

FIELDWORK SAFETY

Corporate Health and Safety Guidance

March 2023

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Summary

What is this document about?

This guidance document is intended to provide a framework from which staff can plan and conduct fieldwork activities safely. It is intended to cover medium to high risk activities such as survey/data collection and fieldwork conducted by staff and students.

The guidance draws upon the Higher Education Sector Guidance on [Health and Safety in Fieldwork and Travel](#) produced by the [Universities Safety and Health Association](#) (USHA). USHA defines fieldwork as: *“Any work carried out by staff or students for the purposes of teaching, research or other activities while representing the institution off-site”*.

Overseas fieldwork comprises of two components; the travel to the overseas destination and the actual fieldwork activity. This guidance document concerns the ‘fieldwork’ component. There is guidance available on the overseas travel procedures in place for [staff](#) and [students](#). For fieldwork groups consisting of both staff and students, a [fieldwork overseas travel risk assessment](#) can be found here and this can be used to include all persons attending the fieldwork.

For the purposes of this document, fieldwork is predominately a group activity. For fieldwork being carried out solely by individuals additional consideration should be made of the risk involved in [lone working](#). Examples of lone working fieldwork could be undertaking social science interviews, attending conferences etc. In addition, this document would not be relevant for work placements and other lower risk activities, such as the use of facilities within other institutions or business travel and attendance at meetings away from the University. Standard safety procedures should be adopted for these activities. Further information and advice can be sought from the [Health and Safety Office](#).

Introduction

Fieldwork is a valuable aspect of teaching and learning, and is often an essential part of research. Organised field trips and recreational visits also benefit learning and enhance the student experience. This guidance is intended to enable staff responsible for organising field trips to ensure appropriate arrangements for health and safety are in place. The intention is to provide relevant information and procedures for staff organising trips taking place within the UK and overseas. This document also intends to provide support for fieldwork activities to ensure they take place safely without unwarranted restrictions.

The general duties outlined by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations apply to all activities under the control or direction of the University including off-site activities such as fieldwork.

The University has a moral and legal obligation to ensure the health and safety for persons participating in fieldwork. This includes:

- Gaining/granting approval for fieldwork.
- Identifying the hazards and risks associated with fieldwork.
- Establishing suitable controls to manage those hazards and risks.
- Ensuring the competence of all staff involved.
- Confirming the suitability of third-party fieldwork providers.
- Planning for potential emergency situations.

Responsibilities

Fieldwork Leaders

Fieldwork leaders are responsible for:

- 1.1 Identifying the risks associated with the fieldwork activities they intend to undertake.
- 1.2 Ensuring their own competence to plan and supervise the fieldwork activities.

- 1.3 Risk assessing fieldwork activities and communicating the findings and control measures to all the staff, students and any others involved as appropriate.
- 1.4 Ensuring the risk assessment is signed off by a suitable person such as Head of Department/School.
- 1.5 Ensuring factors such as legislative requirements and suitable insurance and travel arrangements are in place.
- 1.6 Seeking to ensure, where reasonably practicable, that fieldwork is inclusive considering the needs and capabilities of potential participants in line with the Equality Act.
- 1.7 Identifying whether there are any young people under 18 or vulnerable adults taking part in the fieldwork and, if so, putting appropriate measures in place.
- 1.8 Ensuring all equipment and materials to be used during fieldwork activities are suitable and safe.
- 1.9 Providing suitable personal protective equipment, if required, and to ensure all staff and students comply with the requirement to use it.
- 1.10 Confirming that third-party fieldwork/activity providers are competent and will implement similar or greater controls as those stipulated in this document.
- 1.11 Providing all relevant staff and students with suitable information, instruction, supervision and training to enable them to understand the nature of the risks involved and how these risks are controlled.
- 1.12 Identifying and informing staff and students involved of all costs and requirements associated with the fieldwork.
- 1.13 Establishing, as appropriate to the level of risk, suitable emergency procedures.
- 1.14 Ensuring fieldwork incidents are investigated with action taken, reporting and cascading incidents as appropriate.
- 1.15 Regularly reviewing arrangements for managing fieldwork and compliance with this guidance.
- 1.16 Ensuring the fieldwork (and associated documentation) is adequately approved.

Risk Assessment

It is expected that fieldwork leaders speak with their Head of Department (or equivalent) and where relevant [Corporate Health and Safety](#) and [Insurance Officer](#) in order to determine the relative risk involved in the activity.

For fieldwork taking place in the UK, a risk assessment should be completed using the University's [Risk Assessment Form](#).

