

University Health & Safety Arrangements: Chapter 24



Health & Safety in Fieldwork (including field trips)

Key word(s) : Safety Management in Fieldwork, USHA Guidance, planning and authorisation, risk assessment, risk profiling model, fieldwork, field trips.

Target audience: Heads of School, Principal Investigators, fieldwork leaders, PGR students, PGR supervisors and school safety advisors.

Contents

Introduction and scope	2
Roles and responsibilities	2
Risk assessments of fieldwork.....	3
Risk assessment authorisation and validation	5
Risk assessment review	6
Fieldwork reviews.....	6
Further guidance on planning fieldwork.....	6
Further advice and assistance-during fieldwork	7
Document control box.....	7
Appendix 1: Extracts from the Universities Safety and Health Association Guidance on Travel Risk Profiling	9

Introduction and scope

1. This chapter sets out University of Manchester's requirements relating to health and safety in fieldwork and describes the process for risk assessment of fieldwork (including travel to the destination associated with fieldwork).
2. This chapter covers research and teaching activities off-campus which are more traditionally associated with the term "fieldwork"; including undertaking interviews with the public, as well as activities such as survey/collection/analysis work carried out by scientists in the field.
3. This chapter does not cover attending conferences or business meetings, etc. Further advice on such general travel can be found on Compliance and Risk's [website](#). This chapter does not cover student placements, which are covered by a separate [chapter](#).
4. The University's [travel policy](#) has a requirement that some travel outside of the United Kingdom, including travel associated with fieldwork should be [pre-approved](#). A process is in place in the policy which ensures travel is authorised at a level of management responsibility that is proportionate to the threat level in the country.

Roles and responsibilities

5. The portfolio of fieldwork activities varies from school to school. Therefore, detailed roles and responsibilities for planning and managing fieldwork should be set out at a local level. They should incorporate a minimum of the responsibilities set out below.
6. **Heads of School/Institute (or their equivalent)** have been delegated overall responsibility for health and safety, including during fieldwork activities, via the University's health and safety policy. They are responsible for ensuring that:
 - there is clarity in their local arrangements about roles and responsibilities for all those involved in organising and leading fieldwork
 - that fieldwork is properly planned, including planning for emergencies
 - fieldwork leaders and supervisors are competent
 - suitable and sufficient risk assessments of the fieldwork are undertaken
 - where necessary safe systems of work have been established for all staff, students and other participants in fieldwork
 - emergency contact details are held and are kept up-to-date
 - any accidents occurring during fieldwork are reported and investigated
 - post-fieldwork reviews are undertaken (where appropriate to the risk)
 - where relevant, ensuring that there is clear communication and cooperation and demarcation of responsibilities when carrying out field work at sites run by other organisations

The Head of School or their equivalent will often delegate some or all of these duties to the members of staff involved in organising or leading the fieldwork, while retaining accountability for ensuring health and safety aspects of fieldwork are adequately planned, carried out and reviewed. This could be recorded in the school's local arrangements.

7. **Fieldwork organisers/leaders** for group fieldwork should ensure that:
 - all aspects of the fieldwork are planned at a level of detail proportionate to the (inherent) risk and complexity of the activity and the level of threat in the area
 - emergency and contingency plans are in place
 - a clear command structure is in place during the fieldwork, including authority to change itineraries or stop activities in the interests of safety
 - emergency contact information for fieldwork participants is up-to-date
 - adequate instruction, training and supervision is provided before the trip and during the trip where appropriate
 - control measures identified in the risk assessment are implemented in practice
 - dynamic risk assessments are carried out if necessary (i.e. when conditions change) and any necessary changes made to itineraries or activities
 - any accidents occurring during fieldwork are reported and investigated
 - post-fieldwork reviews are undertaken; in accordance with the level of risk

8. **Solo fieldworkers** (undertaking fieldwork on behalf of the University) will assume the relevant responsibilities of the fieldwork leader above and are responsible for taking reasonable care of themselves in line with agreed plans, including stopping work in the interests of their own safety if necessary.

