



Lone Worker Guidelines

The following pages are **guidance** for researchers (staff and students) who are working alone or in small teams. They are intended to provide guidance to researchers in the field, irrespective of whether they are working on independent research projects or externally funded ones.

Who is this guidance for?

Members of staff or students who:

- work by themselves without close or direct supervision,
- or in small teams
- who may be vulnerable to the physical environment,
- lone travelling either by public transport or on foot and
- in particular for unaccompanied home visits.
- Researchers are expected to follow these guidelines and to use their professional judgement at all times.

Safe working arrangements for staff who work alone

Lone working on campus should also be considered to have a reasonable element of risk, particularly when working in the evening, after dark and early in the morning.

You should have permission from your Head of Department or Supervisor and notify security to let them know when you are working late or any other time where you feel vulnerable.

Ensure that you have a telephone close to you at all times and the Campus security number to hand.

It is **your** responsibility to ensure that you alert a named co-ordinator/colleague, when your work involves you working alone, in vulnerable situations or undertaking home visits, so that an effective process is put in place to ensure your safety.

This includes:-

Basics –

Good common sense should prevail and all researchers should carry the following items each time they conduct research away from the University:

- Carry an official **identity card** (with photograph).
- Carry a **comprehensive map** of the area.
- Carry a **torch** (and spare batteries).
- Carry a **mobile telephone** and **phone cards** (for areas with poor mobile reception).
- Carry a **personal alarm** (to be kept in an accessible place).

In addition, each researcher should:

- Maintain a **visit proforma** (Appendix 1) as well as their personal diary as a means of logging visits. The visit proforma must be easily accessible by colleagues who are monitoring your visit.
- Never carry large amounts of **money or valuables**.
- Always have familiarisation sessions on home visits with an experienced member of staff during their induction period and only complete a home visit on their own when they, and their more experienced colleague, agree that they are ready. A formal risk assessment should be undertaken prior to new staff undertaking lone working.
- Ask a colleague to accompany you if you feel at all uneasy about conducting a home visit on your own.
- Obtain information about where you are visiting before the visit. Ask how many people will be at the visit.

Risk assessment – ensure that there is opportunity to feedback relevant information from a lone visit – e.g. if you felt at risk or if there was an incident. This should be formally recorded and reviewed with your Supervisor/ Head of Department and other members of your team to ensure appropriate follow up action is taken and to minimise any risk in subsequent visits.

Use of private cars

- Researchers or staff using their own cars for travel:
- Should where possible become a **member of a national breakdown service**.
- Ensure that car users have the appropriate level of insurance cover.
- Drivers should travel with **doors locked and windows closed**. If windows are open, handbags and briefcases should be kept out of sight.
- At night, the car should be **parked in a well-lit and busy place**. Multi-storey parks, or car parks where the car and the user will not be easily visible, should be avoided.
- If a driver thinks they are being followed, they should keep driving until they reach a busy area - Garda station or a garage, etc.
- Staff should avoid taking research participants as passengers unless they know them.

Pre visits

- Make and keep pre-arranged appointments, and notify the participant if you cannot keep them.
- Try to arrange home visits during daylight hours whenever possible. During winter months, weekend visits may be more suitable than evening appointments.
- Consider the purpose of the visit. Does it pose a higher than usual potential of bringing about a violent response e.g. an interview in connection with emotional matters? If so, consider asking a colleague to accompany you or arrange to interview the person at the workplace.
- Ensure that an appropriate room is available and there is financial support to cover participants' travel expenses if necessary.

During a visit

1. **Do not** enter someone's home, if you don't feel comfortable or safe.
2. **Do not** enter a house if the person you have arranged to see is not there. Be aware of, and maintain, personal safety at all times during visits.
3. Always explain your research role clearly and the conditions of confidentiality.
4. If the participant is anxious, consider encouraging them to have a carer/friend within sight/hearing.
5. Never meet aggression with aggression.
6. Your safety is the primary concern, which should be placed above completion of research tasks.

Home visits

- If you are late arriving for your appointment, advise your nominated colleague who will record the revised time on the visit proforma.
- When visiting people's homes, try to let the tenant lead the way. Avoid being the first to go into any room. Be extra careful when alone with participants e.g. fetching something from a handbag, comforting participants. You should always make sure that the exit from the room is clear.
- Animals in the home: if you are in any doubt about the behaviour of animals in the home, ask for it/them to be locked away while you are visiting.
- Never undertake an interview or assessment in the bedroom.
- Do not give your personal telephone number or address to clients.
- You should not interview anyone who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- If you feel uncomfortable while in a person's home, you should take steps to leave immediately.
- A professional and friendly attitude should be adopted but over familiarity must be avoided.
- Remember that the interviewee may also feel anxious about the interview and your visit.
- You should bear this in mind whilst also ensuring your own safety.

