

28 February 2007

TO: All DEL Staff

FROM: Accommodation & Services Branch

DEPARTMENTAL GUIDELINES ON STAFF AIR TRAVEL

1. The purpose of this note is to remind staff of the procedures for booking airtravel for official business. **All staff are asked to familiarise themselves with these arrangements, which are effective immediately.**
2. In October 2002, the Department introduced new procedures to achieve savings on air travel expenditure. The procedures have been regularly reviewed and demonstrate year on year savings in spite of an overall increase in the number of flights booked. The Department is keen to continue keeping costs to a minimum.
3. There has been a dramatic change in the booking of flights in recent years, especially with the opportunity to negotiate better deals through low cost carriers available via the Internet. In order to ensure continued value for money staff are asked to consider the following points before making a booking:-
 - (i) Tickets are subjected more than ever to variables such as availability, the length of time between booking and departure, the length of stay, etc.. **Early booking** means that savings are maximised on **all** airlines and routes.

- (ii) All officers are encouraged to use the most cost effective flight or route which will allow them to carry out their official business at their stated destination.
- (iii) Staff are asked to submit their itinerary to Accommodation & Services Branch rather than requesting specific flights and/or airlines. As much notice as possible should be provided to minimise inconvenience and to assist Accommodation & Services Branch to obtain the best fares through early booking.
- (iv) Accommodation & Services Branch will continue to use the on-line booking facilities and the services of the travel agent, where appropriate.
- (v) Staff will be presented with a choice of travel options, which will enable them to select the most cost effective flights to suit their itinerary.
- (vi) To maximise savings on domestic and European flights, economy class on established carriers or low cost carriers will be used, where appropriate. Staff should only utilise classes other than economy (i.e. business and/or flexible) where flexibility of travel times is essential and this should be agreed in advance with an appropriate authorising officer.
- (vii) For all transatlantic flights, staff should endeavour, where possible, to utilise interim classes (World Traveller Plus or Premium Economy) to achieve best value. These interim classes are offered by the major airlines as a cheaper alternative to business class providing many of the same benefits (extra leg room, reclining seats, priority check-in, personal telephone etc).

- (viii) All staff should note that reservations will only be made upon receipt of a completed Travel Request form approved by an appropriate officer. **Domestic flights must be authorised at Director (Grade 5) level or above, while European or transatlantic flights must have Under Secretary (Grade 3) approval.**

4. **Other points to note**

- (i) Staff travelling on official business will wish to note that the following facilities have been made available for those travelling from Belfast International Airport. These facilities are in addition to those detailed in the minute of 5 November 2004 regarding access to business lounges at Gatwick, which remain in place.
- Staff may enter the business lounge in Belfast International Airport upon the presentation of their NICS security pass and payment of an £8.00 fee. A receipt will be issued and staff may claim this amount back on their expenses claim. This is not pre-bookable through the Departmental Travel Co-ordinator, Accommodations & Services Branch.
 - On production of a NICS security pass, staff may use the fast track channel at the central search area of the airport.
- (ii) Staff booked on Easyjet flights will wish to note that it may be possible to take an earlier flight free of charge subject to seat availability. Similarly, if an officer misses a flight, a £35 rescue fee is payable and the next flight can be taken.
- (iii) Easyjet has also introduced Speedy Boarding which allows a

traveller to board the plane first for a fixed fee (between £2.50 and £7.50 depending on the length of the flight). This facility is limited to 20 passengers per flight and it must be booked at time of booking the flight. Staff who have grounds to use this facility should provide their reasons on the Staff Travel Request form.

5. **Internal Booking Procedures**

A Staff Travel Request form is available on the DEL Intranet. Where staff do not have access to the Intranet, a form may be obtained from Mairead Devaney (ext 57899), Departmental Travel Co-ordinator, Accommodation & Services Branch.

Stage 1

Completion and Submission of Part A of Staff Travel Request Form

- Maximum savings on air fares are attained by booking travel as early as possible before the departure date. It is therefore essential that staff plan schedules well in advance and complete Part A of the Travel Request form **as soon as their itinerary is known.**
- When completing Part A of the Travel Request form, staff should provide as much information as possible regarding their itinerary. Staff should also give a brief description of the reason for travel and indicate any additional travel requirements, including preferences for arrival/departure airports if appropriate. The correct and comprehensive completion of the Travel Request form will prevent unnecessary delays and help to ensure that promotional fares are purchased where available.
- To enable Accommodation & Services Branch to provide travellers with a range of suitable options, staff should submit their completed Travel

Request form promptly. To facilitate this process, Travel Request forms can be forwarded by e-mail to stafftravel@delni.gov.uk.

- Staff who require assistance with their itinerary or with the completion of the Travel Request form should contact the Departmental Co-ordinator (Mairead Devaney, ext 57899).

Stage 2

Approval and Submission of Part B of Staff Travel Request Form

- **All staff travel must be approved at Director or Under Secretary level as appropriate, using Part B of the Travel Request form.** The authorising officer should approve the most appropriate airline/route, according to the purpose of the visit/need for flexibility etc.
- **In order to secure the preferred option, Accommodation & Services Branch must receive notification of the approved travel as soon as possible (preferably on the same day of issue), as reservations cannot be held before booking.** If the relevant authorising officer is absent, the Travel Request form should be passed to an equivalent grade for approval. Confirmation of the preferred travel option can be e-mailed to stafftravel@delni.gov.uk, with a hard copy of the completed form to follow. **Unauthorised requests cannot be processed.**
- Where the itinerary changes prior to the departure date, it is possible to amend economy class tickets booked through both established and low cost carriers. **In the case of any such changes, the traveller should notify Mairead Devaney (Ext 57899) in Accommodation & Services Branch at the earliest possible date.**

- It is recommended that, before travelling overseas, staff should seek information from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by telephoning the helpline on 0870 6060290 or visiting the website at <http://fco.gov.uk>. Guidance on countries is readily available online and there is a free subscription service to an e-mail advice update facility for user-specified regions.

7. Other Travel Arrangements

- Accommodation & Services Branch will continue to book rail travel for staff where appropriate. Using the Travel Request form, staff should indicate their departure point and destination. For all rail transfers to/from airports, standard class fares will be purchased for staff.
- The procedures for booking hotel accommodation remain unchanged. Hotel accommodation is booked through Carlson Wagonlit Travel and staff are responsible for settling the bill directly with the hotel on departure.

8. Further information on staff travel arrangements may be obtained from

Norman McCracken (ext 57861), Maureen Doonan (ext 57866) and Alison Adams (ext 57819), Accommodation & Services Branch.