

FIELDWORK PROCEDURE

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HEALTH AND SAFETY FIELDWORK Procedure

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[Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policies and Procedures - Ulster University](#)

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This document sets out Ulster University arrangements to ensure fieldwork can be undertaken with a reasonable degree of safety for those participating and anyone else who may be affected by it.
- 1.2 It provides a framework and guidance on the necessary steps to be taken for the safe management of fieldwork activities along with sources of further information and assistance.

2. SCOPE AND COMMENCEMENT

- 2.1 This procedure applies to all Fieldwork arranged or facilitated by the University including staff, students and others participating in such fieldwork with effect from October 2024.
- 2.2 This procedure does not apply to student placements; work at the facilities of other higher education institutions; attendance at conferences or meetings (unless e.g. in a country of higher risk deemed by Foreign Office advice); other low hazard sedentary activities off campus where a written risk assessment is not required; activities not authorised or arranged by the University.
- 2.3 Arrangements for consideration not related to health and safety such as financial/ethical aspects of particular fieldwork fall outside the scope of this procedure.
- 2.4 While this procedure is primarily for off-site fieldwork as defined in Section 4 it provides helpful guidance for those undertaking similar activities on University Premises.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The University recognises that learning and research activities beyond the confines of the campus are essential for academic and indeed personal development.
- 3.2 However, off-site arranged activities can vary greatly across disciplines in terms of factors such as the number of participants, locations, complexity and the degree of risk.
- 3.3 The risks associated with specific fieldwork activities must be recognised and understood by those participating, organising and approving such activities. Effective leadership and organisers with clearly defined roles are required. They must adopt a proportionate risk-based approach with thorough planning, well-informed decision making and practical, sensible control measures to mitigate risk.
- 3.4 Often third-party providers may be sourced to facilitate part or all of a fieldwork activity. When this is the case, reasonable enquiries should be made to ensure they have the necessary health and safety capability and competency.

4. DEFINITIONS

Fieldwork	<p>Fieldwork is defined as: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any offsite activity carried out by university staff or students for the purpose of learning and/or research and • where the University remains responsible for the safety, health and wellbeing of participating staff, students and others affected by their activities. <p>This definition will, therefore, include activities as diverse as e.g. factory and construction site visits, civil engineering surveys, social survey interviews, expeditions, scuba diving and survey/collection work carried out by geologists and biologists. (Not an exhaustive list)</p>
Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA)	<p>The continuous real-time assessment of risk in unforeseen and/or changing circumstances which may require new, or change to, control measures. Normally undertaken “in the field”, by those undertaking the activities/tasks.</p>

5. KEY LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

- 5.1 The **Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978** requires both the University and individuals to, so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure foreseeable risk to staff, students and others is sufficiently controlled during, or as a result of, Fieldwork-related activities.
- 5.2 The **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000** require health and safety arrangements to be in place including effective risk assessment and appropriate control measures to help manage risk and prevent anyone coming to harm as far as reasonably practicable.
- 5.3 Under the **Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007** an organisation can be found guilty if a person’s death occurred as a result of serious failings in how an activity was managed or organised resulting in a gross breach of a duty of care.
- 5.4 The University must exercise a "duty of care" to employees and students as is recognised in both criminal and civil law. Responsibilities are set out in Section 6.
- 5.5 The Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA) Sector [Guidance on Health and Safety in Fieldwork and Travel](#) sets out expected standards of good practice for Higher Education relating to Fieldwork (including overseas). The USHA guidance should be read in conjunction with this procedure.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

[The University Health, Safety and Wellbeing policy](#) includes information on Consultation and Cooperation arrangements.

Vice-Chancellor

- 6.1 On behalf of the Council, the Vice-Chancellor has executive responsibility to ensure that the requirements of health and safety legislation and the University health, safety and wellbeing policy are complied with.
- 6.2 Ultimate responsibility for ensuring that appropriate management systems are in place for the safe conduct of fieldwork therefore lies with the Vice-Chancellor.
- 6.3 The Vice-Chancellor will ensure that responsibility for health and safety is properly assigned and accepted at all levels within the University.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVC), Provost, Chief People Officer (CPO), Chief Finance and Strategy Officer (CFSO) Deans, Directors, Heads of Schools and Departments.

