Step by Step guide to Fieldwork Risk Assessment

Faculty of ESSL

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Introduction

Who is this information for?
This information is for anyone who is organising a fieldwork activity whether for staff, students or a group that includes both. It is also for members of staff and PGR’s who are conducting their own risk assessments for activities related to their individual research. Members of staff and PGR’s are considered to be both “Organiser” and “Participant” for activities related to their individual research and will be expected to fulfil both of these roles. As such they would be expected to conduct their own risk assessments for discussion with and sign off by their supervisor / line manager.

What do we mean by fieldwork?
Activities carried out by staff and students as part of their teaching or research as a member of the University of Leeds. The range of fieldwork undertaken is diverse and includes overseas trips, archaeological digs, social survey interviews and mountain climbing, as well as the traditionally recognised survey / collection work associated with Environmental and Biological activities. It also includes short organised trips for undergraduate students to public sites such as the British Library, York Minster and Whitby Abbey in the UK. It does not include any work undertaken that is not part of the activities of the University, or voluntary or leisure (including sport) activities. Placements and Study Abroad are dealt with separately. Contact your Health and Safety Manager if you have specific queries.

Important Notes: The definition of Fieldwork does not include student “study abroad” placements, work placements or work experience. Neither does it include staff or PGR’s involvement in UK based low risk activities such as teaching, attending seminars, meetings and conferences etc. Whilst it may be necessary in some circumstances to complete risk assessments for these or similar activities further guidance is currently being developed. If you need information now contact your Health and Safety Manager and/ or Co-ordinator.

Step by step guide to Fieldwork risk assessment

This guide takes you through the risk assessment process step by step. It must be read in conjunction with the “Documents to get started”.

It should be noted that this guidance is in no way a comprehensive guide to every aspect of the fieldwork activities undertaken by the University. Equally not all of this guidance will be appropriate for every activity. For low risk activities some of the sections will be not applicable. The level of detail, effort and time involved will vary and should be commensurate with the level of risk.

If there are any concerns or questions that relate to the activity it is important that you seek further guidance and specialist advice; support can also be sought from your Health and Safety Manager or Health and Safety Co-ordinator.

It is not possible or desirable to be totally definitive and prescriptive in terms of who should be involved in carrying out / writing the assessment. The most important factor is that the person(s) involved are “competent”1 to identify the hazards and evaluate the risks of the activity in question. This could be a team approach and involve any combination of people e.g. for research activities the PGR will often be the most appropriate person with input from their supervisor and perhaps the HSM or local HSC.

See also FAQ risk assessments and Scenarios and roles

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1 Competence in health and safety terms does not necessarily depend on the possession of particular skills or qualifications. Individuals should have an understanding of relevant current best practice, an awareness of the limitations of their own experience and knowledge and be willing and able to supplement their own knowledge when necessary by obtaining help and advice.
Risk Assessment

The ESSL Fieldwork Risk Assessment template will help you to identify hazards / risks in a methodical manner; the help text version provides further explanatory notes and this step by step guide provides more detailed information to assist you.

For Social Survey activities it is strongly recommended that The Social Research Associations’ “Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers” is referred to as it contains practical advice on how to minimise the specific risks related to this type of Fieldwork. See http://www.the-sra.org.uk/staying_safe.htm

Key points when you organise fieldwork

1. A risk assessment and any identified control measures must be in place and approved before the fieldwork is carried out
2. Appropriate insurance and emergency plans must be in place
3. Any training necessary must be carried out
4. A pre-departure briefing for all participants must have taken place
5. A post Fieldwork evaluation should be completed

Step 1: Identify Fieldwork activity & participants
• First, use local documentation to create a brief plan – citing who, when, where and what you will do on your fieldwork trip.

Step 2: Identify the Key roles
• Identify the key roles of organiser/s, risk assessor/s, central contact/s, and who will approve and sign off the risk assessment.

Step 3: High Risk activities?
• For potentially high risk activities or activities in high risk locations or groups of individual (e.g. where the FCO advise against travel) – approval by senior management is essential. Therefore it advisable to gain approval (subject to a satisfactory assessment) in principle, as soon as feasible.