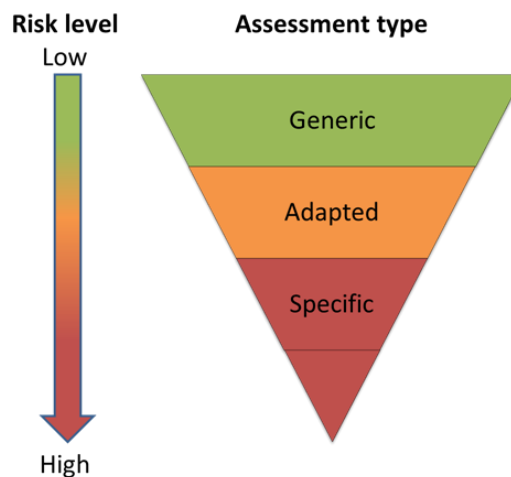
9. **Participants/members of a fieldwork team** are responsible for:
 - heeding and observing any instruction given to them by a supervisor
 - notifying any concerns regarding health and safety to their supervisor
 - taking reasonable care of themselves and others in their activities

Risk assessments of fieldwork

10. Risk assessments of fieldwork should be carried out with reference to the Universities Safety & Health Association ([USHA guidance](#)) for the higher education sector on health and safety in fieldwork and, where relevant any travel advice provided by the [Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office](#), or by the University travel insurer's.

11. Deciding when a generic, adapted or specific risk assessment is required is not always easy. In general, as the inherent level of risk increases, the level of detail required in the risk assessment increases (see diagram below).

12. For routine, low risk, regular fieldwork activities, which may be viewed as a fairly minor extension or development of our day-to-day living experiences (e.g. visiting a cultural institution in the UK), schools and directorates can use the University's **generic fieldwork risk assessments** (or other local procedure or code for field visits). A significant portion of fieldwork undertaken by staff and students at the University will fall into this category. Generic fieldwork risk assessments and a template for specific fieldwork risk assessments can be found on [Safety Services](#) website.



13. Where **generic risk assessments** are used it is important that these are communicated to relevant staff and students (e.g. this may be done as part of induction and when planning for an individual trip). Prior to each trip, staff should also check that there are no special circumstances requiring further consideration (which might include individual factors, such as health or disability).

14. Where circumstances are outside the scope of the generic risk assessments, or aspects require further consideration, then **adapting** (or supplementing) a generic risk assessment i.e. identifying additional hazards or adding in extra controls might be appropriate. For example this might take into account travelling overnight, in bad weather, to more remote locations, or a specific individual's needs. [Guidance](#) on how to adapt the generic risk assessments can be found on Safety Services website.

15. The University has guidance on Overseas Travel Guidance for Staff & Students with Protected Characteristics. **Specific (more detailed) assessments of risk** must be carried out when the level of threat posed in the area where the fieldwork will be undertaken due to (among other factors) security, health or environmental conditions is deemed by the University's insurer to be [high or extreme](#); or the FCDO advise against travel, or the level of inherent risk of the activity being carried out is high. Specific risk assessments should also address

any travel advice given by the FCDO and/or advice from the University's insurers for the country/area being visited.

16. Very occasionally **dynamic risk assessment** may be required, when circumstances change during fieldwork such that risks must be addressed immediately and there is a need to work differently from the way identified in the existing assessment of risk. This is particularly applicable in emergency situations. Dynamic assessment must not be used 'on the job' as a substitute for other assessment types. The findings must be recorded, but this will inevitably be after-the-fact and could take the form of additional information being added, as part of a post-fieldwork review of the existing risk assessment.

Risk assessment authorisation and validation

17. **Generic assessments** are usually adopted locally using the University's generic fieldwork risk assessments, or carried out locally by a person competent in assessing risks who can objectively identify the hazards associated with routine fieldwork, determine the likelihood of harm and assign measures to reduce the level of risk. This will often be an academic fieldwork organiser, principal investigator or school safety adviser.
18. **Adapted assessments** must also be carried out by a person competent in assessing risks, who can apply the principles of the generic assessment to a given set of circumstances. This could be individual researchers or field trip organisers. These will be checked by someone in a position to verify that the assessment that the control measures are reasonable and in place, normally a principal investigator, fieldwork leader, academic supervisor or safety advisor etc.
19. **Specific assessments** should be carried out by a person competent in assessing risks who understands the requirements of the fieldwork, can objectively determine the likelihood of harm and assign measures to reduce the risk, taking any specialist advice into consideration e.g. regarding security aspects. The risk assessment would require approval by another competent person who has relevant expertise to check that the assessment that the control measures are reasonable and in place. This could include another academic with expertise in the area, a safety advisor or specialist insurance adviser, academic supervisor or a senior academic.
20. It is important to note that local arrangements may be in place for checking and validation of risk assessments and that checking and validation of risk assessments may be carried out by different people to those who are approving the travel aspects of the fieldwork. Refer to the University's travel policy for more information on pre- approval of the travel aspects of fieldwork.