For fieldwork involving overseas travel, an [overseas travel risk assessment](#) template is specifically available for this so that all students and staff can be covered on one form. This template only covers the risks regarding the destination and travel. If the fieldwork involves any hazardous activities, then an additional risk assessment may be necessary. In these instances, please contact Corporate Health and Safety for assistance. In some circumstances, it may be that activities are covered by a third-party organisation. In this case, their risk assessment should be requested to inform/accompany University documentation.

In the risk assessment, both the actual and potential hazards should be considered. Hazards and dangers vary according to the locality and type of fieldwork carried out. Some locations and activities will present additional hazards than those encountered in everyday life, while others will need extra precautions.

Where there is a group of people, the fieldwork leader must ensure that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is completed and the findings communicated to everyone involved. The risk assessment must specify any control measures necessary to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

The amount of time spent on planning and the degree of detail recorded in the risk assessment needs to be proportionate to the inherent danger present in the fieldwork. For instance, it is sensible to make simple generic assessments for routine, well-supervised visits to low risk areas. But more extensive planning and assessment would be required, for example, with a group planning an extended stay in a wilderness area, or for work in areas where there may be a risk to personal safety because of criminal activity or civil unrest.

The competence of the leader and team, their knowledge and experience of the proposed activity and location will have a major bearing on the perception of risk and this should be reflected in the risk assessment. The level and extent of this experience should be clearly stated in the risk assessment.

It is helpful to consider three types of risk when planning fieldwork:

- i. Universal risks, applicable to all fieldwork (e.g. general travel-related risks).
- ii. Risks associated with inherently dangerous activities, applicable to particular types of fieldwork (e.g. mountain walking, diving or caving).
- iii. Specific risks that apply to particular locations (e.g. the presence of local danger at a fieldwork site, or travel-related risks applying to a particular country).

Besides these external factors, risk assessments should consider the knowledge, experience, and skills of all staff and students involved, and whether they have any special needs or vulnerabilities.

The risk assessment should be regularly reviewed (at least annually) and whenever:

- There have been significant changes such as legislation, new equipment, substances, locations, people or procedures that could lead to new hazards.
- Significant changes at the location(s) such as environment or political climate, etc.
- Significant areas for improvements have been identified.
- Following accidents or near miss incidents.

It is the responsibility of the fieldwork leader, in consultation with their fieldwork team, to ensure that the level of supervision is adequate for any given situation, and to make necessary adjustments to itineraries in the interest of safety, including where necessary the cessation of an activity.

An assessment of the competency of third-party providers must be undertaken. Third-parties providing services involving heightened risks not usually encountered in everyday life (e.g. outward-bound activities) require a more detailed assessment of their suitability and competency to provide those services. This would include a review of their Public Liability Insurance, checking of past

enforcement actions, accreditation to relevant governing bodies and the specific management arrangements for their service, including risk assessments.

Responsibilities regarding supervision during the activity and the provision of specialist equipment, training etc. should also be confirmed pre-trip, with arrangements confirmed in writing.

Depending on the level of risk identified through the completion of the risk assessment, the fieldwork leader, in consultation with their fieldwork team, will determine whether a contingency plan including a documented 24-hour incident and emergency response plan is required. This could include provision for:

- Responsibilities of the staff members involved.
- Basic procedures to be followed in the event of an incident or emergency.
- Emergency communication protocols.
- Financial provision in case of incident or emergency.
- Contact details for local representatives, nearest diplomatic mission, and nominated emergency contacts.
- Medical support available at all stages of the fieldwork.
- Contact details for medical support at all stages of the fieldwork.
- Actions for any known specific medical needs of any staff member or student involved.
- Repatriation or evacuation provision.
- Protocol in response to civil unrest or natural disasters.
- Missing person procedures.
- Media management in case of incident or emergency.
- Passport details of all staff and students involved.

A summary of this plan should be made available to all staff and students involved. If the fieldwork involves anyone under 18 years of age or classed as a vulnerable adult, then the information must also be provided to the person's parent or legal guardian.

Staffing

There should be one identified leader per fieldwork trip, suitably trained and qualified to lead the activity. The leader should ensure they are aware of the skills and experience of the staff team and the composition, known needs and experience of each fieldwork participant. This should include any medical needs, first aid experience, ability to use safety or other essential kit, and ability to perform expected tasks under likely conditions. Where relevant, the leader may utilise the field work staff team to collate this information and discuss it in helping to appropriately prepare the fieldwork activity.

Where participants are of mixed gender, the inclusion of males and females in the staff team is desirable and should be achieved wherever possible.