Step 4: Are any external permissions needed?
• Check whether you will need any specific agreements to carry out the fieldwork – including international, cultural, environmental, health-related or behavioural permissions.
• Check whether you need any written permissions or agreements from Local Authorities, Official or Government bodies, Governing Bodies, Head teachers etc
• You should ensure access to your chosen site is legal, and seek permission from the relevant owner or organisation.

Step 5: Carry out the risk assessment
• Identify the hazards – use the hazard identification section of this guidance to help you
• Assess the risks – assess the level of risk associated with the hazards you have identified
• Identify controls – identify suitable control measures that will reduce the risks to an acceptable level
• Use a team approach and seek advice and support as necessary.

For low risk activities some of the template sections will not be applicable and can be ignored.
Step 6: Implement identified controls

Now you have the risk assessment, you can look at how to implement any control measures and actions you have identified. Some of the most important ones might include:

**School Central Point of Contact** - ensuring that a named individual has been identified as the central communication point at the University should any emergencies arise in the field and that they have been provided with the risk assessment and all relevant details (especially contingency plans).

**Emergency procedures** – you should make plans for foreseeable emergencies, taking into account the environment and hazards that may be encountered. These might include:
- **Emergency equipment** (such as appropriate first aid kits).
- **Appropriate critical incident management plan** including liaison details for local emergency services, evacuation procedures and/or means of raising the alarm.
- **Liaison details for local emergency services**
- **Contact details** for the School contact at the University, fieldwork activity organiser, the British embassy if abroad and all participants.
- **Itinerary** – outlining when and where you expect to be, details of planned arrangements and accommodation arrangements.

**Insurance** - You must have insurance to adequately cover the fieldwork (travel, activity, medical, repatriation etc) and if anyone extends the trip to include a holiday this also must be covered. Further information is at [http://www.leeds.ac.uk/insurance/](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/insurance/).

**Mode of transport** - travelling between sites can be one of the highest risk activities, so carefully consider how you can ensure the safety and suitability of vehicles (e.g. appropriate licences, insurance, vehicle checks and number of drivers). If using your own vehicle this must be insured for business use. Be especially careful about public transport if you go overseas.

**Supervision** - a number of risks can be controlled or reduced through adequate and appropriate supervision. The level of supervision required depends on the number of participants, their abilities and the nature, location or type of activities being undertaken.

**Lone or isolated working** - where the activity involves lone or isolated working a safe method of work must be in place e.g. a buddy system, doubling up for first visits, calling in at pre-set times.

**Health considerations** – you need to check you have:
- Briefed participants to arrange their own access to any medication they may need.
- Requested information on medical histories from participants if necessary.
- Arranged health surveillance if participants may be exposed to hazardous substances (e.g. under COSHH risk assessments).
- Ensured that all participants are aware of any necessary immunisations and of the need for proof of vaccinations in some countries.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), Student Medical Practice or participants’ General Practitioners will be able to give more specific advice.

**Visas** - check the visa requirements for any countries you will visit, along with arrangements such as registering with the embassy or local authorities.

Step 7: Are the risks acceptable?

- Have you been able to reduce the risks to an acceptable level?
- Seek further advice from your supervisor, line manager, other colleagues, your local co-ordinator or your health and safety manager.
- Forward risk assessment for approval and sign off ....
**Step 8: Obtain approval and sign off**

- E-mail all documents to the identified line manager or supervisor (this may often be the Head of School) for approval and sign off
- The “approver” should then e-mail confirmation back to the organiser
- Records should be lodged with the school contact and where appropriate mailed to the central e-mail box esslfieldwork@leeds.ac.uk

**Who approves the Risk Assessment?**

Often this will be the person(s) with supervisory and/or line management responsibility for the participants(s). It is not possible to be totally prescriptive in terms of job title who this would be as in practice as it will depend upon circumstances, it may be the Head of School, the PI, line manager, Course Leader etc. [Getting Started Instructions](#)

For potentially high risk activities or activities in high risk locations or groups of individual (e.g. where the FCO advise against travel) – approval by senior management is essential.

