



FIELDWORK GUIDANCE

at the University of Warwick

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1. Introduction

The University of Warwick has a commitment to develop its research and education activities. The purpose of this document is to outline the steps which should be taken by staff and students to ensure their personal safety when working off-campus within the United Kingdom, overseas and in places which are not under the direct control of the University of Warwick.

The University of Warwick has a responsibility to ensure it has effective management arrangements in place designed to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of its employees and students. However, it remains the responsibility of each individual employee/student to actively participate and cooperate with the University in the execution of its responsibilities. All individuals should take heed of the advice, training, instruction, risk assessment and guidance provided to them by their respective Departments/Schools in preparation for fieldwork and to act upon it.

All students and staff are expected to follow the University's [Dignity Principles Policy](#) where we treat everyone with respect, do not tolerate discrimination, harassment, or bullying, do not tolerate sexual misconduct or relationship abuse or violence and keep our campus and community safe.

2. Definition of Fieldwork

The University of Warwick defines fieldwork as any off-campus practical work carried out by research staff and students as part of their work, or as part of their course of study. This could be in the UK or overseas and includes activities such as:

- work in a natural environment
- practical data gathering in a community
- interviewing participants for research purposes
- visits to research camps, museums, galleries, observatories or similar
- visits to industrial or commercial sites
- domiciliary visits.

Note: The Fieldwork Policy does not cover planned placement learning provided as a core part of delivery for professional and academic courses, e.g., MBChB. Further information about placements can be found via the [Placement Practitioner Toolkit](#).

3. Scope of document

This document applies to all employees and students at the University of Warwick undertaking all types of work-related activities or study, supported by the University. It provides essential guidance to individuals planning fieldwork. This document is supported by the [Overseas Travel Process and Guidance at the University of Warwick](#) for fieldwork conducted overseas. It does not cover Placements and the University's [Placement Practitioner Toolkit](#) should be consulted for related information.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1. Head of School/Department

The roles and responsibilities for the University, Heads of Department/School, and all staff and students, is set out in the [University Health and Safety Policy and the University](#)

[Leadership and Management document](#). In regard to fieldwork, the Head may delegate responsibility to the Fieldwork Leader to “make a suitable and sufficient assessment of (a) the risks to the health and safety of employees, and (b) the risks to the health and safety of persons not in their employment e.g., students, arising out of or in connection with, the conduct they are undertaking”. The Head of School/Department has overall accountability for health and safety. Therefore, they have the authority, in conjunction with the necessary stakeholders, to exclude staff/students from fieldwork if fieldworkers/Fieldwork Leaders fail to follow measures implemented to protect their safety.

4.2. Fieldwork Leader

The Fieldwork Leader has the task of overall supervision; this could be the Project Lead, Principle Investigator, Line Manager etc. They should ensure, where required, that an approved suitable and sufficient risk assessment is in place detailing knowledge and understanding of necessary safety measures, where appropriate. The Fieldwork Leader should ensure there are sufficient emergency/contingency plans in place and that these document/s have been communicated to the members of the fieldwork team. The Fieldwork Leader should also have in place clear communication lines between themselves and the fieldworkers as well as their Home Contact, as applicable.

It is the Fieldwork Leader’s responsibility to **ensure that** the identified control measures are followed during the trip. This may require active monitoring and the use of dynamic risk assessment where the situation changes. The University should be alerted, through local departmental/School mechanisms, if there is a change in threat level e.g., security threat, natural disaster.

The Fieldwork Leader is responsible to ensure the level of supervision is adequate to the nature of the fieldwork being conducted. They can also allocate specific supervisory duties as and when required, including the allocation of competent person/s to lead a sub-group if fieldwork activities have been sub-divided. In these cases, it is important to have a clear command structure in place which is communicated to all involved. The Fieldwork Leader has the authority, devolved from the Head of School/Department, to implement emergency or contingency plans as and when required.

4.3. Fieldworker

The Fieldworker is a participant/member of the fieldwork team. It is the responsibility of the Fieldworker to understand, observe and follow any instruction given to them by a Supervisor, Fieldwork Leader, Line Manager etc. Fieldworkers should understand that they are responsible for their own health and safety and that of others, as detailed in the University Leadership and Management document. All fieldworkers should understand who is in charge of the fieldwork and who has the responsibility for the work e.g., Fieldwork Leader. Any questions or problems should be brought to the attention of their Supervisor/s, Fieldwork Leader/s as soon as is practicable.