- 6.4 Responsibility for the health and safety of all those engaged in fieldwork normally lies with the Head of School/Department, or the person with overall authority who approved the fieldwork.
- 6.5 Where duties are delegated to the member of staff organising or leading the fieldwork, overall accountability/responsibility for health and safety cannot be delegated.
- 6.6 These duties / responsibilities include ensuring: -
- The planned fieldwork and associated activities comply with this procedure.
 - Processes that allow fieldwork to be authorised at an appropriate level taking account of the degree of risk.
 - A fieldwork plan that includes the proposed itinerary and timetable is available with the school/departmental office and updated as necessary.
 - If the work is in a remote or hazardous environment, a detailed and accurate itinerary should be shared with a suitable person or organisation (e.g. police, coastguard, mountain rescue team etc.).
 - Field trip leaders and supervisors are adequately trained in relevant work techniques, possess any necessary skills such as first-aid training, are capable and competent in leading a party in the field and appreciate the hazards involved in the undertaking.

- Roles and responsibilities are allocated, documented, communicated and clearly understood.
- The risk assessment of the fieldwork is completed and that a safe system of work with proportionate control measures has been established for all staff, students and other participants.
- That, when delegating duties, overall responsibility cannot be delegated (see 6.4 / 6.5) the fieldwork leader understands the obligations to those under their supervision and has the personal capability to lead – particularly where they may face challenging or adverse conditions.
- There is a clear management structure in place during the fieldwork, including authority to change itineraries or stop activities in the interests of safety.
- That the organisation of the fieldwork meets departmental safety criteria and that any accidents that do occur are reported. The University accident reporting form can be found at <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/peopleandculture/employee-benefits/health-and-safety/forms>

Fieldwork Leader (FL)

- 6.7 The field trip organiser will normally adopt the role of Fieldwork Leader (FL) and in most cases, this will be the academic or research supervisor. They must ensure levels of supervision are adequate for the situation (See Section 11). Where appropriate, more than one FL may be appointed to act on their behalf in the field.
- 6.8 FLs must understand the limits of their own knowledge and experience and seek the advice and / or assistance of others, as necessary.
- 6.9 The FL is responsible for ensuring that there are adequate safety arrangements for all those involved including:
- There are adequate safety management arrangements in place for the health and safety of all fieldworkers.
 - The degree of planning and organisation required is consistent with the degree of risk, so that any associated risks are reduced to as low as reasonably practicable.
 - Ensure participants understand the responsibilities of the FL and any other designated supervisor in relation to safety.
 - Safe systems of operating are in place.
 - Staff supervising fieldwork are competent (having the appropriate knowledge, ability, experience and qualification/training).
 - A risk assessment and an appropriate emergency response plan for all fieldwork activities is completed, and the findings/controls/plans are communicated to participants and others as appropriate (See section 8.4).
 - Dynamic risk assessments are made where appropriate.
 - There is a procedure in place to review the safety of fieldwork activities.

- All equipment and materials to be used during fieldwork activities are suitable and safe, with records of equipment inspections, maintenance etc. kept as appropriate.
- Suitable welfare arrangements such as availability of toilets and washing facilities.
- All fieldwork participants are given suitable information, instruction and training to enable them to understand the nature of the risks involved and how these risks are controlled.
- Suitable personal protective equipment is provided or make clear what should be worn as appropriate to the fieldwork activity.
- Arrangements in place for emergencies are sufficient and emergency contact information for fieldwork participants is up to date.

Staff/ participants/members of a fieldwork team

6.10 All staff and participants must: -

- Understand and observe any training, instruction or other information given to them by a supervisor and bring any questions or problems to the attention of their supervisor.
- Take seriously their own responsibilities for the health and safety of themselves and others.
- Not through their acts or failure to act, jeopardise the safety, health or wellbeing of themselves and others.
- Where undertaking solo travel or self-managed fieldwork take reasonable care in their activities and follow control measures identified in risk assessment regarding lone working.

7. AUTHORISATION

- 7.1 The levels of risk appetite and tolerance for off-site activities within Faculties/Schools/Departments may differ significantly depending on the nature of the course and related risks. Faculties/Departments should clearly set out circumstances which are beyond their risk tolerance level and therefore would be rejected from the outset, for example, where Government advice is to not enter a country for security reasons.
- 7.2 For other fieldwork within the scope of tolerance, Faculties/Departments must have in place a clear, robust approval process. As much fieldwork as possible should be authorised at the lowest level in relation to the risk and complexity of the activity.
- 7.3 Whilst many instances of fieldwork can be demonstrably assessed as low risk with approval by Head of School/Department, the approval process must provide for escalating high or unusual risks for senior management approval such as Deans/Directors and on a case-by-case basis.

