teacher again.

As an experienced teacher, you may find it hard to accept your lack of confidence when faced with a new and unusual teaching situation. This feeling is natural for all teachers on exchange.

Culture shock

This includes a combination of jet lag, change of climate and food, accommodation, school and the lack of a support group. Even though you may be with your family, all other members are going through the same experience and thus may not be able to offer support. Don't underestimate the adjustment that may be needed in the first month or so.

Mountains or molehills

The result of this culture shock can often be that a minor irritation or problem is blown up out of all proportion to its real significance. Some recent examples of minor problems that have affected the delicate balance of exchange are:

- comparing host country, school, etc., with home
- problems with pets and relatives
- indiscreet comments to principals and other staff members
- smaller, more confined home than expected
- exaggeration of minor health problems
- negative attitude to everyday events
- interference by close relatives or friends
- failure to follow instructions or advice in various parts of this booklet
- feeling depressed or isolated in weather you're not used to (particularly if you arrive in winter).

Positive attitude

In case of any minor problems, ask yourself:

- "Is the problem really as serious as I think it is, or is it caused by a combination of the factors outlined above?"
- "Am I being positive about the problem or are there other things I could be doing to solve it? Can't I just live with it?"

Commitment to your exchange

continued

Major problems

If the problem is major (professional or personal), contact the appropriate people. Keep accurate records of incidents. Keep details of communication, including copies of letters sent and received. Try to avoid getting into unpleasant correspondence with your exchangeee or any local people. Do not involve other people unnecessarily; you may be living in a very small community.

Sense of humour

Remember at all times to be positive, adaptable and calm, and keep your sense of humour. You have applied for an exchange in order to **experience a different culture and learning environment**. Above all, remember that you are an ambassador of your state and country. As such, you should try to appreciate the differences you will face in the next twelve months.

Making arrangements with your exchange partner

Regular correspondence

Regular exchange of information is the key to a smooth exchange.

Initial contact

The correspondence you will have with your exchange partner before departure will play an essential part in the success of your exchange year. You should therefore communicate immediately with your partner. Your partner will be given similar instructions. Send your partner accurate and honest information as soon as possible.

Means of communication

These days, the best way to communicate quickly is via e-mail. If you don't have a home computer, you should be able to arrange an e-mail address at school. Phone calls are also relatively cheap, but be aware of the time differences that apply.

Ongoing contact

Continue to inform your exchange partner of all relevant issues, including changes that will affect the exchange.

Exchange Agreement

The QETL recommends that each Queensland exchange teacher have a written agreement for the purposes of exchanging houses and cars (for those who choose to swap cars). The QETL document **Our Exchange Agreement** serves as a written exchange of commitment between you and your exchange partner, and is also a comprehensive checklist of all the matters that should be considered in preparing, enjoying and concluding your exchange year.

Your exchange partner may have a similar agreement or "contract" that they will ask you to complete. If not, the QETL document might serve to use for both ends of the exchange.

Any exchange of accommodation, cars, etc., is an entirely private matter between the two partners; however, we recommend that you and your partner clearly define all exchange arrangements **in writing** in order to avoid the difficulties and misunderstandings that can arise through verbal, informal correspondence. The Agreement should include such things as the date on which the accommodation/car is to be exchanged, and dates to and from which accounts for electricity, gas, telephone, etc., will be paid in each country by each teacher. You should arrange for a friend (or solicitor) to witness any such Agreement and to be available during the year should a problem arise. It is normal for teachers exchanging homes to continue paying their own mortgage but to exchange accounts for utilities such as gas, electricity and telephone (remember there may be charges for new connections or change of names).

The legal or binding nature of an agreement made using the document **Our Exchange Agreement** is not guaranteed by the QETL. Should you require a more legally binding agreement, you should seek assistance of your legal representative.

Making arrangements with your exchange partner

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Exchanging the house/flat

With the exchange of a house/flat, it is best to state clearly what the duties and responsibilities of each party are. The QETL document **Our Exchange Agreement** may be a useful basis for this agreement.