**Step 9: Pre-departure training and briefing**

**Specialist training needs** – depending on the fieldwork you may wish to provide training in specific areas for example self-defence, cultural sensitivity, first aid, swimming.

**Pre-departure briefing** – all participants and organisers should meet before the trip to share relevant information. This should include details from the risk assessment such as:

- **Itinerary** of the trip
- **Contingency plans** – what to do in an emergency and relevant contact details
- **FCO Advice** – when travelling overseas. This also highlights any potential increased risk, often in the form of military or political unrest.
- **Dress and behaviour** – you may wish to brief participants on any cultural sensitivity around the fieldwork activities and the area they are visiting.

**Step 10: Carry out Fieldwork trip**

You must ensure that all participants know what to do in an emergency or if anything changes during the trip that might impact on the risk assessment. If any of these changes occur you must ensure they are communicated to all participants and the school contact. Any serious incident e.g. fatalities, serious injuries (e.g. broken bones), hospitalisation, or absence from work or study for more than three days, must be reported immediately. Less serious incidents can be reported on return from the trip.

**Step 11: Post-fieldwork evaluation (monitor and review)**

Once the fieldwork is over, you should review the activity and share any learning points with other relevant staff in your School / Service. This can then feed back into future fieldwork to ensure it is equally successful. All risk assessments and related documents should be stored in a safe place for a period of 3 years (filed electronically at School & Faculty level) if any of the participant(s) involved are under 18, the records should be kept until they reach 21. If an incident or accident has occurred all records relating to this must be retained for the 3 year minimum as outlined above. If the incident involves complex legislation (e.g. COSHH, GM or radiation) Health and Safety Managers will advise.
Important Note:
Not all of this guidance will be relevant but is provided for completeness

Hazard Identification

- **Nature of the site**
  - Include all locations to be visited during the trip; these could be logged as part of the itinerary. Any changes during the trip should be recorded on the itinerary and be approved by the activity organiser and recorded on or off the site.
  - Site information must include:
    - Nearest local contact point(s) (such as a hospital, police station or hotel).
    - System for contact appropriate to the location (such as mobile phones or a two-way radio). Include prearranged contact times if appropriate.
    - Grid references and maps for rural and remote areas.
    - Tide-times where appropriate e.g. for coastal trips.

- **Environmental Conditions**
  - **Climate**
    - Assess the local climate and weather conditions to identify suitable equipment and clothing and ensure this is available and worn. Consider:
      - Extreme cold or heat.
      - Humidity.
      - Exposure to sunlight.
      - Fog.
      - Rain or snow.
      - Altitude.
      - Wind
    - Determine whether a period of acclimatisation is needed for the participants when visiting and returning from climates with extremes of temperature.
    - Also consider hazards associated with specific climates such as:
      - **Alpine & Sub-Alpine**
        - Purity of water.
        - Exposure to sunlight.
        - Altitude sickness.
        - Access and evacuation in case of emergency.
        - A place for safe refuge.
        - Supply of food and water.
        - Sudden weather changes.
        - Lack of local infrastructure.
      - **Desert and Arid**
        - Dehydration.
        - Wild animals such as predators, venomous snakes and insects.
        - Prevalence of disease.
        - Water purity.
        - Extreme sunlight and temperature.
        - Political instability and local hostility.
        - Lack of local infrastructure.
Other consideration should be given to transport, food and water supplies.

- **High mountains and Polar regions**
  - Altitude sickness.
  - Lack of local infrastructure.
  - Lack of rescue services.
  - Extreme weather conditions.
  - Dehydration.
  - Hypothermia.
  - Wild animals.

- **Tropical and Subtropical**
  - Water purity.
  - Flooding due to heavy rainfall.
  - Prevalence of tropical disease associated with the area.
  - Wild animals such as venomous snakes and insects.
  - Political instability and hostile local people.
  - Lack of local infrastructure.
  - Consider site access and evacuation in the event of an emergency, and the supply of food and drinking water.