Furthermore, where participants may be under 18 years of age, or are classed as vulnerable adults, the staff team must be selected in accordance with relevant legislation and the [University's Safeguarding Policy](#), e.g. DBS checks. The participants' specific needs should also be factored into the planning of the fieldwork.

All students must abide by the University's Code of Student Behaviour and act responsibly throughout the duration of the fieldwork activity.

Health and Medical Issues

Fieldwork planning should include consideration to maintain the health of all fieldworkers. The assessment of individual health needs and the provision of appropriate travel health advice for each fieldworker will vary in complexity depending on their health status and identified hazards for the fieldwork.

Where participants include young people or vulnerable adults, written consent should be obtained from parents or guardians to administer medication or first aid to these participants.

All fieldwork leaders and any relevant member of staff are to be made aware of any member of the group who is receiving medication or suffers from any condition or disability which could constitute a risk to themselves or others.

Staff should not normally be required to complete a dietary and medical questionnaire. However, staff can request a referral to the Occupational Health Service via their manager if they have concerns about their ability to participate safely. Should a manager have concerns about a staff member's fitness or health they should refer the member of staff to the [Occupational Health Service](#) for advice.

Students are strongly encouraged complete a [dietary and medical questionnaire](#) to ensure suitable arrangements can be put in place. Where adaptations or special measures have been identified in the dietary and medical questionnaire, the fieldwork leader should arrange a confidential meeting with the student concerned to discuss the additional measures required for the student to complete the fieldwork safely. Records of further action required or special measures to put in place must be kept. If students do not advise of a disability or health condition, it may not be possible for them to fully participate in the fieldwork and it may not be possible for dietary requirements to be accommodated at late notice. Leaders should collate this information into the Fieldwork/Participants Manifest before the trip takes place. This should be in an appropriate format for the trip, e.g. paper as well as electronic copy.

Welfare Issues

All staff and students involved should be made aware that they are representing the University whilst engaged in fieldwork and are expected to do so in a professional manner. Breaches of conduct may result in the individual being removed from the fieldwork activity and/or formal disciplinary procedures being instigated on return to the University.

Before undertaking fieldwork all students should sign a declaration stating that they:

- Are capable of undertaking the fieldwork.
- Have been fully informed of the physical and mental challenges expected.
- Will abide by relevant codes of conduct.
- Have been issued with a risk assessment for the trip.

- Have been made aware of any particular rules and regulations that apply.
- Are aware of relevant health and safety issues or risks.
- Have made the organisers aware of any health concerns.
- If necessary, have sought medical advice to ensure that any health problems have been fully managed.

There may also be additional requirements and regulations to be aware of if visiting a commercial, industrial or secure site.

In non-urban environments, the fieldwork leader should be competent in the recognition and treatment of exposure to extremes of temperature and all staff members taking part should have received at least emergency first aid training.

The leader and/or an appropriate member of staff must carry a first aid kit and should be trained in emergency first aid. The risk assessment should identify any additional requirements for fieldwork trips to extreme, isolated environments, e.g. survival kit and advanced first aid training.

Staff and students who knowingly place themselves or others in danger on fieldwork or visits should be removed from participation in the activities and may be ordered to return to, or remain at, the accommodation site or another safe location. The fieldwork leader and team have the right to remove the individual from the fieldwork trip or activity should they deem it necessary and repatriation will be at the individual's own expense. If this situation results in students failing an assessment associated with the fieldwork activity they may not be eligible for a second attempt assessment.

Downtime

A clear statement must be made to staff and students on the University's expectations for the arrangements and supervision during periods of personal or downtime during fieldwork trips. The University should make it clear to all fieldwork participants how much downtime is allowed within the programme and what is and is not considered to be acceptable activity within these periods. Participants should be briefed on this sufficiently in advance to allow them to plan.

Staff and students involved must be made aware of the possible need to obtain additional insurance to cover activities undertaken during that time (e.g. diving trips).

The inclusion of downtime must be a specific element of the risk assessment and risk management procedures (e.g. students may be left to their own devices during downtime, but must be warned if there are known areas or activities that may pose a risk to them during that time).

The legal situation regarding accidents or incidents occurring during downtime is unclear as it could be argued in some circumstances that the accident would not have happened if the participant was not involved in the fieldwork. Leaders are advised to give specific advice about appropriate conduct and to intervene if they observe unacceptable behaviour or activities. Where groups include young people under 18 or vulnerable adults, specific consideration needs to be given to supervision arrangements.

A designated staff member (rotated over time) must remain contactable by students at all times during the fieldwork, including downtime. Staff should be aware that they need to be competent and able to deal with potential emergency situations at all times during fieldwork.