Be alert for signs of DANGER

- Raised voice, rapid speech and babbling indicate rising tension.
- Changes in tone and pitch as the conversation progresses may suggest anger, frustration or impending violent behaviour.
- Keep your distance. Each of us has a personal space, which we defend when we feel it is being invaded.
- Be alert for body language that may indicate developing anger – e.g. flushed face, fidgeting, pointing, folded arms.

Awkward or potentially threatening situations

If an awkward or potentially threatening situation arises, this should be reported to a colleague as soon as possible. The facts should also be recorded in a specific "untoward incident" file. Formal arrangements should be in place for staff to be accompanied by a colleague for subsequent visits if there have been any incidents giving cause for concern on the first occasion. If, for any reason, you are concerned for your personal safety once you arrive at your appointment venue, then do feel able to cancel your appointment. On return to the office, make alternative arrangements when another member of staff experienced in working on their own undertaking home visits can accompany you.

Process for monitoring researcher visits

When visiting the home of a participant, you should leave the following details with a nominated colleague (complete a visit proforma) who **has formally agreed to monitor the duration of your visit**. The onus is on you, the researcher, to ensure that a colleague is aware of the details of your visit and has agreed to monitor during the visit and when the visit is completed. Ensure that your nominated colleague is available on the phone and contactable by you for the duration of your visit. Keep your nominated colleague adequately informed by leaving the following details:-

- Sign/make colleagues aware that you are leaving the office and make sure that a named colleague is aware of your visit and details provided on your visit proforma sheet.
- State clearly the name and address and telephone contact for where the interview will take place (and where the interviewee lives, if different) – take care about interviewee confidentiality.
- State the time of the appointment, when you expect the visit to be completed and when to expect you back in the office or the time you expect to contact your nominated colleague to let them know that your visit is safely completed.
- State the make, model, colour and registration of the car you will be driving and the route you will be taking.
- Contact your nominated colleague if you are late for your appointment who will note this on the visit proforma.
- If an appointment or the deadline for contact is after 5pm, the researcher must make other arrangements for someone (colleague/partner/friend/family) to undertake the departmental role in monitoring the researcher's whereabouts. These details should be noted on the pro forma. Your nominated person should also be briefed on these procedures and given details of who to contact in the unit (Head of Department or nominated Deputy), in the case of your failure to return on time.
- Leave your mobile telephone switched on during the interview.
- It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that he/she has stated clearly the details about the visit. Where appropriate, a nominated colleague will monitor who is out of the office and when they can be expected to return. It is important that the office are aware of the whereabouts of the researchers, including, wherever it may be practicably possible, the travelling time between the visited site and the office.
- Prepare yourself for difficult meetings by finding out everything you need to know before arriving and planning in your mind how you are going to deal with the situation.
- It is the responsibility of the nominated colleague to ensure s/he is available to receive a call and monitor the time when the visit should be over. If circumstances change, s/he should arrange for another colleague to monitor the visit.
- If the interview is still in progress as the deadline for contacting the department approaches, the researcher should excuse him/herself and call their nominated colleague to inform them.
- If the deadline passes and the researcher has not contacted the nominated colleague, the nominated colleague should ring the mobile telephone number of the researcher.
- If there is no answer, the nominated colleague should inform the Head of Department (or Deputy) immediately and ensure the police are informed immediately.
- If researchers decide that they are not going to return to the office after their last visit, they should ensure that the appropriate person in the office knows about that by telephoning in. The visit pro-forma can then be completed accordingly.

Additional useful guidance

DCU Health and Safety – Out of Hours http://www.dcu.ie/safety/out_of_hours.shtml

Risk Assessment for lone/ out of hours work:

<http://www.dit.ie/media/documents/healthsafety/policiesprocedures/Risk%20Assessment%20for%20Lone%20Out%20of%20Hours%20Work%202009.pdf>

Health and Safety Executive. Working Alone in Safety. Controlling the risks of solitary work.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

Health and Safety Executive. Violence at Work. A guide for employers.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf>

Paterson BL, Gregory D and Thorne S (1999). A protocol for researcher safety. Qualitative Health Research, 9(2): 259-269

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust. <http://www.suzylamplugh.org/home/index.shtml>