Exchange arrangements involving rented premises should be covered by agreements protecting the rights of the landlord and the exchangee as tenant. It should be possible for an agreement to be reached, for the duration of the exchange period, in which the particular circumstances of the exchangee arrangement are covered.

If you are exchanging rented accommodation, then the cost of heating and electricity might be included in your exchangees' rent, and therefore you must reach agreement on that.

You should also take into account the responsibility for major maintenance problems that may arise during the year to homes and cars. When paying final accounts overseas, these should be up to the agreed date of vacating the property. You should keep receipts for all payments made.

Where possible, avoid disconnection of services such as telephone and electricity. These incur even higher charges than transfers and can cause a delay in reconnection. You need to consider carefully how best to arrange these matters with your exchange partner.

In spite of the advice we give in connection with home exchanges, problems still arise. Therefore, we make another suggestion: an independent viewing of the homes at key times (**before** the home exchange commences and **prior to the departure** of each teacher at the end of the exchange year). The homes could be 'checked' by an independent neighbour or staff member who can be proved to be impartial. You should also ensure that all equipment in the home is in good working order. Leave lists giving names and addresses of suppliers/repairers who should be contacted where necessary, and come to an arrangement with your partner about who will be responsible for any minor and major repairs.

When exchanging accommodation, you should exchange photographs of the property and give a clear description of the size and furnishings in every room, and be specific about the type of heating/cooling, i.e. gas/electricity/air conditioning. Remember that your exchange partner may be dissimilar to you in ideas of essentials/luxuries in the home and in the way the home is run. If you decide to exchange homes, you must be prepared for these difficulties and for a reasonable amount of wear and tear to your property. It is fairly easy to become involved in disputes with your exchange partner over necessary repairs: this can lead to a less than satisfactory relationship. This difficulty can often be avoided if each teacher nominates a responsible local agent to make on-the-spot decisions and payments to an agreed amount.

It is strongly advised that you and your exchange partner each be aware of the normal average costs of running the home, e.g., electricity, gas, telephone, and any other bills that your

Making arrangements with your exchange partner

continued

partner will be paying, together with costs which you may continue to pay, such as mortgage, local taxes, water rates and television licences. Please ensure that no bills are left for your own property or the property you rent or exchange, as this can lead to a serious embarrassment between you and your partner. If you have arrangements with service providers to have accounts paid from your bank/credit union account, you may have to cancel these or make arrangements for your agent to collect payments from your exchange partner.

To provide for easy reference, the Appendix Section of the QETL document **Our Exchange Agreement** contains much of the information required for exchanging houses and cars and, if completed fully, becomes an indexed information booklet for you and your exchange partner.

House insurance

With regard to accommodation exchange, we remind you to check with your insurance companies that your policies will not be affected by the change of occupancy, that new names are registered for the exchange year, and that you have a realistic cover that will extend to your exchange partner's personal belongings.

Approach your insurance company to get an "override or bridge" to insure your own personal effects in your exchange person's home overseas/interstate. Check to see if your travel insurance covers this eventuality.

Exchanging cars

The exchange of vehicles can cause great problems. Unless you are totally happy with arrangements made, you are advised not to exchange vehicles.

You could consider buying, leasing or hiring a car.

If you do decide to exchange cars, ensure that the size and condition of your borrowed vehicle is safe, reasonably economical, and suits your family's travelling requirements.

If you decide to exchange cars, come to an agreement about repairs, servicing, insurance, extent of travel, etc., **and put the agreement, including any conditions imposed, in writing. Get it signed by both parties.**

Accidents do happen. Arrangements need to be made to cover this possibility.

Driving habits and conditions differ significantly.

Check to see if distance limits are to be set. Remember you will probably want to use a vehicle for the summer holidays.

Even if your car has been left in good mechanical condition, you have no guarantee that it will remain that way - similarly with your exchangee's car.

Remember, things go wrong mechanically when **you** are driving your car.

Making arrangements with your exchange partner

continued

Ask your exchange partner to check with their local police authority as to the requirements concerning driver's licences. Some countries require you to obtain a local licence if you are staying longer than 3 months. If this is the case, you may revert to a learner's permit until the full licence is supplied.