- 7.4 The levels of risk appetite and tolerance within Faculties/Schools should be clearly communicated so that FLs, Heads of School/ Department, understand what they are empowered to accept, authorise and/ or escalate to the next level.
- 7.5 Depending on threat analysis and risk assessment, initial authorisation may be subject to on-going monitoring of high or unusual threat or risk levels to conditions of the approval, requiring reaffirmation of approval following significant change in risk levels.
- 7.6 The written approval process must ensure (not exhaustive): -
- ✓ All fieldwork is supported by appropriate suitable and sufficient Risk Assessment.
 - ✓ Competency of those leading and participating.
 - ✓ Those involved in the approval process understand and accept their role, including the duty to prohibit unsafe fieldwork and the powers of their approval authority.
 - ✓ Appropriate expert guidance has been sought where appropriate.
 - ✓ Consideration of threat analysis for travel to and choice of location.
 - ✓ Adequate incident management and emergency response plans.
 - ✓ Ability for the approval to be withdrawn if the risk status changes.
- 7.7 A Faculty/Department may wish to authorise their staff and student workers by the issue of identity cards. For overseas work, in particular, it is prudent for the base to retain passport and visa details and names and addresses of next of kin.

8. PLANNING

- 8.1 Sufficient planning, proportionate to the risk of field activities proposed, must be undertaken prior to time of event to allow completion of approval process at the appropriate level.
- 8.2 The purpose of the fieldwork, along with key activities, should be clearly identified at the planning stage.
- 8.3 Relevant sector/industry/degree programme guidelines (not an exhaustive list) should be considered at the planning stage.
- 8.4 These key activities can be expected to include details of the fieldwork team and competencies, outline itinerary, numbers of participants and any vulnerable participants, stakeholders/third parties' assessment of risk, necessary conduct and supervision.
- 8.5 An appropriate emergency response plan must be in place and form part of the risk assessment control strategy. The emergency plan must identify the procedures to be followed in the event of an accident, incident or ill health to a member of staff or a student. The degree of detail required in the plan must be commensurate to the risk. The plan should specifically address the following:
- ✓ The means of summoning assistance in emergency (i.e. communications).
 - ✓ Access to medical assistance and first aid and means of repatriation.
 - ✓ Access to emergency funds for organisers.
 - ✓ Identification of key contacts both at home and in the field. In the event of a serious accident or incident involving a student/staff member, it is important

that the emergency response plan has identified the appropriate people at the University who must be informed and how to do so.

9. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 Risk assessment is an integral part of the planning process both initially and potentially continuously to the end of the fieldwork depending on risks associated. This should be undertaken by competent persons.
- 9.2 In the UK, and particularly if overseas, a key consideration in the initial assessment (including both the final destination but also travel to and from) must be of security and political threat levels, significant natural hazards, and health risks.
- 9.3 This requires gathering and analysis of reliable information from a range of potential sources. The assessment and associated controls should be proportionate to the level of risk.
- 9.4 Consideration may need to be given to fitness required for some types of fieldwork or activities within it. This may relate to physical and or mental health or to particular health risks such as prevalence of infectious diseases. Where appropriate, advice should be sought from the Occupational Health Team.
- 9.5 Leaders should ensure that field trips are fully accessible and consider reasonable adjustments for fieldwork or part thereof to enable all people to participate fully in the fieldwork where practicable.
- 9.6 Prior to travel to any country, as part of the risk assessment, the [Foreign Travel Advice](#) Website should be checked to get advice about travelling to your destination including the latest information on safety and security, entry requirements and travel warnings. It is recommended the USHA Travel risk toolbox is used when assessing travel risk: <https://www.usha.org.uk/guidance-documents/travel-risk-toolbox/>
- 9.7 Significant residual risks apparent at the end of this process should be clearly documented and communicated so that consent is then on an informed basis and expectations of participants will be realistic.
- 9.8 The acceptability of an intrinsic or residual risk should be weighed up by the School/Department against potential benefits, for example, the value of the educational experience or the profile of the research proposed.
- 9.9 Where appropriate, contingency plans should be built into the risk assessment documentation before fieldwork begins and relate directly to the threat analysis/risks identified.
- 9.10 Clear and timely management arrangements should also be in place to facilitate the implementation of suitable controls.
- 9.11 Dynamic risk assessment can be expected where circumstances change, or new risks present themselves. This is not a replacement for contingency planning ahead of the fieldwork.
- 9.12 It is recommended that post fieldwork feedback should be obtained and evaluated so any lessons learned can be reflected in future similar assessments within the Department/School.
- 9.13 A fieldwork risk assessment template is available to download [here](#).