Risk assessment review

21. Risk assessments for repeat fieldwork should be reviewed prior to each trip. An existing routine fieldwork risk assessment (which may be generic, adapted or specific in the first instance) may need to be revised prior to travel; for example, if one year's cohort of students includes someone with a disability, or the trip incorporates a new higher risk activity.
22. Similarly, shortly before any travel, the individual researcher/fieldwork leader should check if there is any significant change in hazards or risks; including weather/climate, and the security threat level within the country or area being visited as part of the fieldwork, or advice given by the FCDO or the University's travel insurer. If so, the risks involved should be re-assessed and should consider any additional control measures which may be necessary, or changes to plans which need to be made.

Fieldwork reviews

23. Arrangements should be in place locally for an appropriate level of monitoring of health and safety arrangements on an ongoing basis **during** fieldwork, by carrying out site inspections or checks on emergency arrangements within accommodation venues, or monitoring changing environmental or security conditions within a country.
24. Arrangements should be in place locally for **post-fieldwork de-brief meetings**, or other formal reviews of the fieldwork, to take place where appropriate. The reviews should include health and safety considerations and can be used to determine if the arrangements or risk assessments require updating for future trips. The performance of any third-party providers (such as accommodation or activity providers) should be included as part of this review.
25. It is good practice to survey participants following supervised fieldwork; health and safety aspects can either be incorporated into other student feedback processes for the fieldwork, or a separate process could be in place. This process could also be used to monitor to ensure that any problems or incidents occurring on fieldwork have been captured through the normal reporting channels.

Further guidance on planning fieldwork

26. The Universities Safety & Health Association (USHA), in association with the Universities & Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) has produced [guidance](#) for the higher education sector on health and safety in fieldwork and travel. See Appendix 1: Extracts from the Universities Safety and Health Association Travel Risk Profiling Guidance.

27. The University’s insurance policies covering Travel, Employers’ Liability and Public Liability can be found on the [Insurance Office](#) website. The University’s travel insurer can provide bespoke advice relating to travel (including security) to specific areas if required. This is particularly useful for travel to higher threat areas.
28. [Safety Services toolkit](#) on fieldwork provides further information including example risk assessments, a link to the [USHA guidance on fieldwork](#) and travel and guidance on points to consider when compiling specific risk assessment for fieldwork.
29. Government general travel advice: <https://travelaware.campaign.gov.uk/>.
30. [The University has guidance on](#) Overseas Travel Guidance for Staff & Students with Protected Characteristics,
31. If further advice is required, please contact your school safety adviser in the first instance for further advice and support.

Further advice and assistance-during fieldwork

32. The [University’s travel insurer](#) and [travel agents](#) can also offer assistance in emergencies. If travellers are already in a part of the world that becomes dangerous due to deteriorating security or environmental conditions the University’s travel insurer can provide advice and assistance.
33. The University’s [travel insurer](#) and [travel agent](#) can provide live country alerts and travel assistance mobile apps for mobile phones which can be downloaded by individuals prior to travel.
34. The FCDO deploy a number of channels of communication for providing the latest information and advice to British nationals abroad. Channels providing the latest information include:
- **Twitter** <https://twitter.com/fcotravel>
 - **Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/fcotravel>

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Owner of this chapter	<p>Occupational Health, Safety & Training Advisory Group (OHSTAG)</p> <p>Chair : Professor Nalin Thakker</p> <p>Secretary : Dr Patrick Seechurn</p>

**Appendix 1: Extracts from the Universities Safety and Health Association
Guidance on Travel Risk Profiling**

Travel Risk Factors

The risks involved in any travel are influenced by many factors which interact to escalate or reduce risks. The location risk profile is the starting point for considering the risk of a particular trip, but the detail of who is travelling, exactly where they are going, when and for what reason will considerably vary the risk. This diagram and supporting table provide an overview of these factors and how they interact to generate a unique risk profile for a particular journey.