In some countries a valid "International Driver's Permit" is all that is required to allow you to drive for one year. Check with your exchangee about the requirements of the country to which you are going.

Obtain a **Commonwealth Motoring Conference Card** or **Letter of Introduction to the A.A.A.** from the RACQ. Take your RACQ Membership Card with you. An additional bonus is that RACQ members can obtain free or inexpensive copies of maps and brochures on travel and accommodation from the A.A.A.

Car insurance

This varies from country to country, but you should:

- Check with the local automobile association as soon as you arrive.
- Take a copy of your Australian insurance record signed by the manager of your Australian insurance company and a copy of your traffic record from Queensland Transport. Most overseas insurance companies require a record for at least the last five years. The Australian rating 1 is very different from overseas. Ensure the letter from your insurance company states that you receive the greatest discount with a rating 1.
- Have your partner insure their car in your name and vice versa to avoid losing any no claim bonus that has been accumulated.
- Contact previous Queensland exchangees to find out special conditions in the country/state/province to which you are going. They can provide names of insurance companies that accept policies from temporary residents.

Personal arrangements you should make

Finance and money

Experience of previous exchangeees has shown that depositing your salary into your Australian bank or credit union and accessing your money via an internationally recognised credit card (e.g. Visa, Mastercard) is the most cost-effective and efficient means of managing your money.

Opening a local cheque account is recommended for bill paying, etc. (You may need a cheque card from the bank to operate your cheque account.) Ask your exchange partner to find out what documents you need to open an account.

If you are a Queensland Teachers' Credit Union member, you can obtain immediate account information by telephoning them during Australian business hours and providing them with your Tele-Access number. This information is only a password and mouse click away if you're registered for online banking.

Never leave yourself with only a few dollars in your pocket if you are relying on credit card/electronic funds transfer, just in case 'the system' is down!

Your exchange will cost you your entire income and more. Don't think of saving and be prepared to spend. Otherwise you will miss out on so much and you'll have a worrying year. Remember you have the rest of your life to pay off your debts.

Currency and exchange rates

Currency rates fluctuate. Be aware that there could be differences in each transaction. Try to find a Visa card that does not charge an exchange rate fee on transactions in other countries.

For the United Kingdom, the QETL recommends having a Queensland Teachers' Credit Union ACE.S1 account. This requires no removal of funds from Australia, and all expenditure through VISA card is paid in full at the end of each month. Some banks will issue bank cheques at no or little cost (TSB and Halifax Building Society) while others have hefty charges (Barclays and National Westminster).

Medical and hospital insurance

The QETL recommends taking out travel insurance to cover your entire travel period. Some companies provide 13-month cover for exchange teachers. It is important to check the medical component of your insurance contract, as countries such as the USA have extremely high medical costs.

Private health insurance in Australia (MBF, Medibank Private, Queensland Teachers' Credit Union Health) in addition to normal Medicare can be preserved at no cost by having your membership suspended (up to 13 months) while you are out of Australia. Check with your own Private Health Fund.

As health insurance arrangements vary considerably in every state/province/country, it is necessary to obtain relevant information from your exchange partner. Medical and hospital costs are much higher overseas than here.

Overseas teachers on exchange in the **United Kingdom** will be exempt from charges being

Personal arrangements you should make

continued

made for medical treatment under changes in the Health Act. Under National Health cover similar to Ambulance, Medicare, Private health care would be additional.

Your spouse and children will also be exempt. Definition of “child” includes a child under 16 years, and any child in full-time education up to the age of 19 years.

You should register with a British (or Canadian or US) doctor immediately upon arrival. Don't wait until you are ill. When a doctor has accepted you as a patient, you will obtain a medical card that will be used for visits to a doctor, hospital, dentists, etc. In some EEC countries, medical benefits are available to holders of British medical cards. You can obtain a leaflet explaining this from the doctor or Health Department.

Medicare and most other health funds provide benefits of 85% of the schedule fee applicable in New South Wales for medical services overseas, for Australian residents for a period of up to two years.