- **Site Specific Conditions**

  It is vital that knowledge of the site is gained prior to the trip. Where possible an assessment of the site should be undertaken before fieldwork starts, to assess any hazards and the suitability for the activities to be undertaken.

  This may take the form of a pre-trip visit or contact with local people who can pass on any relevant information. There may also be hazards inherent in the site itself that will need to be considered. Some specific examples include:

  - **Alongside Railways and Major Roads**
    - Work alongside railways and major roads require permission. The hazards associated with this type of environment are high, so work must be planned in conjunction with the controlling authority. Their advice must be taken on the procedures required.

  - **Inner City / Suburban / Residential**
    - Traffic.
    - Physical violence or abuse as a result of the fieldwork activity or due to becoming a victim of a crime.
    - Domestic animals.
    - Crime hot-spots
    - Dereliction / isolation

  - **Commercial and Industrial**
    - Traffic including commercial vehicles such as forklift trucks or industrial plant.
    - Chemical, biological and radiological hazards as a result of the processes being undertaken.
    - Physical violence or abuse.
    - Domestic and feral animals.
    - Collapsing structures or falling objects particularly in demolition or building sites.
    - Trenches / storage tanks / grain silos / old mine shafts / quarry etc.
Farmland
Any access to farmland must be agreed with the landowner and farmer, to prevent damage to crops and harm to animals, as well as highlighting any hazards that may be encountered by participants.
Examples of specific hazards associated with farmland are:
- Aggression from domestic animals that have been disturbed. If large domestic animals may be encountered, participants should be aware of what to do if a large domestic animal becomes aggressive.
- Mechanical hazards from farm machinery – It is crucial to be aware of the types of machinery that may be encountered. Remember that noise levels associated with machinery may reduce the operators awareness of approaching groups or people or verbal warnings.
- Chemicals such as pesticides and crop sprays - The presence of these will vary depending on the time of year.
- Wild animals.
- Domestic/wild animals with young.
- Knowledge of open shooting season (usually October to January).

Hills and Mountains
Hills and mountains pose a number of specific hazards:
- Exposure, weather conditions and temperature may be very different at the summit compared to the base.
- Sudden changes in weather such as fog or snow.
- Exhaustion.
- Remoteness of the location – where small injuries can have far more serious consequences.
- Hypothermia and hyperthermia - body temperature falling dangerously low or climbing dangerously high.

Marine including Inshore, Coastal, Shorelines and Open Water
The scope of fieldwork in marine environments will often lend itself to using specialist equipment and / or working with a third party partner organisation. Therefore many of the considerations relate to the third party partner organisation and their ability and competency to carry out the tasks. Hazards to consider include:
- Drowning.
- Pollution.
- Infection from ingesting polluted waters, e.g. Weil’s disease.
- Falling rocks from cliffs.
- Landslips.
- Getting cut off by tidal changes or rapidly changing water levels.
- Quick sands and mudflats.
- Potentially dangerous wildlife such as stinging jellyfish.
- Hypothermia and hyperthermia - body temperature falling dangerously low or climbing dangerously high.
- Working from boats etc.

Moorland
Moorland poses similar hazards to those associated with hills or mountains, also consider the potential for becoming lost due to the lack of landmarks or as a result of poor visibility during bad weather. Consider the previous and current use of moorland e.g. artillery firing ranges, some areas have been used for military training and so there may be unexploded ammunition present.
Other risks to consider include:
- Fire.
Wild animals with young.
Knowledge of open shooting season (usually October to January).

- **Woodland and Forest**
  Seek permission for access to woodland and forests, and give consideration to the risks associated with woodland. These risks include:
  - Fire.
  - Getting lost due to the lack of landmarks.
  - Forestry operations such as tree felling.
  - Potentially dangerous animals (usually abroad), such as wild bears.
  - Wild animals with young.
  - Knowledge of open shooting season (usually October to January).

- **Process**
  Consider what the process involves – does it include:
  - Interviewing groups or individuals.
  - Working alone.
  - Manual Handling.
  - Driving off road or driving specialist vehicles.
  - Handling or working with animals.

