

Research Office

**Lone Worker Procedures for
Researchers**

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In its lone worker policy, the University of Cumbria recognises its responsibility to ensure that reasonable preventative measures are in place to safeguard the health and safety of all employees, students and visitors. The policy emphasises the task of line managers and supervisors to enact proper procedures in line with a risk assessment of the nature of the lone working under consideration. The purpose of this paper is to suggest appropriate procedures for research staff and research students where instances of lone working may occur. Your own personal responsibilities and a risk assessment will need to be considered as any policy or guidance can only outline the issues and potential solutions. In all lone working situations, do consider your own personal safety.

With regard to researchers, the three main areas of possible lone working are:

1. Working in laboratories
2. Fieldwork
3. Conducting interviews with participants in their own homes or on the streets.

1. Working in Laboratories

In such instances line managers, supervisors and researchers should apply the normal Health and Safety procedures related to laboratory work. It is essential, of course, that all involved have had suitable training in these areas. Researchers, supervisors and line managers should familiarise themselves with the University's [Health and Safety Policy](#).

Any new researcher before starting to work in the laboratories should be trained by the appropriate Laboratory Lead/Supervisor or Senior Technician. No new researcher can work unsupervised until they have been categorised as trained around the laboratory conditions by the appropriate Laboratory Lead/Supervisor. Laboratory health and safety policy and training will depend upon the type of laboratories used (Class 1 or class 2).

2. Fieldwork

If fieldwork is to be undertaken alone, the researcher and supervisor should apply the procedures described below and those in the [Health and Safety policy](#). A risk assessment should be undertaken, and particular attention should be given to the researcher's own health needs, and to issues of communication and security. Finally, the implications of Data Protection legislation for the recording of health information should be taken into account. All health details should be stored securely, (e.g. in a locked cabinet or on a password protected computer), should be shared only with those who need to know, and should be destroyed when no longer required.

Once the researcher is ready to conduct fieldwork, the following procedures should be adopted:

1. the researcher should be familiar with emergency procedures and with the international distress signal.
2. the researcher should leave with the nominated contact (usually line manager) details such as; written summary, map, expected duration of the fieldwork, nominated contact person and phone number, of the proposed field area to be visited. For research students the

nominated contact would be the main supervisor. They should also leave with the administrator/nominated contact a mobile phone number on which they can be contacted and the contact details of a family member who can be contacted in case of emergency.

3. the researcher should phone the administrator/nominated contact within one hour of the end of the proposed duration of the fieldwork (or a nominated contact number if the fieldwork goes beyond office hours).
4. If the researcher does not phone, the administrator or nominated contact (whichever is appropriate) will ring the researcher to check (where appropriate).
5. If the researcher is conducting fieldwork abroad, then working alone and remote from colleagues is to be discouraged as far as possible. Where it is not practicable to avoid it, lone working should only be sanctioned after a thorough assessment of the risks has been carried out. A safe system of work should be devised.
6. A lone researcher should keep others involved in and fully informed of the details of each journey and of the planned research programme. It is critical that a nominated contact person is appointed who can act upon any failure to make contact.
7. Emergency plans should be devised and these should be initiated should the worker fail to keep to the agreed schedule. An effective means of communication should be available.
8. Regular checks should be made on any lone worker, by personal contact, by telephone or by radio.
9. Communication should be maintained on a planned basis and appropriate action taken by the responsible contact person in the event of a failure to establish contact by the researcher.

3. Conducting interviews with participants in their own homes or on the streets.

All researchers conducting such interviews should familiarise themselves with University's Health and Safety Policies. Once the researcher is ready to conduct the interviews, the following procedures should be adopted

1. The researcher's own health needs should be checked and appropriate proactive strategies adopted to ensure the well-being of researcher and participant(s) e.g. medical conditions that would place a researcher at risk should be noted, emergency arrangements appropriate to the needs of the researcher should be put in place if needed.
2. The security of the lone researcher should be ensured. This would involve the following measures
 - a. the researcher informs the nominated contact of the name and address of the person to be visited and the times of the interview.
 - b. leave with the administrator/nominated contact a mobile phone number on which they can be contacted.
 - c. if no contact can be made, then support is called for by the administrator/nominated contact in line with guidance from the Health and Safety Officer
 - d. if the interviews are to be conducted abroad, then parallel procedures to these should be put in place.
 - e. the key issue is the appointment of a contact person with clearly delineated responsibilities should a researcher fail to make contact according to an agreed schedule.