The medical services include general practice, surgery, pathology, and radiology. Benefits for optometrical tests overseas are not provided and no benefits are payable for overseas hospitalisation.

Taxation

Education Queensland will stop tax deductions from your wages if you are exchanging to the USA. Exchangees to Canada or England remain on the current Australian tax system. Non-Government exchangees to Canada, however, pay their tax to Canada. Taxation laws change from time to time, so this information could be out of date by next year.

If you are going to the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand, you will pay tax in Australia (the source of income). Your normal instalments will be deducted from your pay. Upon return to Australia, lodge a late return, remembering to claim travelling expenses going to your exchange position. The next tax return should include travelling expenses coming home. This should be explained as **expenses related to a professional development activity**. Remember to claim attendance at any conference or function.

America's Double Taxation Agreement with Australia means that you avoid paying tax to two countries. IRS has decided that although we are paid by Australia, our source of income is America and we should therefore pay tax to them. IRS have made it very clear that exchange teachers are required to pay tax in America and failure to do so could result in some less than favourable dealing with the Australian Taxation Department upon your return. This is due on 15 April in the year of your return to Australia.

In the USA, you will be able to claim all clothing and petrol expenses, hotel payments, a proportion of the weekly food bill, cultural expenses (learning to ski). Keep all receipts. The QETL recommends that teachers use a tax agent familiar with the US tax system to complete their tax return. Most exchangees have found it advantageous to pay tax to the US government rather than to Australia.

Contact **Earl Tawney** 2300 Central Ave Ste.A1, Boulder Colorado 80301 (303) 443-0855 for advice.

Personal arrangements you should make

continued

Current information should always be sought by direct contact with the Tax Office or Education Queensland Exchange Office or the QETL.

Visas

If you are going to North America (Canada or USA) you will need to get a **one-year USA visa**. The usual 90 day waiver visa **cannot be extended** while you are still in the North American continent – **this includes Mexico**. To obtain this visa you, your spouse and any child over 14 will need to attend an interview in **Sydney** at the American Embassy. **This is an additional but necessary cost.**

Spouses

Spouses of exchangees will find it difficult to find work, so you should budget to be on a single income for the year away. If you wish to make further enquiries, your exchange partner would be the best person to research local rules and regulations. You should make these enquiries well in advance, so that you can collect any required documentation.

Paragraph 46 of the United Kingdom Immigration Rules covers the spouse and children under 18 of a person admitted to take employment. Such dependents will normally be admitted to the United Kingdom for the same period as the teacher on conditions that will leave them free to take employment.

Paragraph 36 provides that a Commonwealth citizen who wishes to take or seek employment in the United Kingdom will be granted an entry clearance for that purpose upon proof that one of his/her grandparents was born in the United Kingdom and Islands. The holder of such an entry clearance should be granted indefinite leave to enter the United Kingdom. Visa nationals (these include nationals of Bangladesh, Ghana and India) will require visas to enter the United Kingdom.

Paragraph 37 deals with young Commonwealth citizens aged 17 to 27 inclusive coming to the United Kingdom for a working holiday before settling down in their own country.

If you are exchanging with a family, it is very important to set up a welcome for a non-teaching or a non-working spouse and children. Life can be difficult in the first few weeks, and the spouses of your colleagues and friends can do a lot to help. Similarly, you could identify colleagues and friends with children of the same age and provide introductions.

Climate and clothing

Provide your exchangee with a description of the local climate and indicate the type of clothing they will require. Many overseas visitors believe that Queensland is warm all year, so they don't bring clothing for our winter. Warn your exchange partner how quickly they can burn or dehydrate in our extreme heat. Leave some 30+ sunscreen for them.

You will find that your school, homes, cars, etc. will be heated and that warm clothes are not needed for general day wear. However, if you are going to North America, you will find doing playground duty in -30 degrees Celsius a little unsettling. Make arrangements to obtain coats and thick solid boots (best to get them when you arrive). Ask the locals. Children will need snow suits. Your exchangee may be able to leave you something to suit.