- **Transport**
  Travel is one of the areas where most incidents happen during fieldwork, consider;
  - Transport to and from the site – where appropriate an itinerary including a record of flight times and numbers.
  - Any transport on site.
  - Also consider whether you are carrying any dangerous goods.
  - Lone driving / parking areas.

- **Equipment**
  What equipment is needed for the activities to be undertaken? Consider:
  - Machinery.
  - Specialist equipment e.g. climbing, sailing etc.
  - Electrical equipment.

- **Violence**
  Consider the potential for violence, political or civil unrest. Violence can be encountered anywhere, but the chances are increased in urban environments. Violence can take the form of:
  - Violent crime such as mugging.
  - Being caught up in local unrest such as political demonstrations.

  Violence could result from people misinterpreting why activities such as questionnaires are being carried out. This is more likely when working alone, dealing with particular high risk individuals and groups, or working in areas with high crime rates.
• **Individuals/ other persons at risk**

Consider your capabilities and experiences and those of others within the group to ensure that these are catered for as far as possible and that individuals have the opportunity to take part, this should include:

*Excellent guidance is contained within “The Social Research Association’s Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers” at: [http://www.the-sra.org.uk/staying_safe.htm](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/staying_safe.htm)*

- Medical considerations
  - If you are currently taking medication you **must** ensure you have enough to cover the duration of the trip, with enough to cover in case of delay. You should also know the name of the medication, not just the trade name that is used as it is not always easy to obtain medication abroad and it may have a differing composition to that found in the UK.
- Experience of travel or activity.
- Any disabilities.
- Pregnancy
- Client group – associated risks – Children, vulnerable adults etc
- Cultural sensitivities
- Dress and behaviour
- Gender related
- Psychological risks – staff or client group

• **Work Pattern**

Consider the pattern of work while undertaking the activity, will you be working shifts, working at night, long hours, also consider potential of lack of sleep, exhaustion etc.

**Lone or isolated working** - where the activity involves lone or isolated working a safe method of work must be in place e.g. a buddy system, doubling up for first visits, calling in at pre-set times

• **Permissions Required**

Do you require permission to carry out the work e.g. from the owner of the land, for entry into the country etc. Include details of any permissions that you have obtained and any restrictions on activities placed within them. Permission should be sought prior to the field trip and activity however if needed when overseas the Foreign Commonwealth Office, Embassy or Consulate of the Country will be able to advise as to the legislative requirements and permissions required.

If your work occurs in open countryside in the UK, work on sites of special scientific interest (SSSI) must be approved by the site owner and appropriate authorities. Overseas work must also be approved by that country’s relevant bodies/ authorities. Areas that may require specific permissions include:

- Sites of historical importance - Heritage sites, National Trust properties etc.
- Sites of ecological importance –national parks, nature reserves, SSSIs.
- Politically or economically sensitive areas.
- Near military sites, generating stations or important communications centres.
- Sites where the work may disturb an endangered species of plant or animal.
- Privately owned urban spaces such as shopping centres.
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- **First Aid Provision**

  Provide appropriate first aid kits and means of correct treatment of casualties. Also ensure that there is an appointed person to monitor all first aid provision, and take charge of any situation that may arise. A basic First Aid Kit should contain equipment (e.g. bandages, dressings, plasters etc) in sufficient quantities appropriate to the number of participants, the duration of fieldwork and the planned activities.

  Consideration should also be given to any specialist equipment not normally required in a basic First Aid Kit (e.g. hypodermic needles, syringes, sterile saline). All participants must be informed of the arrangements for first aid, the location of facilities when on fieldwork, who the first aider(s) is / are and the reporting mechanism following an accident.

  When visiting some areas of the world consideration of emergency provision for injury or ill-health must be made. It may be necessary to include some medications, sterile solutions such as water and sterile hypodermic needles and syringes in the emergency kit. It is recommended that this is only done when absolutely necessary and following advice from the Occupational Health Service.