4.4. Independent Fieldworker

An Independent Fieldworker undertakes solo travel or self-managed fieldwork. They have responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves in their activities. In practice, an independent fieldworker will assume many of the duties and responsibilities of the Fieldwork Leader. The independent fieldworker must ensure, where required, that there is an approved suitable and sufficient fieldwork risk assessment in place detailing knowledge and

understanding of necessary safety measures, including the need for emergency/contingency plans **and** any additional risks associated with lone working/travel. It is also the responsibility of the independent fieldworker to ensure that the identified control measures are followed during the trip. This may require the use of dynamic risk assessment where the situation changes. The Independent Fieldworker must inform the University, through local departmental/School mechanisms, if there is a change in threat level e.g., security threat, natural disaster.

4.5. Supervised Fieldworker

Taught undergraduate or post-graduates are usually Supervised Fieldworkers who are under the direct supervision of the Fieldwork Leader and/or their nominee. It is their responsibility to understand and follow instructions and processes which have been put in place to protect their health and safety. Any questions or problems should be brought to the attention of their Fieldwork Leader/s as soon as is practicable. Experienced post-graduates may fall under fieldworker or independent fieldworker, depending on experience, and should implement the role and responsibilities of these categories as appropriate.

4.6. Home Contact

The Home Contact works in the fieldworker/s School/Department who can be contactable in an emergency e.g., arrival person to check-in, contact in the event of an emergency and, for general support e.g. if there were accommodation or flight issues, buddy for lone worker. The role and responsibility of the Home Contact is dependent on the level of risk arising from the fieldwork undertaken. Departments should have mechanisms in place for a Home Contact. This could be a research/teaching lead, Principle Investigator/Supervisor, Line Manager, Project Manager, etc.

5. Fieldwork Policy

The University [Fieldwork policy](#) sets out the University's expectations of departments including but not limited to, tolerance of risks posed by off-site activities, approval process dependent on risk, emergency escalation procedures, incident/accident reporting, competence/training, use of third parties, monitoring and review process post-fieldwork.

6. Planning – Pre-Fieldwork Considerations

6.1. Risk Analysis and Insurance

The initial assessment of any fieldwork being conducted in either the UK or overseas, is to consider the security and political threat levels, significant natural hazards and any health risks relating to the proposed activity. This should include the fieldwork location (UK or overseas destination), the field site/s and travel considerations (both to the site and between sites if multiple locations are being visited).

In order to assess these threats, the Fieldwork Leader/Independent Fieldworker should use relevant up-to-date information for the fieldwork they intend to conduct. For example, social research on contentious topics may require the Fieldwork Leader/Independent Fieldworker to obtain sensitive participant information, following ethical approval, from partner institutes. Overseas fieldwork will need to assess the threats from both the fieldwork being conducted and the destination the fieldwork is being conducted in. Further information about overseas travel procedures can be found on the University's [Travel Hub](#).

The University's Group Insurance Manager may also need to be consulted before any fieldwork is conducted to ensure that adequate insurance provision is in place. It may be that insurance availability is a limiting factor to some types of fieldwork such as travel to unstable areas.

The approval process for these activities will be dependent on the risk level associated with the proposed fieldwork. For example, an organised undergraduate trip to a UK-based museum would be considered a low-risk fieldwork activity and the associated risk assessment could be approved by the Fieldwork Leader (once insurance cover has been confirmed). However, conducting overseas fieldwork in an "amber" country would require multiple approvals before any fieldwork can be considered (see Travel Hub).

All significant threats inherent to the fieldwork being conducted should be detailed in a fieldwork risk assessment (see section 6.2) and adequate control measures identified to ensure the health and safety of those conducting and participating in, the proposed fieldwork.

6.2. Risk Assessment

Once fieldwork has been approved, a risk assessment may be required. The type, and detail needed, will be dependent on the activities being undertaken. Activities such as attending an overseas conference/meeting would follow the University's travel arrangements (see Travel Hub). A UK-based conference/meeting would not require a separate risk assessment, but it is advised that the fieldworker/s use the University's travel management provider, where appropriate, and/or a home contact (see section 4.6) is aware of the location and duration of the trip.