Personal arrangements you should make

continued

It is our experience that teachers dress more formally in North America and the United Kingdom than here. We suggest therefore that you leave the shorts and long socks at home for your exchangee.

Buying clothing for your exchange

Many teachers have discovered from experience that it is more practical, and cheaper, to buy clothing after arrival in London or another large city. There are regular sales each year when good quality and inexpensive clothing items are reduced in the large stores. These sales generally coincide with the arrival of exchange teachers as they are held in late December/January and again in July/August. Check with a teacher who has recently been on exchange. When you receive a local newspaper or cost information from your partner, you will have a better idea of comparative costs. The Internet can help, too.

Advise your exchangee about magpies, insects, bugs and noisy creatures in summer. You should make it clear if your house is not fully screened against insects.

Power of Attorney/Wills

We suggest that you nominate a competent friend or relative who, as your agent, can deal with your personal affairs during your absence, and that where necessary you follow any legal formalities for appointing them. They should be able to handle your personal letters, deal with your home bank in case of difficulties, negotiate minor problems with your exchange partner about your house or car, pay minor bills, and take overall responsibility for any household pets – the latter particularly during the holiday periods.

Appointment of Power of Attorney is a more formal and legally binding arrangement of very considerable import and consequence and not to be entered into without full appreciation and advice by your legal representative. Nevertheless, the QETL recommends that each exchangee make such an appointment as the best way to protect your interests.

Power of Attorney must be registered at the Titles Office in the Registrar General's Office if it is to be legal.

Personal Wills are essential family protection for all exchangees and their spouses. Make sure you have Wills, that they are current, and that their location is known to interested family members.

Schools for your children and those of your exchange partner

We understand that some overseas education authorities now require children of visiting exchangees to be medically examined prior to school entry, and such arrangements may take up to one month. Ask your partner to find out whether this will apply in the authority to which you will be assigned (or the authority in which your children will be studying, if different) and ensure that you complete the appropriate forms and arrive in good time to arrange the medicals well before commencement of the school term.

In most cases it is essential that the local head teacher(s) be alerted to the arrival of your

Personal arrangements you should make

continued

children. Ascertain what information and records are required and notify your exchange partner accordingly. It is wiser to bring such records rather than rely on the post. For young children, it is helpful if addresses and requirements of nursery schools or playgroups are forwarded to you by your exchange partner. Some nursery schools have waiting lists and children must be placed on the waiting list some months in advance.

NOTE: It may be necessary to have details of schooling approved before your arrival in some countries to satisfy legal entry arrangements of that country.

For young persons aged 17 or 18 years, consider the possibility of colleges of further education/technical colleges as alternatives to secondary school; similar information should be sent to your exchange partner. Where further education is concerned, it is essential to ascertain whether fees are payable and if so, whether higher “overseas student” rates will apply.

Exchanging schools

Arrange for a person on staff to be your exchangee’s **coordinator**. This should be a person who will take the time to explain the Queensland education system, how the school is organised, where to go to obtain information, etc. This is most important.

Provide your exchangee with as many details as you are able about your school using the list in the QETL document **Our Exchange Agreement** as a guide.

Arranging arrivals

The arrangements you make for each other’s arrival in your area and school/college are probably the most important factors in determining the success of the exchange year. There must be someone – Principal, Head of Department or another staff member – to talk to the teacher, answer questions and generally provide help and information before the opening day of school, so that many problems can be avoided.

Similarly, during the first few days it is not always easy for a newcomer to identify the right person to refer to when faced with a problem. A member of staff must be prepared to take on the responsibility of assisting with questions about the teaching program, organisation, records, registers, staff meetings, etc.

If possible, try to compile a small folder containing a variety of information about this. It is advisable to exchange lists of prices from your local shops as well as newspapers to give each other a realistic view of costs and conditions in the community.

When corresponding with your partner about exact arrival and departure in the local area/accommodation, please ensure that the timing is suitable to your partner and will not interfere with his/her last minute departure arrangements.

Bon Voyage, and enjoy your year.