

Policy on Lone working in the School of Engineering

The HSE define lone workers as “those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision”.

Lone workers have neither visual nor audible communication with another individual and is therefore unable to summon assistance in the event of an accident, illness or other emergency.

Lone working can include work activities undertaken by staff or students:

- during normal departmental working hours (8:00 – 18:00 weekdays);
- outside normal departmental working hours (includes weekends and holidays when the University is closed); or
- off-site e.g. travelling to visit other organisations; conferences; working in the community; field work etc. (there will be additional arrangements for off-site lone working).

Out of hours and habitual lone working should be avoided where possible. Space owners should decide on local rules for lone working but ultimately where practical, lone working especially outside normal working hours should be avoided and should not be the norm.

Any proposed activities that meet any of the three definitions of lone working above must be risk assessed in order to consider the potential impact on the lone worker. For each activity, the assessor should: describe:

- a) describe the nature of the activity;
- b) describe the risks to lone workers; and
- c) describe arrangements required to monitor the safety of the lone worker
- d) consider the local rules on lone working as decided by the space owner.

Arrangements could include, for example, use of a buddy system, periodic monitoring of workers by the supervisor or other colleagues, notifying security via phone on arrival and departure from campus, or use of personal alarms, lone working apps or automatic warning devices that could be triggered in the event of an emergency.

Any lone working must be agreed between line managers / supervisors and space owners before commencing.

Working outside of normal hours

It is also important to consider the other hazards linked to lone working not directly linked to the work activity especially when work is carried out outside of normal hours such as personal safety when travelling to and from the school especially when: travelling during hours of darkness i.e. more likely to be exposed to verbal or physical violence; more likely to be tired or suffering with fatigue which could impact on ability to drive safely; or during adverse weather conditions.

Low risk activities

Where possible, lone working activities should be restricted to activities presenting a low risk even in the event that control measures were to fail. For example, persons working alone in offices outside normal working hours are unlikely to be at significant risk as long as appropriate fire and security precautions are in place. Carrying out activities that a person would otherwise do as part of normal everyday life would also be considered low risk. It is also acceptable for low risk laboratory activities to be performed by a lone worker provided the person performing the task is:

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- competent (i.e. has the necessary experience and has received appropriate training); and
- capable of dealing with any reasonably foreseeable accident or other emergency alone, without the assistance of colleagues

Higher risk activities

There are occasions when it is not appropriate for activities to be performed by lone workers without special arrangements involving monitoring, help or back up being introduced. Special arrangements must be considered for all activities where the risk assessment has identified that the risk cannot be adequately controlled by one person. Activities that are considered unacceptable for a lone worker to perform under any circumstances must be identified as prohibited to lone workers (including students).

These arrangements or prohibitions must be documented as part of any relevant risk assessment, local rules and health and safety folder and approved by the PI /supervisor prior to work being undertaken. They must also be communicated to workers during local inductions where appropriate.

Examples of high risk activities that must not be undertaken by a lone worker include:

- use of machinery or electrical test rigs that could result in serious injury or death in the event of an accident;
- use of hazardous substances that present a risk of serious acute health effects in the event of exposure e.g. hydrofluoric acid;
- the use of high energy open-source radioisotopes such as ^{32}S or ^{125}I ;
- working at height on ladders or elevated platforms; or
- decanting of liquid nitrogen from high pressure vessels.

Individuals at increased risk

Lone working activities can often present additional risks to certain individuals or groups of workers, for example:

- those individuals with known medical conditions that could impact on their ability to respond to an emergency e.g. visual, hearing, or mobility impairment (not exhaustive);
- expectant mothers;
- under 18s; and
- those with limited experience or training.

Individuals at special risk must also be considered as part of the risk assessment process.

Undergraduate and Masters Research projects students

Undergraduate and Masters Research project students require formal written justification and permission from their supervisors before low risk out-of-hours work is allowed.

A permit request form for undergraduate students to use Engineering lab facilities during vacation times can be found on the module page for ES327 and ES410. This form must be signed by the student, academic / project supervisor and the Head of Teaching.

It is equally important to note that supervisors of all workers (for example PhD students) are satisfied that an individual has reached an appropriate level of competence before independent work, including lone working, is allowed.

Responsibilities of Principal Investigator/Project Supervisor/Line Manager

It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator/Project Supervisor/Line Manager to ensure that:

- activities requiring special arrangements are identified and assessed and that special arrangements are approved;
- activities that must not be performed by lone workers are identified and prohibited;
- relevant work activities are brought to the attention of their workers (including students); and
- ensure that those performing lone work understand local rules and emergency arrangements including:
 - a. first aid arrangements;
 - b. escape routes; and
 - c. emergency contact details including security (extension 22222); and

Supervisors of all workers (including UG, PGT and PGR students) must be satisfied that an individual has reached an appropriate level of competence before independent work, including lone working, is allowed.

Responsibilities of Lone Workers

It is the responsibility of those that are lone working to ensure that:

- activities are carried out in line with risk assessment and agreed procedures; and
- report any accidents, incidents or near misses that occur.

Lone Working: Summary of School Requirements