Activities such as off-site courses, research projects (UK/overseas), teaching or recruitment are likely to require a risk assessment before the fieldwork commences. The fieldwork risk assessment should be undertaken by those conducting/involved in the work and approved by the Fieldwork Leader (in some overseas cases you may also need Head of School/ Department approval).

All aspects of the work should be considered on a systematic basis, with the final document covering the foreseeable hazards and significant risks associated with the planned activities. Any accessibility issues, young persons, vulnerable adults etc. needs, should also be considered at the planning stage and as part of the risk assessment process (see section 6.6). This is especially important if fieldwork is a pre-requisite to completing a Warwick University degree.

The risk assessment should be provided to intended participants as part of the pre-activity information to allow them to make an informed decision regarding their participation. In these cases, alternative options may need to be considered. The risk assessment should identify all control measures which will be implemented to reduce these risks to an acceptable level.

Once approved the risk assessment should be communicated to all those involved in the fieldwork; in some cases, this may also include Insurance. Depending on the complexity of the fieldwork being undertaken, overseas fieldwork may be covered in the travel risk assessment e.g., travelling to a meeting or attending several meetings at multiple sites within a country.

It is also important to note, that if the fieldwork is being undertaken as part of a joint project and the partner institute is leading the fieldwork element, the Warwick University

staff/students should have access to the partner institute's risk assessment/s and procedures and be fully aware of the hazards and controls identified in them. In these cases, Warwick University staff/students must understand and follow instructions and processes which have been put in place to protect their health and safety.

Further information about risk assessment including a link to the online training can be found on the Health and Safety Services [risk assessment](#) pages.

6.3. Travel and Transportation

Travel requirements may include transport to and from fieldwork sites in the UK or overseas, to and from airports and to and from accommodation. The provision of transport can vary from public transport, use of own vehicles and the use of third-party providers. All of these aspects should be managed and detailed in the associated risk assessment (where applicable).

If a third-party provider is providing the travel they should be treated as any other, and it should be checked that they have suitable and sufficient risk management and insurance. The Fieldwork Leader retains the ability to decide not to use the provided transportation if it is found to be unsafe.

The University's [Driving and Vehicle Safety Policy](#) should be read and followed if driving/travelling on company business in the UK. Further information regarding driving/travelling overseas can be found in the Overseas Travel Process and Guidance at University of Warwick document (accessed via the Travel Hub). If you are intending to use your own vehicle then you should check with your motor insurer that you will be adequately and legally insured.

All participants should be notified of the travel arrangements and provided with additional guidance if there are potential safety issues associated with the travel.

6.4. Accommodation

The type of accommodation used for fieldwork activities can be varied depending on the nature and location of the fieldwork being undertaken. These include the requirements of the fieldwork, the needs of all the fieldworkers and the availability of accommodation in the location of the fieldwork. The standard of accommodation can also vary and therefore it is important to consider this in the fieldwork risk assessment and prior to booking.

The Fieldwork Leader should, where possible, take steps to assess the standard of accommodation prior to the work taking place. It is advised that, where possible, Fieldwork Leader's book accommodation for themselves and their team through the University's travel management system.

Further information about booking accommodation overseas can be found in the Overseas Travel Process and Guidance at University of Warwick document (accessed via the Travel Hub).

6.5. Health

The health of fieldworkers needs to be considered during the planning stage. Health hazards should be identified before the trip and included in the associated risk assessment, as appropriate. For certain types of fieldwork this may involve the minimum capabilities expected of the fieldworkers during the trip such as physical fitness and/or mobility problems,

any pre-existing medical conditions which may impact on the individual undertaking said fieldwork (including how prescribed medications are going to be managed) as well as any specific health hazards associated with the activity e.g., tick bites.

For large groups or fieldwork being conducted in remote areas first aid provision should also be considered. This could include ensuring qualified first aiders are part of the trip and/or a first aid kit is carried at all times during the activity. The location of the nearest medical facilities should be identified depending on the type of fieldwork being conducted.

Fieldwork planning should also ensure that there is a mechanism to share health information with Fieldwork Leaders if required; this should be carefully considered and must be compliant with GDPR; including when dealing with large fieldwork groups.

Some mental health issues can also be exacerbated by being in an unfamiliar environment. It is important to recognise this and to have discussions with fieldworkers who have disclosed a mental health condition. However, consideration should also be given to fieldworkers where mental health is often hidden due to it being stigmatised. Where conditions have not been disclosed and there is an issue during the trip emergency procedures may need to be instigated (see section 6.8).