- **Other specific risk assessments required**

  Are other assessments required e.g. for Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH), Manual Handling, Lone Working, if they are required either include details or attach as a separate risk assessment.

- **Health Questionnaire**

  Information should be submitted in confidence to your School. In some cases, evidence of fitness to undertake the trip or specific activities may also be required from a doctor (e.g. fitness to fly).

- **Health Surveillance Required**

  The possibility of exposure to certain substances may require a more extensive level of health surveillance and monitoring. Health surveillance may be required under specific regulations e.g. COSHH.

  Also give consideration to whether the site might contain any potentially hazardous substances, as some may occur naturally, as a result of previous activity or as the result of pollution. Pre-existing medical conditions may make an individual more vulnerable to the adverse effects of some substances and in some cases pathogens if they have reduced immunity.

  Substances to be aware of include:
  - Specified biological agents (human or transmissible animal pathogens “zoonotics”).
  - Carcinogens.
  - Toxic chemicals (with both short term acute and long term “chronic” effects).
  - Allergenic substances (some wood dusts, paint vapours, lubricants and animal fur).
  - Radioactive chemicals.

  For more information on these substances, consult the specific guidance documents; contact your local Health and Safety Co-ordinator or Faculty Health and Safety Manager.
• **Vaccinations Required**

In some cases you may potentially be exposed to infectious or contagious diseases such as Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and Malaria which may require immunisation or prophylactic medication to prevent infection or contraction. You may also be required to have proof of immunisation for the Country / Countries that are to be visited.

Exposure to these diseases will dependent on the area being visited. Advice is available from Occupational Health (Staff) the Student Medical Practice (Students) or from your own General Practitioner. Further advice can be sought from advisory bodies such as the World Health Organisation (WHO).

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**Additional Supporting Information**

• **Pre-departure briefing**

• **Training**

During the planning and risk assessment process training needs may have been identified, include this and whether training has been carried out.

• **FCO Advice**

Include FCO advice when travelling overseas. Also consider any potential increased risks associated with visiting particular countries or regions, often in the form of military or political unrest.

• **Supervision**

Includes levels of supervision required for the activities, this should be appropriate to the experience of the individual participants. When on a group fieldwork activity the ratio of Staff to Students or experienced to novice participants, should be determined by taking into account the type of activity, size of the group and their experience.

When undertaking specialist activities such as diving which are being run by or in conjunction with a partner organisation their advice must be sought regarding supervision levels. Note that when a third party partner organisation is used they must provide appropriate health and safety documentation any other requirements (e.g. specific personal protective equipment) for the activities.

Supervisors must be named in the risk assessment and plan, and any specialist responsibility, qualification; training, in-house training and previous experience must also be included; e.g. trained in first aid, or a specialist instructor in rock climbing or sailing etc.

• **Other Controls**

Consider any further controls such as registration with the embassy or local authorities when entering a country.

• **Persons at Risk**
Identify anyone else who may be at potential risk from the work being carried out. This may include employees of partner institutions or the general public.

- **Additional information**
  
  - **Accident / Incident Reporting**
    All accidents, incidents and cases of ill-health associated with the fieldwork must be reported to Health and Safety Services through the Sentinel accident reporting system. When these incidents include fatalities, serious injuries such as broken bones, hospitalisation, or absence from work or study for more than three days these must be reported immediately. Accidents should be reported to the Activity Organiser, Fieldwork Co-ordinator or Health and Safety Co-ordinator.

  - **Waste**
    All waste that is produced as part of a fieldwork activity must be disposed of in accordance with local regulations (Country specific) or if returned to the University disposed of in accordance with University requirements (link to waste manual / standards and guidance).

  - **Personal protective equipment (PPE)**
    The risk assessment must determine the requirements for PPE. The University will supply specialist PPE for specific tasks, such as rigger gloves for certain manual handling or hardhats for working under cliffs.

  - **Clothing and footwear**
    Identify suitable clothing for the trip and activities. This includes items such as:
    - Walking boots.
    - Rain wear.
    - Cold weather clothing.

For further advice and guidance please contact your local Health and Safety Manager or Health and Safety Co-ordinator.