10. INSURANCE

- 10.1 It is the University's primary aim to ensure that all staff members remain safe and healthy during any trips in connection with university business. The University expects all members of staff to ensure that any travel arrangements are made with their safety and wellbeing as the ultimate priorities.
- 10.2 For insurance to be valid as part of fieldwork, it must have robust, documented risk assessments and be authorised at the appropriate level.
- 10.3 Organisers must ensure the insurance cover is adequate for the fieldwork. For more information on insurance including contact details, for queries open this hyperlink [Insurance](#).

11. SUPERVISION

- 11.1 Supervision requirements will vary depending on the nature of the fieldwork and the experience of the participants.
- 11.2 The following factors should be considered, in deciding staff to student ratios: -
 - ✓ the nature of the fieldwork.
 - ✓ the environment and conditions in which the fieldwork takes place.
 - ✓ the experience of the members of staff in supervisory roles.
 - ✓ the experience of the group.
 - ✓ the gender mix of the group.
 - ✓ the needs of individuals considering their age, level of maturity, and any individual special needs.
 - ✓ the external requirements of, for example, regulatory authorities or bodies.
 - ✓ the possibility of members of staff (and particularly those with a supervisory role) becoming unavailable due to illness, accident or having to deal with an unforeseen event.
- 11.3 Circumstances not requiring supervision, or where lone working is acceptable, should be clearly identified and communicated. Where a level of supervision is appropriate, two levels of supervision can be considered: -
 - ✓ Direct supervision is appropriate for high-risk activities or for inexperienced participants where a member of staff oversees the participants and is able to intervene in person immediately if necessary.
 - ✓ Indirect supervision where a member of staff is managing the situation but would be unable to intervene immediately. This would be appropriate for lower risk activities such as individual research projects, group working, home visits, social activities. Where indirect supervision is appropriate, a schedule of communication should be agreed between supervisors and participants.
- 11.4 Where, during an activity, the necessary level of supervision cannot be implemented, a team leader should be empowered to stop the activity to ensure the safety of all involved.

12. THIRD PARTY PROVIDERS

- 12.1 Where third party providers are used or sourced, FLs must undertake a reasonable degree of due diligence to ensure they have an acceptable health and safety record, public liability insurance (or local equivalent) and competent staff (including key considerations such as acceptable staff supervising). This is particularly important in relation to specialist outdoor activity providers, e.g. climbing/diving instructors.
- 12.2 Depending on the level of risk, formal checks should be made prior to the fieldwork and records kept – particularly if the third-party provider has a safety-critical or supervisory role.
- 12.3 Obtain this information and agree the roles and responsibilities of the provider in writing and keep this on file. If companies or individuals are used, regularly keep a note of positive and negative experiences to inform future planning.
- 12.4 All parties/participants involved must clearly understand where responsibilities lie at any given time during the fieldwork.

13. EQUIPMENT

- 13.1 All equipment necessary for the fieldwork should be identified and specified at the planning stage, including any equipment, welfare facilities or clothing expected to be provided for fieldworkers. Equipment should be specified and selected carefully to ensure that it is suitable for the intended use and conditions, and any prior and ongoing requirements for testing, examination and inspection should be detailed– including any required competencies to inspect or use the equipment. Damaged equipment and equipment that has not been approved should not be used.
- 13.2 Hired equipment should be similarly specified and any maintenance records verified. Activities requiring safety critical equipment such as fall protection harnesses must have evidence of correct maintenance to the required standard. For non-critical equipment or clothing it will be down to the judgement of the FL and experienced team members, erring on the side of safety where there is any doubt.

14. MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 14.1 It is recommended that a debrief and review be undertaken after field course / expedition to consider (not an exhaustive list): -
 - ✓ Feedback of participants.
 - ✓ Conduct of participants.
 - ✓ Health and safety incidents (these must be recorded on the University reporting system).
 - ✓ Suitability of accommodation and transport arrangements.
 - ✓ Effectiveness of risk assessment and controls.

Any lessons learned should be shared and implemented at the appropriate level.

15. RESOURCES

[USHA Higher Education Sector Guidance on Health and Safety in Fieldwork and Travel](#)

<https://www.usha.org.uk/guidance-documents/travel-risk-toolbox/>

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>

<https://www.ulster.ac.uk/peopleandculture/employee-benefits/health-and-safety>

[SENDU Guidance](#)