# LONE WORKING

**Corporate Health and Safety Guidance**

October 2022

# Contents

# Introduction

Lone workers face the same hazards at work as anyone else, but there is a greater risk if these hazards causing harm as they may not have anyone to help or support them if things go wrong. A lone worker is defined as 'someone who works by themselves without close or direct supervision'. They exist in all sectors and include those who:

- Work alone at a fixed base;
- Work separately from other people on the same premises or outside normal working hours;
- Work at home;
- Work away from a fixed base;
- Are a contractor, freelancer or self-employed;
- Are volunteers carrying out work on their own.

Staff and/or students are considered to be working alone if they have neither visual nor audible communication with someone who can summon assistance in the event of an incident. This includes those who knowingly or foreseeable work by themselves without close or direct supervision. This can also include working at a fixed base or mobile. Some examples of lone working include, but are not limited to:

- Working alone on or off campus, in or out of normal working hours (if working out of hours, please also be aware of the University's Out of Hours Arrangement);
- Undertaking field work alone within the UK or abroad;
- Travelling alone or abroad on University business;
- Undertaking research with participants in their own homes, non-University workplaces or in a public place alone;
- Home workers;
- Visiting landlords, other employers' premises or community groups alone;
- Contractors working alone in plant rooms.

# Lone Working

As an employer, the University is required by law to protect its workers, and others, from harm. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, we must ensure that the risks to lone workers are managed appropriately. Some risk that should be considered for lone workers include:

- Violence in the workplace;
- Stress and mental health or wellbeing;
- A person's medical suitability to work alone;
- The workplace itself, for example if it's in a rural or isolated area.

Depending on the level of risk that comes with the job that is being undertaken will depend on the level of **risk assessment** that needs to put into place. For example, if it's a low risk lone working job such as office working, then you may not need a written risk assessment but another way of ensuring regular contact with the worker, such as other regular communication measures instead. For further information on risk assessments for lone working, please refer to the Lone Working Arrangement.

## Low Risk

This includes work that will involve risks which would occur in everyday life e.g. reading, writing, operation of a computer. A generic risk assessment may be appropriate for a low risk environment e.g. staff lone working in an office. Low risk lone working may not require a formal written assessment where informal communication methods have been put in place and this is deemed sufficient.

## Medium Risk

This includes any work which could result in injury, but where the injured person could reasonably be expected to be able to summon assistance if required. For example, working in a laboratory or workshop. All medium risk lone working should be risk assessed. Examples of high risk activities include:

- Working with hazardous chemicals where accidental exposure requires immediate first aid;
- The use of machinery, tools and equipment which are capable of inflicting serious injury (i.e. that present risks of entanglement, entrapment, crushing, impact or injury from cutting, shearing, stabbing or puncture);
- One to one meetings with anyone who is believed to be under the influence of drugs, alcohol or whose mental health may increase the level of risk of aggressive behaviour;
- All instances of entering someone's house
- Working in the health and social care sector dealing with unpredictable client behaviour situations;
- Working with lasers and laser equipment;
- Working with compressed gases or handling LN2 or cryogenics.

Work falling into the high risk category is unlikely to be suitable for lone working and should only go ahead if it is considered absolutely necessary. If the work/task is essential, it should only be considered if:

- The Head of Department/Faculty/School or equivalent has fully approved in writing the work being undertaken and the associated risk assessment;
- Robust emergency procedures are in place.

There are some tasks that are not permitted as a lone worker, examples include:

- Working in a confined space;
- Working at or near exposed live electricity conductors.

# Keeping Contact with Lone Workers

You should agree how to keep in touch with lone workers through regular meetings, or provide other opportunities to share concerns; include lone workers in social events and work or team updates. Ensure lone workers are included in any consultation on changes, they may have unique implications for them and make sure lone workers are included in any training that is required.

# Providing Support on Mental Health

Work can also aggravate pre-existing conditions, and problems at work can bring on symptoms or make their effects worse. Whether work is causing the health issue or aggravating it, Managers have a legal responsibility to help your employees. Work-related mental health issues must be assessed to measure the levels of risk, where a risk is identified, steps must be taken to mitigate or remove it or reduce it as far as reasonably practicable. If a lone worker has a pre-existing mental health condition, you may need to make reasonable adjustments to their work or workplace and this may require additional interventions, including those required by the Equality Act.

## Incidents, Illness and Emergencies

Your assessment of the risks should identify foreseeable events. Emergency procedures should be established, put in place and employees should be trained in them. Regular and realistic practice should take place to allow quick and effective action to ease the situation and reduce the consequences. Your risk assessment may indicate that some lone workers should carry first aid equipment and/or may need first aid training (including how to administer first aid to themselves). They should also have access to adequate first aid facilities. All incidents should be reported to the Corporate Health and Safety Department.

# Home Working

You are defined as a home worker if you permanently work from your home or split your working time between the work place and home (hybrid working). It is important to ensure your safety when working from home just as it would be if you were working on campus.

It's important that you complete a **hybrid working risk assessment** for your place of work as well completing the University's compulsory DSE online training available via **Moodle**. Should you need any additional equipment to ensure a good working environment for yourself, please speak to your line manager.

Whilst there are many benefits to hybrid working, there are also challenges staff and managers should remain vigilant. At times, staff working at home can feel more isolated, experience difficulties in balancing home and work life or find they are more sedentary. The University encourages individuals to take steps to ensure health working practices. More information on this can be found on the University's Occupational Health webpage.