The University's policies on [Drugs and Alcohol](#) should be considered, e.g. dry roles for the designated member of staff and student misconduct. Students engaged in activities in downtime should be reminded that they are representing the University and thus must act appropriately and in accordance with the [Code of Student Behaviour](#).

Emergency Procedures/Incidents

At all times, all staff and students involved must be conversant with emergency procedures and local safety instructions must be complied with.

All incidents involving injury and near miss must be reported to the Head of Department (or equivalent) as soon as practicable. A [HS1 Form](#) must then be completed as soon as is practicably possible.

Serious Incidents

A serious incident could involve the death or serious injury to a member of staff or student whilst in a fieldwork environment. It could also involve being caught up in a natural disaster, terrorist attack etc.

The first priority in any serious incident must be to bring the situation under immediate control by contacting the emergency services wherever necessary. If overseas, then Healix must be contacted and the best way to do this is via the app. Otherwise, the telephone number is also on the [insurance web pages](#).

The fieldwork leader (if able, or another appointed person) will then need to contact the University Security Service on +44 (0)2392 843333 who will in turn contact the relevant University Executive Board staff and initiate the [Major Incident Action Plan](#).

Insurance

When planning fieldwork, it is important to consider insurance requirements from the various perspectives of what could go wrong and who might be adversely affected. It is important to liaise with the University Insurance Officer to ensure fieldworkers are aware of which insurances the institution provides and which they must arrange themselves to ensure the level of cover is adequate.

If any participant is planning to begin a personal venture as soon as the field trip finishes or is not intending to return with the field trip group, it is important that they obtain permission from the field-trip leader. They should be advised that they will be travelling at their own risk and should arrange their own personal insurance for this portion of the trip.

For full insurance details regarding overseas travel please refer to the [University's web page](#).

For insurance details regarding UK based fieldwork activities please contact the University [Insurance Officer](#).

Infectious Diseases and Vaccinations

All staff and students going on fieldwork or field trips must be appropriately vaccinated for the country they are travelling to. Participants must abide by any specific country entry requirements.

Before embarking on the journey, all those going on the trip must be aware of local guidance and entry requirements for each of the countries they are visiting. The requirements vary depending on where you are going so it is vital that you are aware of each of them and fully comply with what is being asked in order to ensure you do not receive a fine. You can find out what each country requires on the [government website](#).

If a member of the party develops any symptoms of an infectious disease they must inform their fieldwork leader and/or accommodation immediately. The Corporate Health and Safety Team must be notified. The individual will need to follow the country's guidance on what to do.

Please note, if organising fieldwork or a trip to a remote location, there must be a contingency plan in place in case the primary accommodation venue refuses to support self-isolation on the premises, if required. This is the responsibility of the trip organiser, taken at their risk, and potentially at the expense of the department.

Information, Training and Supervision

The University of Portsmouth will give sufficient information, instruction, training and supervision, as described in the University's Health and Safety Policy, to ensure full understanding of the potential hazards to health and safety posed by activities specific to fieldwork. It is strongly recommended that all staff taking part in fieldwork are trained in first aid and mental health first aid.

At least one pre-fieldwork meeting should take place to brief staff and students involved and, where applicable, a briefing pack should be provided to them, including:

- Full itinerary of the fieldwork.
- Risk assessment form.
- Any training required relating to the fieldwork.
- Any specialist safety clothing or equipment required.
- Information about locations and activities to be undertaken.
- Vaccinations or preventative medical treatment required (e.g. anti-malarial tablets) and any hygiene or health related issues to consider.
- Physical, emotional and psychological demands of the fieldwork.
- Any training to be received whilst carrying out the fieldwork, particularly if taking place abroad.
- Behaviour expected from all staff and students involved (codes of conduct).
- Any local and cultural issues to be aware of.
- Medical provision required for the fieldwork.
- Provision of necessary contact numbers.

University Forms

- [Fieldwork Checklist](#)
- [Fieldwork Dietary and Medical Questionnaire](#)

External Sources

- [Guidance on Health and Safety in Fieldwork](#): A publication produced by the Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA) in association with the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA). This document provides a framework for establishing policies and procedures that enable all staff and students involved in higher education institutions to undertake fieldwork safely.

- [Fit for Travel](#): An NHS information service for people travelling abroad from the UK.
- [Foreign Travel Advice](#): UK Government service listing information associated with travel abroad including risks to health and safety.
- [University Travel Insurance](#): Details of the University's travel insurance cover.
- [ISO 31030:2021 Travel Risk Management](#): Guidance for Organisations