

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 | 7 |
| Further advice and assistance-during fieldwork | 7 |
| Document control box..... | 8 |

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. 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

4. 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.
5. **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)

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.

6. **Fieldwork organisers/leaders** 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

7. **Solo fieldworkers** (undertaking self-managed fieldwork) will assume many of the 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.

8. **Participants/members of a fieldwork team** are responsible for:

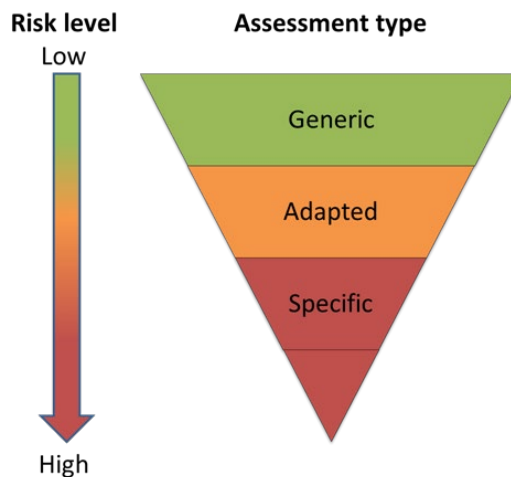
- heeding and observing any instruction given to them by a supervisor
- notifying any concerns regarding health and safety to their supervisor
- taking reasonable care of themselves and others in their activities

Risk assessments of fieldwork

9. 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 and Commonwealth Office](#), or by the University insurer's.

10. 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).

11. 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.



12. 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). Generic fieldwork risk assessments and a template for specific fieldwork risk assessments can be found on [Safety Services](#) website.

13. 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.

14. **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 FCO 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 FCO and/or advice from the University's insurers for the country/area being visited.

15. 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.

16. The following table of prompts has been developed to help users determine when a generic, adapted or specific risk assessment is required. **Any one condition** present in the adapted or specific categories will require the more detailed assessment to be produced.

| Prompt | Generic | Adapted | Specific |
|--|--|---|---|
| Experience of activity | Very experienced | Less experienced | Minimal experience |
| Experience of travel (including to the area) | Very experienced | Less experienced | Minimal experience |
| Inherent risks | Risks are well defined and understood. If they do arise they can still be easily mitigated by the person undertaking the activity. | Risks are understood but subject to some variables but if they are realised they can still be readily mitigated. | Significant risks could be foreseeably realised and cause significant losses to individuals, assets, reputations, programmes of research / work etc. |
| Supervision | Not required for the activity. | Minimal and can be direct or indirect. | Substantial 'monitoring' required by PI or manager over anticipated or emerging risks. |
| Control | Individual is able to directly control any consequential risks in defined ways if and when they arise. | Individual is able to control any consequential risks that may arise, but additional controls are needed compared to generic assessment. | To safely undertake the task requires control measures to be fully considered and recorded for the activity. Or the risks are subject to rapid or unpredictable change. |
| Information and instruction | Routine information required to safely complete the activity | More information than that found in the generic risk assessment is required to successfully complete the activity | Detailed information and instruction required to complete the activity. |
| FCO advice/country threat level | There is no advice issued by the FCO or the University's insurer against travelling to the area. Most visits are trouble-free. | There are no advisory warnings issued by the FCO or the University's insurer against travel. There is advice about aspects of personal safety and security, but most visits are trouble-free. | The University's insurer's determines the risks to be extreme, or the FCO advises against all but essential travel, or against all travel. |

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. 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.
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. 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

31. 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.
32. 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.

33. The FCO 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 | Occupational Health, Safety & Training Advisory Group (OHSTAG) Chair : Professor Nalin Thakker Secretary : Dr Patrick Seechurn |