People

The personal characteristics of travellers can make them more/less vulnerable to targeted threats than the local population.

Cultural and legal differences in some regions can mean travellers' personal characteristics (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity/nationality, religion, appearance) may mean that they are at increased risk from targeted threats (such as imprisonment and violence) and added mitigations may be required. An individual's high public profile/social media presence can also affect the risk.

Pre-existing mental or physical health conditions could be a concern if the healthcare support available is not sufficient or could be exacerbated by the trip activities. Adjustments may be needed if the traveller has a mental or physical disability/condition which needs to be taken account of when planning the trip.

Travellers' appearance and behaviour can increase/decrease their risk from targeted crimes. People with a high level of familiarity with a location are often (but not always) at reduced risk. People returning to their home country (or former place of residence) have knowledge of local norms, and support networks but also may be vulnerable to different targeted threats to international travellers.

Traveller/trip leader levels of competency and experience will increase/decrease their ability to undertake the trip and associated activities safely. This includes the training they have completed, previous experience of this type of travel and their familiarity with the destination country. While familiarity is beneficial, travellers returning to their own country can be at risk, as the purpose/activities they are undertaking can expose them to different or increased threats.

The support available to travellers, if needed, is a key mitigator. This could include partners in the destination (e.g., NGOs, local HEI collaborators, facilitation from agencies like the British Council or use of professional security and local guides). For high and extreme risk travel, the presence of family and friends in country may not be sufficient support.

People/ Purpose

The acceptance and support from the local community can be a powerful mitigator of risks.

Local actors/community groups can control threats on the traveller's behalf by having formal or informal consent and acceptance for their presence and activities, supplying practical support, information on threats and early warning of problems. However, the reverse can apply if there is resentment or hostility to the subject/purpose of the trip, the organisations involved or western Higher Education.

Researchers must ensure they understand the context and the motivations of relevant actors at the destination as part of their planning and the profile of the HEI (and any local partners), the traveller and the purpose of the travel should be considered against the interests and motivations of local actors (government

Purpose

The reason for the travel will affect its timing and places being visited. Travel, particularly for research, can require extensive travel within a country which can be a significant risk particularly if travelling at night, in regions with poor transport infrastructure or via incident prone routes. The condition and appropriateness of the vehicle and competence of the driver should be considered. As incidents are more likely during in-country travel it is an important consideration.

The timing of a trip can influence risk; elections, religious festivals and seasonal severe weather can elevate the risk of natural disasters, civil unrest, and/or conflict.

Activities to achieve research outcomes can be hazardous (e.g., environmental sampling, use of machinery, chemicals & biohazards etc.) particularly if lone working. These will require risk assessment, usually carried out separately as part of the relevant activity risk assessment process to avoid overcomplicating the assessment of the travel risk.

If the reason for the travel (e.g., research topic) is sensitive or controversial and

Purpose/ Place

The purpose of the travel may require visiting more hazardous localities within a country that most travellers would not be exposed to. This includes visiting areas such as

- deprived neighbourhoods like favelas and refugee camps which can have high crime and communicable disease threats,
- hazardous terrain such as minefields, deserts, jungles, polluted areas etc.,
- conflict areas and borders with conflict areas,
- and remote places where support and infrastructure are limited.

The risks of travel to these localities can be high risk even if the country is rated moderate or low.

Place

The risk level of the destination can be considered as security threats (crime, terrorism, unrest, conflict, cyber and sanctions) and environmental factors (health, weather and natural disasters, legal/cultural differences, infrastructure).

Infrastructure covers the safety, reliability and availability of telecommunications, transport, power, water, healthcare provision, emergency, and security services.

Travel risk advisory services provide risk ratings for destinations (usually rated on a 1-5 scale from low/negligible to severe/extreme). These are often provided by insurers as part of their travel insurance policy provision, however decision making by insurers is more strongly dictated by FCDO advice so both should be referenced in processes.

Typically, the highest risk places have challenges such as conflict, unrest, terrorism, high rates of crime, poor infrastructure or are experiencing disease outbreaks or natural disasters. The UK government's Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) tends to advise against travel, or essential only travel to these areas. For extreme risk locations it is common for insurers to also have exclusions or restrictions.

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