In order to look after your mental health and help to manage stress when working from home, some ideas that could be implemented by yourself or your line manager could include:

- Staying in regular contact with your manager and colleagues;
- Talk to your manager about workloads and be open about how you're feeling;
- Take regular breaks during the day and use your annual leave;
- Set and stick to a routine – don't revisit your computer outside your regular hours;
- Check the University **Hybrid Working Support and Guidance for Staff and Managers** and if you have any questions regarding this please contact **hrenquiries@port.ac.uk**.

Carrying out computer or paper-based work remotely is generally deemed low risk, however, to ensure staff have safe hybrid working arrangements, a **risk assessment** will be required for your home working environment, including DSE, which will be signed off by the manager. If a member of staff in a hybrid working role is or becomes pregnant or has or develops an injury or illness, it is important to notify their line manager as soon as possible, so that a new or updated risk assessment can be conducted, and advice can be sought from Occupational Health. Employee Self Service (ESS) should also be updated if staff change their home address or contact information. Staff should also ensure they submit a fit note for sickness absence of more than 7 day's duration in the usual way and should not work if not fit to do so. The **Managing Sickness Absence** still applies to those working from home.

# Work Related Violence

Lone working does not always mean a higher risk of violence, but it does make workers more vulnerable. The lack of nearby support makes it harder for them to prevent an incident. Some of the key workplace violence risks include:

- Late evening or early morning work, when fewer workers are around;

- Lone workers, such as security staff, who have authority over customers and are enforcing rules;

- People affected by alcohol or drugs;

- Carrying money or valuable equipment;

- Working in locations where there is a known high risk of violence.

In order to manage this risk appropriately, the following points should be considered:

- A risk assessment must be conducted in order to decide what action to take and to review this;

- Do not go into a situation if you feel at risk;

- Be aware of your surroundings and keep your wits about you at all times and be aware of the situation you are in. Be aware of your own actions and how others may perceive you.

- If you feel threatened, make your excuses and leave. Make sure you can leave the premises quickly if you need to.;

- Consider talking to the local police for advice on personal safety and to provide local knowledge to the area;

- Let other staff know where the lone workers are via a diary or notice board;

- Report all incidents via our **HS1 form** so that any trends can be identified early and additional control measures can.

# What if a lone worker's first language is not English?

If a lone worker's first language is not English, you should ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to provide clear communications, especially in an emergency. Workers from outside the UK may encounter unfamiliar risks in the jobs that they do and in a working environment with a workplace culture that may be very different from that of their country of origin. You must ensure workers have revived and understood the information, instruction and training they need to work safely.

# Research

The following points should be considered when planning and conducting lone research:

- Has an appropriate Ethics Review been completed including details of the lone working aspect of the proposed research?
- Choice of appropriate research methods: Review and revise any research protocols if working alone
- Choice of research site
- Are home interviews/visits/observations necessary for the research? (Interviews in a public place or via video conferencing may be acceptable and a safer substitute)
- Staffing and experience
- Is it possible to use pairs of researchers to conduct research in risky settings in order to lower the level of risk involved?
- Insurance - Researchers need to ensure that they have insured their private cars for work use, and are covered by personal insurance when travelling away from the University on university business.
- Appropriate risk assessment
- Formal lone worker protocol
- Contact/checking in arrangements

# Interviews with participants in a private place

- If relevant, the participant's health needs should be checked in advance with clear information given to participants as to the reason why such information is being collected and how it will be kept confidential under Data Protection legislation.
- Try to arrange home visits during daylight hours where possible
- Leave your mobile phone switched on
- Do not enter someone's home, if you don't feel comfortable or safe
- Do not enter the property if the person you are visiting is not there
- Your safety is the primary concern, which should be placed above completion of research
- You should always make sure there is a clear exit from the room
- Never undertake an assessment or interview in a bedroom
- Do not give your personal phone number or address to clients
- Do not carry large amounts of money or valuables

# Travel

## Vehicles

- Is it safe to use private cars and leave them in the area?

- Member of a national breakdown service?

- At night, the car should be parked in a well-lit and busy place.  Multi-storey parks, or car parks where the car and the user will not be easily visible, should be avoided.

## Public Transport

- Are reputable taxi firms easy to access?

- Train or bus - wait where it is well lit and there are plenty of people

- If you feel uneasy don't be afraid to get off at the next stop

- If you feel threatened act immediately

# Training, Supervision and Monitoring

Before allowing an employee to undertake any lone working task, it is vital that they are fully trained in all aspects, ensure that an appropriate level of supervision is in place based upon the results of your risk assessment and also continue to monitor all lone workers and remain in touch with them.

## Training

Lone workers are usually unable to ask more experienced colleagues for help, so extra training may be appropriate. They need to be sufficiently experienced and full understand the risks and precautions involved in their work and the location that they work in. Training should be relevant to the work activity.

You should set limits on what can be done while working alone and line managers should ensure workers are:

- Competent to deal with the requirements of the job;
- Trained in using any technical solutions;
- Able to recognise when they should get advice.

# Supervision

The extent of supervision required depends on the risks involved and the ability of the lone worker to identify and handle health and safety issues. The level of supervision needed is a decision which should be made by the line manager based on the findings of the risk assessment – the higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required. It's a good idea for a new worker to be supervised at first if they're:

- Being trained;
- Doing a job with specific risks;
- Dealing with new situations;
- New to a job.

# Monitoring

You must monitor your lone workers and keep in touch with them. Technological advances mean there is a wide range of systems and devices available to employers to monitor lone workers. Any monitoring system needs to be embedded into organisation so it is well understood by workers. You must put clear procedures in place because effective means of communication are essential. These may include:

- When supervisors should visit and observe lone workers;
- Knowing where lone workers are, with pre-agreed intervals of regular contact, using phones, radios, email etc;
- Other devices for raising the alarm, operated manually or automatically;
- A reliable system to ensure a lone worker has returned to their bas once they have completed their task.