Overseas fieldwork may also have several additional health hazards associated with the destination and type of fieldwork being undertaken e.g., prophylaxis treatment, environmental or climate illnesses etc. Further information about overseas health hazards can be found in the Overseas Travel Process and Guidance at University of Warwick document accessed via the Travel Hub.

6.6. Disabled Fieldworkers

The University of Warwick has a duty to ensure that fieldworkers who are disabled are not put at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled fieldworkers. In order to do this, reasonable adjustments should be made to enable participation. This duty should be done in advance of the fieldwork. The fieldworker requiring the adjustments should discuss their needs with the Fieldwork Leader prior to the trip.

There may be certain fieldwork activities where reasonable adjustments cannot be made or the costs of the adjustments prevent the fieldwork from taking place thereby disadvantaging all participants or the research outcomes. Similarly, it might be justifiable to restrict the activities of a disabled fieldworker in whole or part if their personal safety or the safety of others would be compromised. In these cases, specialist advice may need to be sought before making a final decision. In all cases the disabled fieldworker should be involved in the process.

6.7. General Safety Considerations

During the planning stages, general safety such as equipment and clothing requirements, personal alarms, lone working, accident/incident reporting, catering, use of third parties etc. may also need to be considered.

Previous knowledge from colleagues familiar with the area, and advice and guidance from local contacts in the areas being visited should be used to inform risk assessments, emergency procedures etc.

Any equipment including any clothing or personal protective equipment requirements for the activity, need to be identified and plans made for their provision. This should be carried out well enough in advance to ensure that they are in place for the commencement of the activity.

Equipment must be specified and selected carefully to ensure that it is suitable for the intended use and environmental conditions. Any servicing, testing/calibration should be done prior to conducting the fieldwork. Hired equipment should be similarly specified and where possible, any maintenance records verified. Equipment which is required for use overseas must also meet the safety requirements for the intended destination e.g., electrically compliant.

All accidents, incidents and near misses whilst on university business should be reported via the University's [accident reporting system](#).

More information on overseas catering/food hygiene and allergen considerations can be found in the Overseas Travel Process and Guidance at University of Warwick document accessed via the Travel Hub.

Third parties should, where possible, be vetted to ensure that the companies used have considered the health and safety implications of its activities and their potential impact. Examples of typical third parties are field study centres, suppliers of special equipment, specialist outdoor activity leaders. Host or partner organisations are also classed as third parties. The use of a third party does not absolve the university of its obligations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974).

Formal checks on the use of any third parties should be carried out. This may be through the University's [contractor management](#) process, through compliance with BS8848:2014 (British Standard for organising and managing visits, fieldwork, expeditions, and adventurous activities outside the UK) or through other means of due diligence e.g., by risk assessment.

The University has a minimum insurance requirements for third parties e.g., public/product liability - at least £10m. Further information should be sought from the University' Group Insurance Manager.

6.8. Emergency Preparedness/Contingency Planning

The level of emergency planning required will directly relate to the level of risk associated with the fieldwork. All emergency plans should be in place prior to the fieldwork being undertaken. The emergency plan should, where relevant, cover the following:

- available support within the fieldwork team and at the University of Warwick (including identifying the Home Contact),
- missing persons procedure,
- methods for contacting next of kin,
- civil unrest and natural disasters,
- medical emergencies and repatriation
- financial plan for emergencies
- communication plan

All fieldworkers should be briefed on the emergency plan by the Fieldwork Leader and/or as defined in specific School/Department procedures. This may include providing participants

with emergency contact details to allow them to notify the Fieldwork Leader if they are to be delayed or if an incident has occurred.

Where external stakeholders, including partner institutes or third-party providers have roles or responsibilities in the emergency plan, they should also be briefed.

Dealing with a medical emergency is a possibility for any fieldwork including supervised and independent fieldwork. Therefore, considerations should include duration of the work, remoteness of the destination, the fitness of the participants, access to hospital/medical facilities and health care standards available.

In all situations there should be a means of summoning help – this may be via mobile phone or personal location beacon or similar, partner institutes.

It is advised that all staff and students ensure that they keep their personal and next of kin details on the relevant University system up to date e.g., Success Factors, Student Services (See Appendix A – Fieldwork Incident Escalation Process flowchart).

Further information on overseas emergency planning can be found in the Overseas Travel Process and Guidance at University of Warwick document accessed via the Travel Hub.

7. During Fieldwork

7.1 Active assessment of the risk

Occasionally something unexpected will happen or the course of the activity will deviate from what has been planned. At this point there may need to be an active assessment of the risk to respond to these changes in circumstances. If new categories of risk have occurred during the trip the Fieldwork Leader must approve any additional control measures before the activity proceeds. The findings of these active assessments of the risk must be communicated and understood throughout the fieldwork team and a communication method should be established prior to the trip. This should not be a substitute for adequate emergency and contingency planning.

Further information for overseas considerations can be found in the Overseas Travel Process and Guidance at University of Warwick document accessed via the Travel Hub.

7.2. Supervision

There are numerous factors to consider when assessing the level of supervision required during the fieldwork including knowledge, experience, qualifications (both in academic subject or research techniques as well as management, leadership and supervisory skills) and acknowledgement of limitations in ability. For example, an inexperienced group of first year undergraduate students will require a higher level of supervision in comparison to postgraduate level.

There are two different types of supervision – direct and indirect, which can be used in combination or by themselves.

Direct supervision is when a member of staff is in charge of the fieldworkers at all times and are able to immediately intervene in person, if necessary. This type of supervision is required for high-risk activities or for less experienced participants.

Indirect supervision describes a situation where the member of staff manages the fieldwork but would be unable to intervene immediately in person. Examples include individual

research projects, lone working, postgraduate research fieldwork projects and participants working together in group activities or social activities.

Supervision should include a suitable level of monitoring of the health and safety arrangements, based on risk, which have been put in place during the planning phase of the fieldwork.

7.3. Personal Time

Most activities will include the potential for some personal time for the participants. Although this is not part of the jurisdiction of the activity it is worthwhile to define to participants the opportunity for downtime. It is worthy to note that the University's insurance does **not cover** personal travel before or after the trip's scheduled travel period.

7.4. Incident and Emergency Response

During the fieldwork there may be an event that significantly disrupts normal operations, has caused or is likely to cause severe distress or has severe consequences for the individuals and the organisation as a whole. In these circumstances the planned emergency response should be instigated (see section 6.8). See Appendix A – Fieldwork Incident Escalation Process flowchart.

Further information on overseas emergency escalation process can be found in the Overseas Travel Process and Guidance at University of Warwick document accessed via the Travel Hub.

8. Post Fieldwork Review

8.1. Debrief

Depending on the type of fieldwork being undertaken, it is advised that there is a formalised mechanism for debrief procedures post-fieldwork. This may include surveying participants following supervised fieldwork. The survey should include health and safety content as well as academic or business considerations. The results of the survey should be made available to all those who are involved in planning subsequent trips.

In other cases, a survey is not appropriate, and a post-fieldwork debrief meeting is more suitable. This meeting should include discussion on any occasions where other hazards and risks were identified, any accidents or near-misses, any significant changes to the original plans or itineraries, where unexpected training was required during the fieldwork and any shortcomings in the planning process.

All accidents, incidents and near misses whilst undertaking fieldwork should be reported via the University's accident reporting system.

Further information for staff and students at the University regarding proactive and reactive wellbeing provision for any practical, emotional and/or psychological support can be found via [Wellbeing Support Services](#).

[Report and Support](#) is also available to all staff, students and visitors who have experienced sexual misconduct, discrimination, harassment, bullying and/or hate crime. The Report and Support Team understand that this could happen to students and staff beyond the University campus and even overseas. Support is available regardless of where the individual is based in the world or where it happened.

8.2. Lessons Learnt

Following the debriefing, any lessons learnt should be implemented into existing plans and procedures. Relevant risk assessments should be reviewed as soon as possible after the fieldwork where additional hazards and control measures have been identified or there has been an accident/incident during the fieldwork trip. Revised procedures and documentation should be communicated to all those involved in planning for future fieldwork activities.

9. Version History/Change Control

Date	Version	Author/Reviewer	Comments
02.08.24	V1.0	M. Bagnall/ G. Hakes	First issue
25.03.25	V1.1	M Bagnall	Added reference to Dignity Principle Policy in the Introduction section (1) and further information about University wellbeing support and Report+Support in section (8.1).

10. Appendix A – Fieldwork Incident Escalation Process

